



The Press and the Rebirth of Iberian Democracy by Kenneth Maxwell

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begin to bring together and forge an integrated kingdom with the preconditions for a kind of national consciousness by the early fourteenth century remain rather mysterious in his account, which attempts no direct historical description but instead merely gives us some of the skeletal framework. For Mattoso, the decisive region was the general Atlantic littoral of the country from the north to south-center, where the decisive migration, economic and administrative development and sociopolitical interactions took place. It is easy to become a bit impatient with Mattoso's tedious and dry approach, yet it represents solid and judicious scholarship by a mature historian with a keen awareness of the complexities of his material and of the limitations of more simple traditional explanations. Though this work propounds no simple new theory, it will well reward the serious student and can also serve as a helpful reference for early Portuguese social and administrative theory.

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Kenneth Maxwell, ed. *The Press and the Rebirth of Iberian Democracy*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983.

The Press and the Rebirth of Iberian Democracy is a collection of papers presented at a conference held at Columbia University, and co-sponsored by the Institute of Latin American Studies and the School of Journalism. The conference brought together a promising group of top journalists and academics, and dealt with an equally provocative theme: the role of the media in the Iberian transitions to democracy. Unfortunately, the edited contributions of *The Press and the Rebirth of Iberian Democracy* do not live up to the quality of the participants and the importance of the topic. Most comparative politics and area studies audiences will find very little of this volume useful, and students of Iberian politics, with a few exceptions, will be equally disappointed.

The major problem with the book is its absence of a clear focus or coherent set of questions. In Kenneth Maxwell's introduction to the essays, he poses numerous and interesting questions which the essays never really address systematically. These diverse questions include the contributions of the media to the political

cultures of the transition, the manipulation of the media by the state, the nature of the relationship between the media and the state, the level of information on the part of European and U.S. publics, and the overall contributions of the media to democracy.

Just as the types of questions posed at the outset are excessively heterogeneous, so too is the quality and style of the contributions. Juan A. Giner (University of Navarra) provides a generally useful historical overview of Spanish journalism, mass media and public opinion from 1938-1982, but his chapter is weak on analysis. He discusses five intriguing possible explanations for the dramatic drop in readership of periodicals after the transition, but there is no attempt to discuss the relative strengths or weaknesses of each hypothesis. Furthermore, the chapter suffers from an awkward translation, and more serious, contains no footnotes for a number of direct references.

Compared with Giner's broad overview of the media and politics in Spain, Jorge Braga de Macedo (Princeton University) has written a chapter that will appear overly technical for all but the journalism student. While meticulously researched and systematically presented, Braga de Macedo's discussion of the role of market structure in the Portuguese media appears out of sync with the rest of the essays.

Jean Seaton (Polytechnic University of the South Bank, London) and Ben Pimlott (Birkbeck College, University of London) provide the strongest contribution to the book. After presenting a useful overview of the history of the media in Portugal, they discuss a fascinating paradox: on the one hand the media fell captive to the pendulum of politics in post-Revolutionary politics, and was manipulated by dominant political forces. On the other hand, the media is shown by Seaton and Pimlott to have had relatively little impact, and certainly not a decisive one, on popular opinion. Thus, the communist domination of much of the media from March to November 1975 could not sway public opinion to the left, nor could the subsequent deradicalization of the media erode PCP support. The authors explain the apparent lack of media influence by citing the absence of a popularly respected free press, the presence of a highly skeptical audience, and the traditionally elitist nature of the Portuguese media. Thus, elites in post-Revolutionary Portugal placed a symbolic value on the control of media that far exceeded its actual power.

Compared with Seaton and Pimlott's well written and insightful chapter, Francisco Pinto Balsemão's contribution adds very little to a consideration of the role of the Portuguese media in the transition. Because of Balsemão's experience in the media (as editor of the weekly *Expresso*) and in politics (Prime Minister, 1981-83), his contribution might have provided some valuable insights into the relationship of these two areas. Instead, Balsemão's contribution adds almost nothing to the analyses of Braga de Macedo and Seaton and Pimlott.

Alex Keyssar's (Brandeis University) chapter on the U.S. coverage of the Iberian transitions is a most provocative contribution, although one might question whether it fits with the

emphasis of the other essays. Keyssar argues that the U.S. media consistently distorted the view of Americans regarding the transitions to democracy. He indicts the U.S. media on charges of providing an ideologically biased (excessively cold war) and analytically superficial treatment of the transitions. The examples he provides add credibility to his argument, although the argument itself seems almost obvious. Keyssar's observations apply to U.S. media coverage of all foreign events, and are not specific to the Iberian transitions. Nevertheless, Keyssar makes an interesting argument as to why and how the U.S. media distorted its coverage of the Portuguese events more than those in neighboring Spain.

Antonio de Figueiredo's contribution on the European coverage of the transitions to democracy makes some interesting points, but spends more time providing an overview of the European press than analyzing how the European press viewed democratization.

Maxwell's concluding essay was a noble attempt to tie up the many loose ends of the volume, but from the perspective of this reviewer, he does not succeed in unifying the diverse and uneven set of contributions. The special role of the media in the transitions to democracy in Spain and Portugal has long been alluded to in the growing literature on the Iberian transitions, but the topic has received relatively little attention. While *The Press and the Rebirth of Iberian Democracy* again points to the need for additional research in this area, and raises some important questions, the diversity of focus and quality of the contributions seriously limits the usefulness of the volume.

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