

# MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION OF BRAZILIAN JOURNALISM: the case of the postage stamp<sup>1</sup>

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**SBP**Jor / Sociedade  
Brasileira de Pesquisa  
em Jornalismo

## ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the form in which the postage stamp contributes to the construction of the Brazilian journalism representation. It takes into account for this purpose a conception of this artifact both as a media and as a semiotic text, and its close relationship with the press. The identified and analyzed sample consists of regular and commemorative postage stamps issued by the Brazilian General Post Office during the twentieth century. This work proposes to correlate a recurring theme with the Brazilian historical context, with regard to journalistic practices. As a conclusion, we consider that the visibility of journalism made possible through postage stamps not only points out the relevant people and their contributions to journalism practices, but also makes a clear association with the ideals of a journalism of outrage focused on great social causes.

**Key words:** Brazil. Journalism. Memory. Postage Stamps. Social Representation.

## INTRODUCTION

The construction of the representation of Journalism is carried out from an institutionalized set of apparatuses in several different formats. It is pertinent to consider that this representation is formed by both journalistic praxis itself as well as by the way external social actors, for example, the State, build an image of Journalism. When considering this approach, the postage stamp is analyzed as one of the devices that contribute to this construction.

This work is unique in the use of the postage stamp as a subject for analysis. This choice was made by taking into account the fact that studies of journalistic representation have been commonly

made based on traditional academic supports, such as newspaper articles, audience research, self-representations (provided by the understandings of actors in this very field) and new communication technologies (especially the Internet).

Thus, that choice is justified - indeed, challenging - by taking into account the understanding of the postage stamp as a media. Furthermore, it is still an incipient subject, rare in communication studies, particularly in Brazil (SALCEDO, 2010).

### **Postage stamps for newspapers**

The relationship between newspapers and stamps, despite the apparent dissociation, is not only evident from the issuances that lead to the press (with postage stamps of journalists and media, as we shall see) but also goes back to the origin of the postage stamp itself. The first postage stamp used in newspapers was issued by the Austrian government in 1851, precisely with the specific purpose of paying postage for newspapers and periodicals. (MACHADO; QUEIROZ, 1994).

According to Meyer (2008), the 10 reis tipped stamp (Figure 1), was created in Brazil in 1846 and was used to stamp newspapers, or officially authorize their circulation. Stamps were for the exclusive use of journalists and editors. The newspaper stamps were overwritten in 1898/99 and became regular ones until their abolition. The stamps for newspapers, used in imperial Brazil only for the delivery of periodicals by the publishers, were rarely used. A great number of these stamps was discarded.



Figure 1 - Brazilian imperial postage stamp (1846), called "*Inclinado*"

At the time, the Post Office tried to sell them to stamp collectors, at the then collectors' price (over the face value). Not having been successful, the institution chose to turn this issue (for newspapers) into regular stamps. How? By applying an overwriting with a new face value.

The regular stamps went from 114 to 124 (the 1889 overwritten

ones for newspapers). Given the urgency of placing these stamps in circulation, part of the printing work was given then to João Guimarães' typography in Rio de Janeiro. This company was also a rubber stamp supplier. The other part was the responsibility of the General Post Office Administration press. The following report provided details regarding the issuance of this postage stamp:

The overwritten stamps, according to the authorization published in the 164<sup>th</sup> edict of the Ministry of Industry on May 17<sup>th</sup> and in the Board's edicts of September 29<sup>th</sup>, October 28<sup>th</sup>, November 12<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> and December 7<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, went on sale at this Administration within the deadline set in Article 23 of the Resolution contained in the edicts mentioned. Regarding the sale of these franchise formulas, there was nothing unusual, except for the 100/50 reis stamps that were in the announcement of November 12<sup>th</sup>, and which, as soon as they were offered for sale, were immediately purchased, so this Administration could not satisfy the great demand by philatelists, because they got only 2,000 of the 39,980 copies gathered in the vault, of which 25,000 were sold to Alphonse Bruck, 400 to Dr. Rodrigo Octavio, 80 to William Antonio dos Santos, and 11,000 were sold by other administrations because it was not possible to satisfy other requests made to the Board (MEYER, 2009, electronic information).

These overwritten newspapers stamps were demonetized on December 30, 1915. These stamps can be found new, overwritten and with handwritten obliteration in pencil or ink (from the junk mail, assigned to stamp collectors). At that time, some philatelists criticized this, because different kinds have emerged overwritten. The postage stamp catalogs - both Brazilian and international - record these varieties.



