

## **Challenging Franco's Regime by Means of Law: Juridical Knowledge within transnational Campaigns for *Political Prisoners* in Spain, 1958-1977**

By the end of the 1950s campaigns for political prisoners and exiles of the Franco-regime started to emerge in Spain and abroad. Individuals and groups with differing political and religious backgrounds organized meetings, congresses and press conferences. Thereby they built up networks, shared information and called on public opinion to pressure the Spanish government. Around the same time Spanish officials praised the penal regime in Spain as a humane and modern institution. Drawing both on its catholic foundations and a supposedly progressive Spanish legal tradition, this description fitted neatly into a changed overall official rhetoric. At this point in time when after years of political isolation Spain was accepted to enter the international political sphere again, referring to notions such as "rule of law" and "rights", the Franco-regime was aiming to propagate Spain as a modern, advanced and genuinely Western country.

Campaigns for *political prisoners* contrasted this official conception of the Spanish penal regime in several ways. Firstly, the *political prisoner* was pictured as the personification of an unjust state. The sheer emphasis on the existence of such "political prisoners", disputed Spanish officials' statements, which claimed that only regular criminals were imprisoned in Spain. Secondly, references to Spanish and international legal norms put the Franco regime's sovereignty over the law in Spain into question. Furthermore, the campaigns strongly relied on information originating from within the Spanish prisons giving special emphasis to the political prisoner's voices. Individuals who were considered as *political prisoners* testified about their everyday life, formulated claims and made the Spanish penal regime knowable beyond the prison walls. The Francoist penal institutions were both contested by imprisoned individuals and at the same time productively used as a space for political organization and mobilization.

In order to challenge the Franco-regime, campaigns for *political prisoners* referred to knowledge about law (legal norms, procedures, guarantees) and contributed to its production and circulation. Moreover, legal spaces, such as courts and prisons, were being used as a forum for political protest. In return, these practices and newly emerging bodies of legal knowledge affected existing conceptions of law. The PhD project analyses the relevance of law within strategies of help, solidarity and protest, which were incorporated by a number of campaigns for *political prisoners* in Spain and in Western Europe, in connection with the discursive and identificatory potential of the category "political prisoner" within rising debates on "political imprisonment" during the 1960s and 1970s.