

Posthumous letter to José Marques de Melo

Carta póstuma a José Marques de Melo

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IMAGINE YOU WOULD listen to my speech in the next homage to Luiz Beltrão (1918-1986), your master in the theory and practice of Journalism, just as you did last year in the Brazilian Society of Interdisciplinary Communication Studies – the Intercom, which, among so many of your initiatives, was an institution both created and directed by you. Just as in 2017, in the next encounter – if I were invited to it –, before addressing the importance of the Northeastern scholar, your fellow countryman, I would historically reference you and your decisive role in the research in an area that, until the end of the 1960s, featured only testimonials of journalists, legal analysis about the free speech or some foreign bibliography.

Today, I use this posthumous epistle, borne more from affective than academic memories, to highlight the perennial complicity that your death, on June 20th, 2018, shall not erase for as long as I have words left. How not to remember the beginning of this so very attentive listening, in the very first dialogue in which we forged a pact of restless researchers?

June 1970: I come to São Paulo to visit the First Book Biennial, which awarded a literary prize to Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986). I wanted to meet the Argentine writer in São Paulo, having achieved the transfer of the translation rights of his work in Brazil – I worked then on the old Editora Globo (Globo Publishers) of Porto Alegre as editorial secretary. But there was another reason for my displacement from the Ibirapuera and the book fair to the University City. As a young Assistant Professor, I had been invited to teach at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in 1967, where I had attained a degree in Journalism and Literature and Languages in 1964, and kept correspondence with the young School of Arts and Communications (ECA).

Why go to USP that Summer of 1970? First, because I already knew you as a reference in Comparative Studies of Journalism; second, because you were one of the professors participating in the founding of the ECA (1966); third, because I had known, there in the corners of Rio Grande, that you were involved

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with the implementation of the first Latin America's graduate program in Social Communication.

Then I met you, head of the Journalism Department, in a cheerful and dynamic at ease, slipping in (Northeastern?) sandals through the halls of the ECA. We talked in the familiarity we would keep until a few days ago. In the 48 years that separate our first encounter and our parting, this week at Morumbi Cemetery, there has never been a behavior other than the mutual listening. You were interested right away by my reports – the professional activity as a journalist, editor and, mainly, as a professional interested in the research that graduate studies would provide. (There was an implicit pact: you, already a convinced researcher, and I, also with a degree in Languages and Literature, with emphasis on education subjects, had learned in the early 1960s that a professor with no research has no condition to lead the innovative education.)

Your attitude was not exclusive to my presence in this farthestmost visit. I would soon realize that you, as soon as you notice the potential of those who had the privilege of your nearness, would immediately open the doors and lead to binding actions. A unique leadership by empathy, never by the imposition of power. The fact that relates to me is that, in December 1970, your invitation to work on the Journalism Department convinced me to move to São Paulo. (In passing, and not least important, it should be recalled that the family set up in Porto Alegre, Sinval Medina, the companion, and the little Ana Flávia and Daniel, would count on Sílvia and you, the first friends who gave us solidarity and reception in the big city.) Anyway, in January 1971, you, Zé Marques, initiated me in a University whose origin, in 1934, is marked by the culture of research. The graduate program would only be implemented in 1972 – it took a little until the USP believed what you were trying to preach: that Journalism is an area of knowledge and the rigorous, ethical and aesthetic studies on the social responsibility of the profession require continuous research, beyond grammaticalized techniques.

The quick sandals of the fisherman of similar souls moved throughout the world. You have been an articulator of Latin American relations, since the trip to Ecuador, at the beginning of the program International Center for Higher Communication Studies for Latin America (CIESPAL), sending Brazilian journalists to the improvement the project proposed (including me, at the beginning of the 1970s); you led the first investigations into the Latin American press; you created research organizations, strengthening ties of scholars in the Continent. It was not by chance that Latin America internationally called the demands of the early 1970s, consecrated as the Right to Information. While the East-West conflict was drawing attention, South Latin America, suffocated by

the Western North, claimed its place face several monopolies, among which the journalistic information. You, united with other voices of the regions, definitely earned space in power scenarios and created an innovative interpretation of the social rights in communication. It should be noted that the rationale of this struggle was already registered in the research developed at USP, even amidst the repression of the 1964 military dictatorship.

