

Introduction

Science in the Press, Radio and TV: Franco's Regime and the Popularization of Science¹

Clara Florensa

Institució Milà i Fontanals
– Consejo Superior
de Investigaciones Científicas
(IMF-CSIC),
Spain

clara.florensa@imf.csic.es

Hugo Almeida

Interuniversity Center
for the History of Science
and Technology (CIUHCT)
NOVA School of Science and
Technology,
Portugal

hugonor Almeida@gmail.com

Bárbara Direito

Interuniversity Center
for the History of Science
and Technology (CIUHCT)
NOVA School of Science and
Technology,
Portugal

b.direito@fct.unl.pt

Radio played an important role in Spanish households during Franco's dictatorship. Women filled the domestic void, to which the Francoist culture relegated them during school and work hours, with radio soap operas and women's advice programs. These radio products contributed to the construction of the social imagery of women in the female cultural system, which the dictatorship aimed to establish for the perpetuation of the social order and hierarchy enforced by Francoism. Radio was not only a space for women: entire families, often in the company of neighbours, would gather around the radio to listen, for example, to the detective adventures of *Taxi Key* on Saturday nights. This crime radio drama was on air for twenty-two years.

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Scholars have noted that the ideologists of the Francoist regime discovered the potential of the radio soap operas to represent in their stories and characters the ideals defended by National-Catholicism.² The dictatorship used radio, as it did with all forms of media, for propaganda purposes, to impose an ideology, values, and ways of life, even in leisure activities.

The radio waves did not only fill these moments of entertainment with fiction: science was also considered appropriate (and perhaps even convenient) to be part of them. Gathering around the radio before dinner, for five minutes, to hear about science and technology became a habit for many Spaniards living under Franco's regime. Topics like the space race, atomic energy, electricity, but also the process of making pencils or how a photograph is taken, were subjects that captivated the audience of the program *Los Progresos Científicos* (The Scientific Advances) for thirty-five years. The relationship with this program's broadcaster, an engineer passionate about the subject, was not limited to passive listening: listeners would send letters asking questions and requesting topics that the broadcaster would include in his programs. *Los Progresos Científicos* provided a space for scientific dissemination to a broad range of people, from various educational backgrounds and social classes. A detailed study of this program, proposed by Jordi Ferran's paper in this thematic dossier, represents a first step toward studying another broadcasting product of Francoism—scientific dissemination—while also raising questions that require further research, such as the fundamental question of knowing what distinguishes science popularization from other products of cultural popularization.

This case provides access to a window that is rarely opened in historical research: the one that reveals the science audience, its configuration, tastes, and reactions to the circulation of scientific discourse. What did listeners think of the program and its contents? How did they understand it? What did they want to see included? How did it stimulate them in their daily lives? What did it suggest to them? And what did science and technology mean on the other side of the microphone, in the homes of “ordinary” people? These are some of the issues that this historical case and the documentary evidence it reveals allow us to explore. It is worth remembering that contemporary popular culture, such as radio, television, the press, or cinema, have shaped the modern conception of science for much of the population.³ This case provides evidence to reconstruct this conception under Francoism more accurately.

In a dictatorial regime with a strict control over information (well documented by the literature on censorship and communication in Franco's regime), one might think that the only scientific communication model that could prevail would be a strictly top-down, diffusionist

² Sergio Blanco Fajardo, “Inicio y Auge de la Radionovela Dramática en España (1953-1959): El Ejemplo de la “Dama de Verde,” *Hispania Nova. Primera Revista De Historia Contemporánea on-Line En Castellano. Segunda Época*, 22 (2023): 123-142.

³ Agustí Nieto-Galan, *Los Públicos de la Ciencia. Expertos y Profanos a Través de la Historia* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2011, 116).

model—a simplification of the scientific message from the expert to the layperson, with strong propagandistic and indoctrinating overtones, devoid of political critique, especially after passing through censorship (and self-censorship).⁴

However, the case presented by Ferran shows how the program's audience participated, through their letters, in shaping the scripts and scientific content that were ultimately broadcast, which challenges the strict top-down model. Just as in detective serials such as *Taxi Key*, where the audience could participate at the end of the story to try to solve the mystery, listeners also actively participated in *Los Progresos Científicos*. Furthermore, the analysis of serialized radio dramas has uncovered how cracks in the narrative, which went unnoticed by censorship, created room for heterodox readings.⁵ Similarly, from the microphone of Radio Barcelona, the host of *Los Progresos Científicos* spoke critically about economic policies of national self-sufficiency (autarky) and the use of atomic bombs to his audience.