Figure 2 - Brazilian overwritten imperial journal postage stamp (200 réis over 100 réis)

### Memory

One of the most striking phenomena of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century is the progressive growth of questions about memory as both cultural and political concerns in Western societies. Indeed, it seems that people are unconsciously trying to build a mnemonic structure inserted into the current temporality. Somehow, the

same structure was not experienced in the past. The memory issue has been the great political and cultural obsession of the current century.

On the other hand, it should be recognized that while the discourse on memory may seem a “globalized” phenomenon (MATTELART, 2005), in some way, it remains connected to the core of individual memory of people and geographical areas politically divided. This situation is highlighted when Gagnebin (2003, p. 35) states that:

there is now a major concern about the memory issue: we are witnessing a boom in studies of memory, oblivion flaring, recovery, traditions [...] In history, education, philosophy, psychology, the concerns regarding memory made it not only an subject for study but also an ethical task: our duty would be, therefore, to preserve it, to save the disappeared, the past, to recover, as they say, traditions, life, words and images.

There are countless studies on memory that are relevant to this paper. We will not consider *a priori*, the studies of memory from the perspective of cognitive science, computer science, psychology or architecture. Although they are relevant, they do not play a very important role in this article. . Our aim is to adopt the concept of memory related to studies that focus on the elaboration of a history of Brazilian journalism, specifically, based on its representation by postage stamps issued since imperial times.

From this point of view, we will not situate this study among the theoretical questions involving mnemonic studies, media devices and the media. We intend to focus this study on journalism history and the construction of its archeology (FOUCAULT, 2000) as a media system. This can be justified from the statement of Barbosa (2005, p. 111):

I would draw attention to the importance of relying on the past to reconstruct the history of print media. Indeed, as Robert Darnton (1990) affirms, the forms have a history, although not many historians are willing to study it. After over ten years, it still remains current.

Salcedo (2008) states that a past that has close relation to the present and participates in the construction of the future is a constant and active idea. The same past that requires efforts in order to be discovered, revealed and disseminated, can provide intriguing and provocative surprises. According to this assertion, it is imperative and important that any tool available must be used to contribute to the development of models of historical disclosure.

Among the different types of documents we can find philatelic documentation, specifically, the postage stamp. What can be said about such an attractive and rich source of information? This small piece of

paper, regardless of its shape or the media in which it is shown, eliminates distances and creatively preserves in text and image a possible history of mankind. Eco (2004) describes philately, in a fiction book about memory:

I traveled the wide world – in those years when we were restricted by impassable barriers, squeezed between two fighting armies [World War II, on the Italian front] - only through stamps. Even the railroad contacts were disrupted; maybe we could only go from Solara to the city by bike, and I flew from the Vatican to Puerto Rico, from China to Andorra (ECO, 2004, p. 256).

It redeems, as a document, the memory of people through philatelic bibliographies, facts, events, processes and time, in general, confirming a link between humankind and its history and political, economic, social and cultural knowledge. For many, the “paper ambassadors” are seen as a small insignificant piece of gummed, illustrated paper. After some experience one can understand how daily life can cause a “partial blindness” in people.

It is like dealing with bills<sup>1</sup> or cash and not trying to read the symbols in them, even while waiting for more than fifteen minutes on a line in the bank. To “read” the world in order to emancipate the mind is surely one of the greatest difficulties in this century. The postage stamp is not only part of the collection of philatelists, collectors and dealers. It is also a key part of the process of discernment of human material culture. Its content represents symbolic information of potential relevance to the development of historical narratives.

This small piece of paper may help to propagate dominant ideologies, nationalist rhetoric and attributes of an imperialist patriarchy. Therefore, we propose the possibility of relevance when using the documentation as a philatelic source of documentary information. We point out some possible ways to analyze the imagery contained in such a document, which serves as a mirror for the construction of identities, discourses and narratives. The image of a postage stamp, sometimes an individual artifact, sometimes part of a philatelic collection, expresses social diversity.

In fact, it displays a multifaceted human plurality, capable of achieving any social stratum. A critical analysis of this artifact serves both to establish a counterpoint to its unique historical process of a single subject, as well as to open the doors to a dynamic sense production process of multiple dimensions. The social memory may be built using the postage stamp as a symbolic imagery tool. Gomes (1982, *apud* SALCEDO, 2006, p. 110) observes that:

It is understood also that the Archive [physical structure] is an institution, part of a social structure that reflects the culture that produced it, and that on the other hand, acts in return by disseminating its values, beliefs and standards, contributing to the preservation and dissemination of the culture itself.

