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BOOK REVIEW

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A HISTORY OF THE PRESS IN THE PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES
Jorge Pedro Sousa, Helena Lima, Antonio Hohlfeldt, and Marialva Barbosa,
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The first newsbook in Portuguese registered as being published—and that included 'news' about events and analysis about that time—dates back to 1626. Meanwhile, the first publication with the characteristics of what would become the modern newspaper in Portugal was established in 1640. Fast forward to the late nineteenth century and we find that journalists—not news editors or media owners but individual journalists themselves—were creating one of the first professional guilds of news people. It was one that incorporated daily beat reporters, columnists and writers and that acted both as a union and as a professional collage. They develop a code of ethics and debated issues such as censorship and 'objectivity' in discussions that were as comprehensive and critical as those taking place at the same time in countries such as France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States.

Moreover, these debates were not circumscribed to Portugal but travelled within and beyond the Portuguese empire. Journalistic practices and news values between the Global South and Portugal not only were reproduced and disseminated across the globe at parallel times but also there were important interactions between different media ecologies that happened in the context of a very dynamic civil society in Latin America between 1760 and 1900.[1] This created a flow of cultural exchanges that went both ways in which the centres of power were affected and shaped by the counter flows from the South. This not only happened in terms of media practices in general but also in relation to the study of these practices by observers and scholars in particular.

In fact, while José Agostinho de Macedo's 1821 pamphlet under the title 'Exorcismos contra periódicos, e outros malefícios' was an attack on freedom of the press, it nevertheless constituted one of the first attempts to analyse the effects of the press in society. This was followed by comprehensive and well-documented studies, which would proliferate both in Portugal and Brazil in the 1920s and that provided sharp and methodologically acute analysis of the role of media conglomerates in Brazil and Portugal at the beginning of the century. This was at the same time in which media critics such as Upton Sinclair[2] and Walter Lippmann[3] were publishing their own groundbreaking works about the media and the news in the United States.

So why do many media historians insist that the current model of journalism was formed in the United States and then got disseminated throughout the 'periphery'? Why is it assumed that history is somehow a linear project and that modernity 'happened' in one place and then travel to others? Indeed, According to one of the most influential historians in the field, Professor Michael Schudson, 'journalism is not something that floated platonically above the world and that each country copied down, shaping it to its own national grammar. It is something that—as we know it today—Americans [he uses this term to refer to the USA] had a major hand in inventing'.[4]

It is the phrase 'as we know it today' that has always troubled me. Who is 'we', I would ask? A point that is particularly relevant when questioning one of the most enduring historical interpretations around the alleged 'universality' of key journalism values and cultures across the globe.[5] This narrative that has come to reinforce the idea that news values and cultures have historically disseminated from the centre to the periphery of the world and that they have 'happened' or 'occurred' because of a particular process of professionalization that the North undertook—and that derived in part from the emergence of market economy—is, in my view, problematic and flawed. Moreover, the conceptualization made by many Western scholars of journalism, as a professional community, tends to take the building blocks of that historical interpretation more or less for granted.

The explanation to this persistent assumption on a hierarchical and linear interpretation of journalism history is twofold, as this book on the Press in Portuguese-speaking countries comes to remind us. On the one hand, the scholarly study of media history has happened across the globe in silos where researchers rarely have spoken to each other and where the historians from the periphery have had limited ability to put across a stronger voice about their own findings and interpretations (the fact that this book had to be published in English to reach a more 'universally' audience should be the cause of reflexion).[6] With that lack of engagement, there is a predisposition—particularly in the United States and Great Britain—to assume a positivist historical paradigm in which the idea of journalism evolved from places such as NewYork and London and then was exported to the Global South which adopted it almost as it came, without its own grammar.

On[AQ3] the other hand, efforts to de-westernise media studies[7] have been mostly focused on understanding present media systems rather than challenging universal assumptions of history and nature of media practices, particularly in the case of the Global South where these 'assumptions' and historical interpretative narratives remain incapable of providing a truly comprehensive explanatory theoretical framework. They remain inadequate tools at its best, something that has led scholars from the Global South to call for challenges and reinterpretations to globalization and universalism within media studies.[8]

The fact that many still assume that journalism was 'something' generated at the centre and disseminated to the Global South is a misconception not only of how journalism emerged but also about what journalism is today. This is why this book is such a refreshing and welcome contribution to the field, as it reminds us that there is not 'one' single history that can explain journalism as such while reminding us that we need to seek to incorporate alternative and yet complementary interpretations of how journalism came about. Indeed[AQ4], one of the key points made in this book is the fact that, as it was the case in the Anglo-Saxon world, journalism in Portugal and Brazil also emerged from—and was shaped by—Liberalism as a political project,but perhaps in a different manner, which says more about how the grammar of journalism develops historically in different political and societal settings. One of the examples, mentioned in the book, is that of the *Gazeta de Lisboa*, one of the first stable editorial endeavours which illustrates how models of liberal journalism developed across the globe in parallel and in a sort of distinctive manner to the US and UK endeavours. In this particular case, it was an effort closely controlled by what historians refer to as an 'enlightened despotism' in Portugal that led to a type of censorship model shaped by civilians rather than the Church (40). In doing so, it brought about different approaches and understanding of what news is, with its own distinctive grammar, in a different part of the world.

Having said that, this book is a work in progress. To be sure, when reading this book, one is not looking at the entire history of the news media in the Portuguese-speaking countries. Instead, what we get is an incomplete picture. Particularly, when one asks where are the stories of the press in Mozambique, Angola and Macau? Why, one should ask then, does the media historical accounts and prolific body of knowledge of the larger global South remain silent in the scholarly debates in the North and how can they inform us today about what journalism is and can be? These are the questions that will need to be answered by future editions of this and similar books that we expect to see in the future.

Notes

1. See Forment, *Democracy in Latin America, 1760-1900: Volume 1, Civic Selfhood and Public Life in Mexico and Peru*.
2. Sinclair, *The brass check: A study of American journalism*.
3. Lippmann, *Public opinion*.
4. Schudson, *Public spheres, imagined communities, and the underdeveloped historical understanding of journalism. Explorations in Communication and History*.
5. Conboy, *Journalism: a critical history*, 2004; Chapman and Nuttall, *Journalism today: A themed history*, 2011; Ward, "Global journalism ethics: Widening the conceptual base," 137149.
6. Lugo-Ocando, "Pasquali y las limitaciones del idioma: La Escuela Latinoamericana de Comunicación y la difusión del conocimiento propio," 105–112.
7. Park and Curran, *De-westernizing media studies*; Wasserman and Beer, "Towards de-westernizing journalism studies," 428–438.
8. Waisbord, "United and fragmented: Communication and media studies in Latin America," 55–77; Waisbord and Mellado, "De-westernizing Communication Studies: A Reassessment," 361–372.

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