The importance and deep involvement of science and scientists in the construction of political regimes has been convincingly demonstrated in the historiography.⁶ Previous studies have also shown how in regimes with totalitarian aspirations, scientific discourse has been used for propaganda purposes related to the construction of ultranationalism, international legitimization and the domestic reaffirmation of the regime through a narrative of scientific progress. These works have unveiled how the myth of autarky, the purity of race and eugenics, and the foundation of technocratic projects that presented the dictatorship as a welfare state—despite the lack of political freedoms—have also been fostered through science and its narratives.⁷ Great examples of studies in this tradition can be found in the present issue of HoST regarding the case of Portugal's Estado Novo dictatorship, both in the *Varia* section—through Frederico Ágoas' paper on the rise of the social sciences in Portuguese colonial science in a transimperial perspective; and Alexandra Cabrita's paper on Portuguese racial studies in the 1930s and 1940s—, as well as the *Work in Progress* section, where André Pereira discusses

⁴ On the diffusionist model and its history, see Jonathan R. Topham, "Introduction: Historicizing 'Popular Science'," *Isis*, 100 no. 2 (2009): 310–318.

⁵ Blanco Fajardo, "Inicio y Auge."

⁶ Sheila Jasanoff, ed., *States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and the Social Order* (Routledge, 2004).

⁷ Paul R. Josephson, *Totalitarian Science and Technology* (New York: Humanity Books, 2005). Mark Walker, *Nazi Science: Myth, Truth, and the German Atomic Bomb* (Perseus Publishing, 1995). Nikolai Kremetsov, *Stalinist Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Dolores L. Augustine, *Red Prometheus. Engineering and Dictatorship in East Germany, 1945-1990* (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2007). Nestor Herran and Xavier Roqué, "An Autarkic Science: Physics, Culture, and Power in Franco's Spain," *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 43, no. 2 (2013), 202–235. Ricardo Campos, "Authoritarianism and Punitive Eugenics: Racial Hygiene and National Catholicism during Francoism, 1936-1945," *História, Ciências, Saúde – Manguinhos* 23, no. 1, supl. 1 (2016): 131-148.

cases of dam-induced displacement in the context of the construction of the technological landscapes of the Estado Novo between the 1930s and the 1970s.

In recent years, there has been a revision of the history of science during the Francoist dictatorship, showing how science and scientists played a role in the construction, legitimization, and perpetuation of the regime, as well as their role in international relations and in shaping the dictatorship's image abroad.⁸ These works propose that the science of this period be studied as inseparable from other political, social, and cultural activities. The new historiography on Francoism sheds light on the processes of co-production of science and ideology, going beyond a historiography written in the context (or legacy) of the Spanish democratic transition's silence pact, where two evasive strategies were common: speaking about science as separate from power and politics, or portraying science as oppressed by the dictatorial regime. In both cases, the conception of science that this literature constructed was that of an activity intrinsically neutral and apolitical.⁹ Recently, there have been steps toward a comparative analysis of science in different fascist and totalitarian regimes, as well as a call for the rightful place of science in the cultural history of Francoism.¹⁰ A comparative study of scientific dissemination in different dictatorships would be a next step in research in this field.

Despite the common denominator of studying science in Francoism, this literature mostly consists of works dedicated to specific disciplines, institutions, or prominent figures. This has led to the current fragmentation of research in this field, making it difficult to establish a dialogue, draw conclusions and create a common narrative between case studies. The study of scientific dissemination can serve as a unifying element, bridging these investigations by analysing a practice that is common to each of the studied scientific disciplines, their popularization.

