

## Rio de Janeiro as Brazilian journalism capital

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BARBOSA, Marialva (2007)  
História cultural da imprensa. Brasil 1900-2000  
Rio de Janeiro: Mauad X, 264p

The arrival of Royal Family to Brazil - which bicentennial has been widely discussed in 2008 - and the consequent running of Royal print have been subject to numerous discussions on the Press during the last two hundred years. Books, seminars and debates – in which even the relevance of Journalism degree and modifications of the Press Law are topics of discussion – were debated in the recent months, unearthing some problems and solutions on this subject - not always in tune or balanced. One of the latest publications which provide an interesting context on the celebrations of Brazilian press bicentenary is *História Cultural da Imprensa - Brasil 1900-2000*, by Marialva Barbosa (Rio de Janeiro, Mauad X). However, before dealing with the work itself, it is important to make an exception: the volume subtitle may lead the reader to error. In announcing "Brasil 1900-2000", one may think that the author deal with various aspects of the press in various latitudes, which is not the case. Marialva Barbosa deals only with Rio de Janeiro's press in that century, not addressing, for example, publications in São Paulo (and Brazil) as the magazines *Veja* and *Realidade* by Abril group, or as the journal *Estado de S. Paulo* and *Folha de S. Paulo*. Although the researcher has limited her *corpus*, this does void or disqualifies her work. Contrariwise, this exception is necessary only in order to prevent the reader to seek something in their pages that can not be found.

That said, this cultural history of the press fulfills an important role, which is to draw a panel about how media is structured and modernized in Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how it has been consolidated during the 19<sup>th</sup> up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century – particularly the press,

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which the author observes deeply. And it makes sense to be Rio de Janeiro to be the object of the study, since it was - until 1960 - the capital of Republic and, for many, a sort of permanent cultural capital, which was and still is a root of different concepts, fashions and looks on a Brazil that appears to be seen by other lenses at sea level. Just as comparison, São Paulo, at the beginning of last century, had a population smaller than Cuiabá's. It was in Rio that there was one of the major national publications, the current *Jornal do Brasil* - established in 1891, 16 years after *Província de São Paulo* (current *Estadão*), but more influential than the last one. It is from the history of *JB*'s modernization – and that time society's - that Marialva Barbosa, professor at the Graduate Program of Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) begins her narrative. After all, as the author says, the world in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century was a world that "(...) became more compressed, closer and publicize from a new machine that also transforms the daily publications: the telegraph (p.21)". But not only that. Rio de Janeiro saw arise, with an impressive speed, artifacts that reported modernity that was about to come in the end of tropical *belle époque*. The cinematograph, the phonograph, the daguerreotype and the linotype were clear signs that the world would not be the same - for better or worse - since then. And Rio de Janeiro's press, so by extension the Brazilian one, would take advantage of these new technological wonders.

But in the midst of technical innovations - among them were also Marinoni's modern printers, capable of larger printings in a small-time - there was another, even more relevant and professional: the landmark figure of the reporter as we pass to conceive it. If the newspapers from those years preferred commentaries, a legacy from 18<sup>th</sup> century's British periodicals, the speed in which information was received - via telegraph - and printed - using the new powerful printers – has forced the newspapers, including *JB*, to resize the role of its journalists, in social and marketing equation. As Barbosa relates, quoting *JB*'s article, from January 1, 1901:

(...) The role of the reporter grew in importance: it has all focused on him. A report affects the government more than 30 articles and 30 articles does not give the newspaper a circulation that the report provides. Also, the consequence is that there is no more journalists: we are all, more or less, reporters, and it's the report success we're proud of (...)

And it is precisely this new professional and technological dimension that was going to set the tone to the Rio's and Brazilian press along all the century that opened the new calendar.

## **NEWS & Sensations**

Barbosa Marialva's research pass smoothly by distinct periods of the printed cultural history, in which both the city of Rio de Janeiro and the journalists themselves are inseparable characters. After all, one depends on another, creating social, - the journalist, or better, the reporter as mediator in this society - cultural and political bonds, in their broadest senses. And a dish daily served during a long time to a public eager for sensational – and not sensationalist – information was the police news. It was, firstly and mainly, during the 10's and 20's, in a mixture of sadistic curiosity and everyday horror that, if it has taken the newspapers to a *mea-culpa* for the publications they offered, this had not averted them from publishing headlines that sold the horror. Headlines that has seduced a 13 year-old boy, the young Nelson Rodrigues.