Who would have thought, in subsequent political eras, to see you and your redeeming sandals advocating in Barcelona (1988) and in the Lake Bled (Yugoslavia, one year before the civil war, 1990) the decentralization of conferences of the international association of studies and research to Brazil. And the North of communication sciences indulged the consecrated place of the encounters to Latin America, thanks to the presence of research leaders such as yourself. The political circumstances of repression tried to prevent, yet in the 1970s, your signature in the oratory in auditoriums or the writing of books and articles. And they alienated you from the University in 1974. But you returned in 1979 when the amnesties rehabilitated disenfranchised professors – a sad history told in volume 8 of the Report of the Truth Commission of USP (2018, pp.103-114).

The interruption slid in time as the sandals in space. And your presence on the international scene, which I witnessed in the 1980s, once again mobilized me. Also I had been 10 years out of USP since I left with the cassation of Sinval Medina in 1975 and only came back in 1986. Once again, Zé Marques on the bow of the research boat, mobilizing me for tuning trips with Latin American researchers or from other latitudes; you stimulate me, albeit without public funding, to be in tune with scientific trends. There were counterpoints between us that you accepted, listened: the world around new technologies and I, with cultural studies. Above all, you summoned me to external contacts. So there I go, visiting research institutes in Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Paris, London, Barcelona (in the previous ten years I worked in the newspaper *Estado de S. Paulo*, I broadened my horizons in the United States, Scandinavia, Africa, the former Soviet Union, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Peru).

In the Lake Bled, however, I rediscovered the original nexus of research, thanks to your insistence in writing a communication. And you edited in 1991, by ECA/USP, the document *Communication and Democracy, Brazilian Perspectives*. There you included my work that records the proposal of returning to USP in the 1980s: *The journalist as a cultural reader* (p. 195). Amid the technological euphoria of the rich world, I suspect you paid a special attention to the somewhat offset communication I defended. This because you accompanied with constant dialogue (until receiving in hand my most recent book, in April 2018) the route for which you opened doors in São Paulo, in 1970. Because the first book that

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Paulo Roberto Leandro and I published on ECA in 1973 certainly was born of your gentle and persistent command. You asked me to introduce, in the curriculum of Journalism of USP, the subject “Interpretive Journalism.” How? The task was complex: how to differentiate the production of informative, opinionated and interpretive meanings? You would not take no for an answer, you made me go to the fight. From the studies on the theory of interpretation was born, jointly with the students of the 1970s, *A arte de tecer o presente* [The art of weaving the present]. When your master and friend Luiz Beltrão published a book with the title *Jornalismo Interpretativo* [Interpretive Journalism], he referenced the precedent of USP.

The first years of the difficult 1970s produced, in a department of the University of São Paulo, a bibliographical harvest that you sign, you and your students, your Brazilian and Latin American partners. Just scroll through the list of publications, remembered just now after your unexpected farewell. You put together professors like Freitas Nobre (1921-1990), Thomaz Farkas (Budapest, 1924-São Paulo, 2011), Paulo Roberto Leandro (1948-2015), Walter Sampaio (1931-2002), Gaudêncio Torquato. When you invited me to compose the group, you looked at my experience in the Editora Globo of Porto Alegre. You wanted to create another pioneering project – the course of Publishing. But due to my preference for Journalism, you called the journalist and writer Sinval Medina, who also worked in the publishing house of Rio Grande do Sul, for this task. It did not matter if from the South or Northeast, from São Paulo or another city, you consistently motivated young researchers that would constitute the core of theoretical production and train qualified professors and journalists, comparable to the performance and repertoire of expertise on the international critical mass that appeared in social communication.

And it yielded visible results in the local bibliography and in the signature of so many authors and social mediators. In national universities and in the media, until a few days ago you accompanied your primeval students of USP and those you formed in other institutions, such as the Universidade Metodista de São Paulo. Even if your carrier of teaching and research in 1974 was interrupted and much of the core you assembled has dispersed, the force of this generation joined the leader once more after the return of the disenfranchised to the USP, in the 1980s. And the University would count on you and your dynamic management to run the School of Communications and Arts from 1989 to 1993. That early leadership I discovered in 1970 had matured greatly, and we lived unique moments at ECA.

So many seas, so many storms, and the solid ground you trod shall maintain, both in affective and scientific memory, the prints of your unmistakable steps.

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A imensa contribuição intelectual do professor Marques para as ciências da comunicação só é ultrapassada por sua inesgotável sensibilidade afetiva para compreender a todos. As cinco primeiras obras desta lista estão destacadas com estrelas no Lattes do professor José Marques de Melo. 

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