Although the premise of understanding science essentially as a communicative practice has gained (and continues to gain) significant acceptance in the history of science field in recent

⁸ Agustí Nieto-Galan, *The Politics of Chemistry. Science and Power in Twentieth-Century Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019). Antoni Malet, "Science and Power: Francoist Spain (1939–1975) as a Case Study," *Centaureus*, 61, no. 1-2 (2019): 111–132. Lino Camprubí, *Engineers and the Making of the Francoist Regime* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2014). Néstor Herran and Xavier Roqué, eds., *La Física en la Dictadura. Físicos, Cultura y Poder en España 1939-1975* (Bellaterra: Edicions UAB, 2012).

⁹ Herran and Roqué, *La Física en la Dictadura*, 15–16. On how the political climate of the Spanish transition to democracy shaped the discourse, themes and content of the history of science, see Juan Pimentel and José Pardo-Tomás, "And Yet, We Were Modern. The Paradoxes of Iberian Science after the Grand Narratives," *History of Science* 55, no. 2 (2017): 133–147.

¹⁰ Amparo Gómez, Antonio F. Canales and Brian Balmer, eds., *Science Policies and Twentieth-Century Dictatorships* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015). Tiago Saraiva discusses the lack of comparative analyses in the history of science of "fascistized" regimes in Tiago Saraiva, *Fascist Pigs. Technoscientific Organisms and the History of Fascism* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, UK: The MIT Press, 2016), 3. On cultural histories of science during this period, see Enric J. Novella and Ricardo Campos, "Introduction to the Special Issue: Cultural Histories of Science in Franco's Spain," *Culture & History Digital Journal* 10, no. 1 (2021): e001-e012.

years, there is still a lack of focus on the popularization of science or popular science, compared to the study of science in the ivory tower. It is true that there has been a significant shift in this regard, and now we have substantial contributions on this topic, some of them related to science communication in dictatorships. However, the imbalance remains significant.¹¹

The idea that there is an active epistemology of the public that influences and shapes what is called “proper science,” and that one of its mechanisms operates through scientific dissemination and popular science, has been around for several decades.¹² As Fleck once stated: “There is a feedback mechanism, by which what is conceived of as ‘popular science’ crucially shapes the thought style of research scientists.”¹³ Thus, analysing scientific dissemination as a historical object becomes vital for understanding not only the society of a particular era and a type of public communication, namely scientific communication, but also for the historical study of so-called “proper science.”

The study of scientific dissemination and communication in “fascistized dictatorships,”¹⁴ such as Francoism (and also Salazar’s dictatorship in Portugal), can encourage close interaction between historians of science and political, social, economic, and cultural historians of fascism, a need that Tiago Saraiva repeatedly emphasized in his *Fascist Pigs*.¹⁵ Historical research on scientific communication, as a form of mass communication, with its potential for use as propaganda, its role in nation-building, its capacity to function as industrial, business, or national advertising, and its involvement in the labour and economic sectors, beyond the scientific one, can serve as a bridge between historians of science and historians from other fields.

Currently, there is broad consensus among scholars of fascism that this movement did not constitute a reaction against modernity but rather the pursuit of an “alternative modernity.” This alternative modernity formed the context for the New State and the New Man that fascisms aspired to build from scratch. This was the “reactionary modernism” that Jeffrey Herf coined to describe the seemingly contradictory mix he perceived in Nazism, which combined a fascination with modern technology with a firm rejection of Enlightenment values and liberal

¹¹ Jonathan R. Topham., “Rethinking the History of Science Popularization/Popular Science,” in *Popularizing Science and Technology in the European Periphery, 1800-2000*, ed. Faidra Papanelopoulou, Agustí Nieto-Galan and Enrique Perdiguero, 1-20 (Aldershot: Routledge, 2009).

¹² Ibid., 1.

¹³ Ludwik Fleck, *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*, ed. Thaddeus J. Trenn and Robert K. Merton, trans. Fred Bradley and Thaddeus J. Trenn (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), 112.

¹⁴ On the concept of “fascistized dictatorship,” see: Ismael Saz, Zira Box, Toni Morant and Julán Sanz, “Introduction,” in *Reactionary Nationalists, Fascists and Dictatorships in the Twentieth Century: Against Democracy*, ed. Ismael Saz, Zira Box, Toni Morant and Julán Sanz, 1-28 (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 11-12.