When Nelson Rodrigues began his journalistic career in *A manhã*, newspaper owned by his father, he just wanted to work as a police reporter, "a boy looking for love," as he peculiarly sentenced. This allurement has also tempted João do Rio, Paulo Barreto in the civil registry, one of the leading reporters in Rio in the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century who has dedicated special attention to the bas-fond in Rio de Janeiro. Passion, tension, detailed description and a narrative that could fulfill both reality and fantasy were frequent ingredients in these reports which has touched hearts and minds in a city that was growing, thanks to the effective urban actions, and that was literate: the 190's census showed that 74.2% of Rio de Janeiro's population (from a total of 1.2 million) above 15 years old were literate, although most women remain illiterate.

It was in this period of cultural and news effervescence that the first major communication empire in Brazil was born. When Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand bought *O Jornal* in 1925, starting his communication group hereafter named *Emissoras e Diários Associados* (with the creation of the magazine *O Cruzeiro*, in 1928, and *TV Tupi* in 1950, among others accomplishments), he was in fact preparing himself to the appearance of - as Marialva Barbosa has indicated – other great entrepreneurs in Rio and national media scene, as Samuel Wainer (*Última hora*) and especially Roberto Marinho, who would create the largest empire of communication in Brazil,

raised from the establishment of TV Globo, in 1965.

Before dealing with closer moments in our social and journalistic history – in which television takes an important (although controversial) place - Marialva Barbosa discusses other relevant topics in her book, always focusing on the society or press modernization. This is the case, for example, of what became known in the 50's as "new media", when Pompeu de Souza introduced in *Diário Carioca* small changes that have reverberated throughout the national press: the use of *lead* and the creation of copydesk figure. Brazilian journalism was no longer "European", and passed to adopt an Americanized objectivity - that in the vision of Nelson Rodrigues, was a "serious illness" (p. 150), which Brazilian journalism has never been healed, for better or for worse. The author says:

The newspapers, when prioritizing a bunched content by the impartiality idea which is restrained in the parameters of the lead and editing, in which the body of copy-desk gains prominence, and promoting the standardization of language, they build in the press the space for absolute neutrality. Therefore, it goes over to public recognition as emblematic places for dissemination of information (...)

These innovations, as she points out, has originated from three publications with small circulation, but with a diametrically opposite creativity: the aforesaid *Diário Carioca*, the weakened *Jornal do Brasil* - which has implemented, thanks to Alberto Dines, a striking graphic reform – and *Tribuna da Imprensa*, from Carlos Lacerda. These publications were going to ground the “modernization mystique” (p.156) of national press.

Besides these key aspects for understanding the history of journalism in Brazil, Barbosa deals in her work with other subjects that help us to understand the role played by the press over decades of libertarian contest, social actions and also links and relations not always palatable to the established power. It is the case of the recurrent censure to the media, inaugurated as an apparatus of the state with the creation, in 1939, of the Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda, the notorious DIP from Getulio Vargas New State and kept, two decades later, by military that took power after 64's *coup d'état* – a political and military action that had at first support from almost all Rio de Janeiro's press, except from Wainer's *Última Hora*. The author, however, looks for removing any "idealization" feature from military censorship action and also from the “brave” effort of the press for the

expression freedom in this era. Doing this context and comment away as possible from the Manichaeism that tends to permeate discussions on the topic, Marialva Barbosa indicates the paths that have guided the newspapers - as companies they are - for all period she analyses. If the author deals with a specific case in her speech, the sentence could be seen in a broader way: "As a company looking for symbolic profits and gains, the press is located between the construction of a discourse that places itself in a heroic place and its own survival in the market of journalistic and symbolic goods" (p.187).

## CONCLUSION

The important research that Barbosa has undertaken in *História Cultural da Imprensa* discuss key issues to the comprehension of journalism practice in the last century and to the understanding of the foundation of Brazilian society in a widely way. However, the author's intention is to go further. The discussions she suggests cover a relationship – which cannot be simplified – between sender and receiver and, especially, how the messages productions occur in the narrated space-time experimentation. The journalism and its social and media action is only effective when both newspaper and reader gather themselves as a single actor. As she determines:

"(...) the communication is effectively performed only when the reader reads these reports, looks at the pictures, handles the newspaper and carries it under the arm, comments what he has read, cuts, rips and throws it away, i.e., when he reconfigures the world" (...) (p.244).