

BOOK REVIEW

Dependência ou Morte:

*A questão da independência na
imprensa: o caso República*

VERA LÚCIA RODRIGUES

São Paulo: Germinal, 2004, 242 pgs.

REVIEWED BY **José Marques de Melo**

Brazilian journalism is faced with one of its cyclic crises. Whenever society goes down new paths and strays from the routes it followed before, the media apparatus seeks to adjust to it by establishing organic ties with the interests of hegemonic groups.

This corresponds to a survival strategy that is determined by the immutability of our social and economic structure.

Despite modernizations in the “master’s house”, we maintain broad and diversified “slave dwellings” both in the outskirts of urban centers and in far-off impoverished areas.

Today, the main media corporations in Brazil struggle for survival in the IUC of BNDES – National Economic Development Bank as they wait for lines of credit that will alleviate the suffering of their owners. Chased by their creditors, many of them have frenzies that are similar to those experienced by Niomar Moniz Sodré Bittencourt when the mighty of the day declared the death of his “Correio da Manhã” after the 1964 coup d’état.

An identical situation, though shaped by different circumstances, was experienced by Mino Carta during the period of liberalization of the regime after 1979, when his “Jornal da República” was a major shakedown in an environment where the last military administration was waning. Placing his bets on independent journalism, he undertook the adventure of publishing a daily newspaper that represented the third way amid the alternative weekly papers that were labeled “*imprensa nanica*” (tiny press) and the traditional morning papers published by major companies.

Although social and political circumstances were favorable to this initiative (amnesty, end of censorship, new union movement, transfer of power from military to civilian leaders), truth is that administrative

and financial factors (working capital, editorial planning, advertising negotiations, industrial workflow) acted as insurmountable obstacles and inflicted an early defeat on the boldness of that handful of journalists who improvised as media managers.

No such experiment has been attempted in the Brazilian territory ever since.

However, strong demand for a new style of journalism in the country still exists, a style that is able to supply the middle class with contextualized information, trustworthy interpretation and judicious opinion regarding the events displayed in audiovisual channels on a daily basis.

This is an indispensable component to enhance citizens' awareness as the intellectual illusions of those avant-gardes that placed all their bets on the construction of a politically democratic society have withered without a solution for social and economic issues. These issues remain as the cause of exclusion of the vast majority of our population from the civilizing banquet (education, healthcare, housing, full employment, quality of life).

This is why the release of Vera Lucia Rodrigues' book "Dependência ou morte - A questão da independência da imprensa: o caso República" is an important opportunity.

Originally written as a Master dissertation at the University of São Paulo's Communication and Arts School – ECA/USP, it had been consulted by few readers who were willing to go through the typical rituals of university libraries. Now that it has been released in printed format, the new generations going down the paths of journalism can tap into its contents. And also those people who turn to journalism in order to keep pace with the society where they live and whose destiny they want to influence responsibly.

The author successfully wrote a clear, concise and precise text, and she circumvented all the typical mannerisms of researchers who only write to the academic community. Keeping her autonomy as a journalist, she used a plain and uncomplicated approach to a problem that might seem bleak, i.e., the behind-the-scene world of journalistic companies (funding, management, relationships with advertisers, story lines, reports, editorial conflicts, etc).

With an insightful view of the present moment, Vera Lucia Rodrigues decided to expand the reach of her research on the "Jornal da República" newspaper on the occasion of its 25th Anniversary.

This book fills a significant gap in the academic and professional literature. Its purpose is to provide knowledge to young students and journalists-to-be on the mechanics of the information business and its connections with the political world. Without failing to draw on international sources on which journalistic knowledge is based, she accurately focused on Brazilian authors - classical and contemporary authors alike.

It belongs to that batch of journalistic studies I supported, inspired, encouraged, and guided during the fertile academic environment of the 1980s, retrieving unique facets of the Brazilian journalistic identity when our political life was undergoing restoration of democracy.

Among these, special mention should be made of the books written by Carlos Eduardo Lins da Silva – “Much beyond the Botanic Garden: a study about the audience of TV Globo’s *Jornal Nacional* among the working class” (São Paulo, Summus, 1985), Dirceu Fernandes Lopes – “Newspaper-Lab: from school work to commitment with readers” (São Paulo, Summus, 1989), Gerson Moreira Lima – “Release mania: a contribution to the study of press release in Brazil” (São Paulo, Summus, 1985), Pedro Gilberto Gomes – “Alternative journalism as a popular project”, São Paulo, Paulinas, 1990), Sílvia Araújo e Alcina Cardoso – “Journalism and working class activism” (Curitiba, Editora UFPR, 1992).

Having unveiled the intricacies of the paradigmatic adventure, in addition to providing inputs for the assessment of its strengths and weaknesses, Vera Lúcia Rodrigues inevitably sharpens the sense of entrepreneurship of new journalistic talents by inspiring them to follow similar paths, though these are different times and settings. They can avoid the business mistakes made by the historical characters who brought the newspaper to life by ensuring financial requirements are met and managerial tools are available.

Despite Mino Carta’s explicit skepticism in the book’s foreword, I believe that replicating such a bold feat is still possible by revamping the journalistic ideas that were the foundation of its editorial contents. Through printed or digital formats, it is possible to fulfill the knowledge aspirations of new Brazilian citizens, who have been strengthened by democracy over the past decade of republican rule.

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