¹⁵ Saraiva, *Fascist Pigs*, xi.

democracy.¹⁶ This term has been adopted to describe this same mixture as characteristic of fascistized regimes, including Francoism. With the adoption of these concepts—reactionary modernism or alternative modernity—to characterize fascism, the role that historians of science and technology can play in the debate (both academic and social) to better understand fascism becomes clearer.¹⁷

The papers in this special issue stem from a series of academic activities on the topic of science popularization during the Franco dictatorship, led by Agustí Nieto-Galan and Clara Florensa. Two workshops were organized at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in 2019 and 2020, under the framework and funding of a Spanish ministerial project.¹⁸ The authors in this special issue presented and discussed their work in these workshops. The reflection on science popularization in twentieth-century dictatorships was also the subject of a roundtable organized by Nieto-Galan and Florensa, titled “Popular Science in 20th-Century Dictatorships,” held at the 2020 international conference of the British Society for the History of Science. These activities led to a first publication, a special section that appeared in the issue 60 (3) of *History of Science* in 2022.¹⁹ The introduction to this special section, which was programmatic in essence, highlighted the lack of works on the history of science during Francoism dedicated to the popularization of science and its audiences, and proposed future research lines in this field.²⁰

The special section proposed the study of science popularization in Francoism as a contribution to broader academic debates, such as the debate on the construction and characterization of the public sphere, the discussion about the fascist and totalitarian nature of the ultra-conservative and far-right dictatorships of the twentieth century, and the better understanding of Cold War international relations dynamics, especially regarding the hegemonic intentions and strategies of the United States.

The introduction to the special section raised the need to study the mechanisms of production, circulation, and reception of science popularization in Francoism with various analytical objectives related to the aforementioned debates. One of these objectives was to determine whether this study could characterize something akin to a public sphere in Franco’s Spain.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹⁷ Saraiva, *Fascist Pigs*, 5.

¹⁸ The project was entitled “The Politics of Censorship and Science Popularization (1940–1990)” (PID2019-106743GB-C22). Funding was also received through the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT), under the scope of the CIUHCT project UIDP/00286/2020.

¹⁹ Clara Florensa and Agustí Nieto-Galan, eds. “Special Section: Science Popularization under Franco,” *History of Science* 60, no. 3 (2022): 329–435.

²⁰ Clara Florensa and Agustí Nieto-Galan, “Introduction: Science Popularization, Dictatorships, and Democracies,” *History of Science* 60, no. 3 (2022): 329–347.

The question was whether, despite being a key element of propaganda and political control in Francoism, science popularization could have contributed in any way to the creation of a public sphere within the dictatorship—i.e., a space where critical capacity could be fostered, and some criticism of the dictatorship could be raised. Could the apolitical, technical, and objective aura associated with science, according to the dictatorship's narrative itself, have made science popularization a special and suitable channel for generating this space?

Answering this question requires studying the popularization practices that took place in order to more precisely define scientific communication under the regime, beyond the communication policy established by the dictatorship, which involved propaganda, censorship, inaugurations, pro-regime exhibitions, and controlled audiences—all tools designed to implant a strict “top-down” model. Characterizing the audiences and reconstructing their reactions to science popularization are key points of this research. They are also a thorny issue: the scarcity of preserved sources related to science audiences and their reactions makes them a very elusive historical element.

Santiago Gorostiza's paper in the present thematic dossier of HoST illustrates this problem by analysing correspondence between the audience and the production team of the science education TV show *Amigos del Espacio*. What survives through the show's recordings suggests that these letters were filtered before broadcasting to adhere to preferred narratives of patriotism and Catholic piety. Unfortunately, there is no archive of this correspondence that could help confirm this hypothesis. Other contributions, both from the *History of Science* special section and from the present thematic dossier, help advance research in this area by bringing to light unpublished documentary sources that help to characterize the audiences of different science popularization activities and even to discover how these audiences perceived these activities.²¹

On the other hand, this thematic dossier also contributes to the historiography of the Cold War. Numerous studies have addressed the role of science in the Cold War, in both military, political, diplomatic and economic strategies.²² They have also explored how science narratives helped create the Cold War's bipolar dichotomy and became part of the tools used to win the contest, particularly as cultural diplomacy weapons.²³ A significant portion of these studies has focused on analysing the role of science, scientists, and scientific discourses in the United States' efforts to build as large an Atlantic alliance as possible and secure its leadership and

²¹ Jordi Ferran Boleda, “Science Before Dinner: Science Popularisation in Francoist Spain Through the Los Progresos Científicos Broadcast,” in this volume. Clara Florensa, “Struggling for Survival: The Popularization of Darwinism and the Elite's Fight for Power in Franco's Spain (1939–1967),” *History of Science* 60, no. 3 (2022): 348–382.

²² Naomi Oreskes and John Krige, ed. *Science and Technology in the Global Cold War* (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2014).

²³ Audra J. Wolfe, *Freedom's Laboratory. The Cold War Struggle for the Soul of Science* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2018).

hegemony (also scientifically and technologically) in the post-World War II world order.²⁴ The works presented here contribute to decentralizing the study of scientific narratives in the Cold War, examining their generation and circulation in other parts of the Western bloc, particularly in dictatorial contexts.

Gorostiza's article highlights how Spain's involvement in the space race through partnerships with the United States was framed, within the context of a science TV programme, to bolster the political legitimacy of the Francoist regime.²⁵ References to NASA or American astronauts were strategically deployed to emphasize the importance of Spanish contributions to space exploration. The show's priority was to project the modernization of the Spanish dictatorship, rather than providing a complete view of the space race, often ignoring the achievements of the USSR. While the internationalist implications of collaborating with NASA were deliberately downplayed, the show drew a linear historical narrative connecting Spain's conquest of America with the United State's project of space conquest, all the while reconciling scientific facts, as well as the disruptive possibility raised by space exploration that there could be extraterrestrial life, with a Catholic worldview.

Dictatorial contexts in the Western bloc are interesting because they raise tensions between the ideal of science promoted by the United States and the ideological and political discourse of these regimes. In this sense, science popularization in Western bloc dictatorships, such as Francoism, during the Cold War cannot be separated from an analysis of the science popularization carried out by the United States, and the works mentioned above provide an essential starting point. As the literature shows, the United States invested significant efforts and resources to disseminate a conception of science as free and international, essentially democratic, establishing an inseparable science-democracy binomial that, in line with Cold War discourse, had the opposite implication that science was not possible in a totalitarian regime, such as the USSR.

In the United States, scientists, foundations, the government and intelligence agencies adopted the premise that people's attitudes toward science could affect their commitment to democracy—or communism—and acted accordingly, with enormous, orchestrated, and costly science popularization campaigns that were fervently disseminated across its sphere of influence. As Audra Wolfe demonstrates, Mendelian genetics, for example, was considered and

²⁴ John Krige, *American Hegemony and the Postwar Reconstruction of Science in Europe* (Cambridge, London: The MIT Press, 2006). Audra J. Wolfe, *Competing with the Soviets: Science, Technology, and the State in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

²⁵ On the popularization of science on TV, see: Clara Florensa, Oliver Hochadel and Carlos Tabernero, "Science on Television: Theory Meets Practice. An Introduction," *Actes d'Història de La Ciència i de La Tècnica (Nova Època)* 7 (2014): 11–16, and the papers in this special issue.

used as a key ideological tool to spread support for the United State's ideals of democracy and freedom.²⁶

This discourse clashed with significant contradictions. American scientists struggled to reconcile the maxim “science as a beacon of freedom,” promoted during the Cold War, with the use of genetics by the Nazis for eugenic purposes.²⁷ On the other hand, the persecution of sectors of the United States population with public influence, such as artists and scientists, during the McCarthy era, opened significant gaps in the official discourse promoting scientific freedom.²⁸ The scientific and technological achievements of the USSR, such as the successful launch of Sputnik, required reshaping the narrative that asserted the superiority of Western science, which allegedly developed in a context of freedom and internationalism, and the impossibility of proper scientific development in totalitarian regimes. Finally, American support for fascist-origin dictatorships, such as Francoism, during the Cold War, also threatened to undermine the strategic public discourse defending freedoms and the absolute rejection of totalitarianism. Narrative strategies were devised to continue promoting the ideal science-democracy binomial in the face of these contradictions.²⁹

In the 1950s and 60s, American sociologists and historians developed a theorization of totalitarianism that restricted the use of the term exclusively to Nazism and Stalinism, which allowed for a hygienic differentiation between these and other dictatorial regimes. This differentiation between dictatorial regimes and the preservation of the definition of totalitarianism for only two of them proved very convenient for justifying US foreign policy during the Cold War, including support for dictatorships with fascist elements. These theories of totalitarianism presented US-supported dictatorships, such as Francoism, as less ignominious, less abhorrent and therefore less deplorable. They could even be presented as convenient, useful, for ensuring stability and fighting against communism.³⁰

What role did science play in this narrative? Pedro Ruiz-Castell's article offers new perspectives on this issue by showing how the distinction between dictatorships promoted by totalitarianism theory worked both for the United States (as a justification for the strategic support of Francoism—a “lesser evil” authoritarian dictatorship, where there is order and anti-

²⁶ Audra J. Wolfe, “The Cold War Context of the Golden Jubilee, Or, Why We Think of Mendel as the Father of Genetics,” *Journal of the History of Biology. Special Issue on The Lysenko Controversy and the Cold War* 45, no. 3 (2012): 389–414, on 405.

²⁷ Ibid., 405.

²⁸ Jessica Wang, *American Science in an Age of Anxiety. Scientists, Anticommunism, and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill/London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

²⁹ Jessica Wang, “Scientists and the Problem of the Public in Cold War America, 1945-196,” *Osiris* 17, no. 1 (2002): 323–47.

³⁰ Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism. The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), esp. 8.

communism) and, conversely, for Spain, to exalt the value and superiority of authoritarian regimes compared to democracy.

Ruiz-Castell's article shows how Soviet science was portrayed in Francoist newspapers and how this portrayal evolved over the forty years of the dictatorship, in accordance with its interests. From a rejection of American capitalist science and Marxist science during the period of autarky, there was a shift towards praising American science and denouncing Soviet science. This shift was in line with the American rhetoric of the Cold War and coincided with the 1953 Madrid pacts with the US, which were key to the survival of Franco's dictatorship. Despite succumbing to the American Cold War rhetoric, the regime's press did not miss the opportunity to reclaim the value of dictatorial regimes, even if this involved valuing the scientific and technical achievements of the USSR. These achievements were presented as "a lesson and an example of what a country can achieve when it lives under a regime of political unity, where there is also authority and continuity." Thus, through the popularization of Soviet scientific innovations versus those of the United States, the valuing of these achievements and their justification based on the authoritarian structure of the USSR, two objectives were achieved: legitimizing Franco's dictatorial regime and opening up channels for commercial interaction with the USSR.

This contribution marks a first step in another of the programmatic lines indicated by the *History of Science* special section: the need to explore the tensions between the conception of science promoted by America during the Cold War, on the one hand, and the ideology of the dictatorial states that belonged to the Western bloc in the conflict, on the other. The conceptual link between science and democracy has been historically constructed, and in this construction, scientific dissemination has played a crucial role. The works presented here contribute, through the case of science under Francoism, to examining narratives about science in dictatorial contexts as crucial voices for the historical understanding of the relationship between science and democracy during the Cold War. They also contribute to the analysis of scientific dissemination as a narrative tool, a "soft power" weapon of cultural diplomacy, to manage the inherent tensions in the different political strategies of the Cold War by the United Nations and other members of the Western bloc, including dictatorships. At the same time, they help to better understand the role of science and scientific dissemination in the legitimization of dictatorial regimes, not only in their role as a showcase of the fruits of this political model, but also in their use as evidence of the effectiveness of the organization of society that it imposes and its superiority over democracy.

Understanding the mechanisms of public and social legitimization of non-democratic regimes and their channels of operation seems to be an increasingly urgent task. The rise of far-right movements in Europe (and beyond), gaining strength in parliaments with rhetoric that exalts authoritarianism and excludes social sectors, makes it crucial to understand the social success of these discourses. As this thematic dossier shows, science and scientific dissemination are another

tool in the construction of political discourses and national identities, also in dictatorships and a crucial tool in their legitimization. This thematic dossier constitutes a modest contribution to understanding this legitimization through the historical study of scientific dissemination in Francoist Spain.