From that assertion we can highlight the fact that in Brazil (since 1843) many sorts of philatelic documents are produced every year. The representation of Brazilian culture through the philatelic issuances, both at the national and international levels, gives these documents an economic, social and advertising value.

### Journalism stamps

In order to observe how journalistic activity has been represented on postage stamps issued by the Brazilian Government, we analysed images printed on stamps in Brazil during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The criterion for choosing the *corpus* was to identify patterns that referred to journalism, the profession, media professionals and media.

The images will also be analyzed regarding social representations, with the assumption that representation, and the idea of common sense, are internalized theories that have the objective of organizing reality (LEME, 1993).

We will deal with these representations of journalism in the postage stamp as part of this form of organization - which, like all attempts at definitions and appointments, are designed to “make familiar something unfamiliar, or unfamiliarity itself” (MOSCOVICI, 2003, p. 54). We believe that it is through naming and classifying something that the theories “of society and human nature” (*ibid*, p. 62) are revealed.

In the process of the *corpus* building, we decided to focus on the commemorative stamps issued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Brazil. In the *Catálogo Brasileiro de Selos Postais* (Brazilian Catalog of Postage Stamps) we found 23 stamps that conformed to those characteristics. From the catalogue, we were able to identify three recurrent classes of stamps with the theme of journalism, as described below:

Table 1 – Classes of postage stamps issued in Brazil relating to journalism

Journalists	Communication Companies	National Meetings
18 stamps	4 stamps	1 selo

The stamps were divided into three distinct classes - Journalists, Corporate Communications and National Meetings. The first class was the most representative with 18 stamps (78%). The second was

Communication Companies with 4 stamps (17%) and the third (National Meetings) with only one stamp (5%).

The images relating to media companies refer to *Diário de Porto Alegre* (1977), *Diário de Pernambuco* (1985), *Jornal do Brasil* (1991) and to the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Diário de Pernambuco* (1995). The only stamp that does not have a picture of a journalist or a reference to medias was printed in 1953, and refers to the V Journalists' National Meeting. Because of their representativeness, we begin with an analytic description of the stamps in the first class.

The 18 stamps referring to journalists were printed between 1948 and 1999. Among those honored were leading exponents of journalism in the country who appear in the images, mostly to commemorate their birth centennial, as described below:

Table 2 – Brazilian journalists appearing on commemorative postage stamps printed in the XX century

Year or Issue	Journalists Names	Motive of Issue
1949	Ruy Barbosa de Oliveira	Birth Centennial
1951	Silvio Vasconcelos da Silveira Ramos Romero	Birth Centennial
1953	José Carlos do Patrocínio	Birth Centennial
1958	Júlio Bueno Brandão	Birth Centennial
1962	Júlio César Ferreira de Mesquita	Birth Centennial
1962	Quintino Antônio Ferreira de Sousa Bocaiúva	Death Anniversary
1968	Francisco Vieira Caldas Júnior	Birth Centennial
1974	Hipólito da Costa	Birth Centennial
1974	Raul Paranhos Pederneiras	Birth Centennial
1981	Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto	Birth Centennial
1982	Manuel Bastos Tigre	Birth Centennial
1986	Ernesto Simões Filho	Birth Centennial
1990	Lindolfo Leopoldo Boekel Collor	Birth Centennial
1992	Otto de Oliveira Lara Resende	Birth Centennial
1994	Carlos Castello Branco	Birth Centennial
1998	Rodrigo de Melo Franco	Birth Centennial
1999	Joaquim Aurélio Barreto Nabuco de Araújo	Birth Sesquicentennial
1999	Ruy Barbosa de Oliveira	Birth Sesquicentennial

The first stamp catalogued dates from 1949 (Figure 3) and shows the image of the journalist and lawyer Rui Barbosa, on the occasion of his birth centennial. Taking into account that representations, as common forms of perception and imagination, form the basis of human reactions

to events and stimuli (2003), we can associate the image of Rui Barbosa with one of the many stereotypes that surround the journalists' image: advocate of justice, whose ethical precept is the search for "truth" in facts.



Figure 3 - Rui Barbosa's centennial

The laurel branches surrounding his bust seem to refer to the great importance that Rui Barbosa, as a journalist, had in support of the abolition of slavery, of the republic and of freedom during the government of Floriano Peixoto. Of the other visual elements in the constitution of this image, we must highlight the face value, Cr\$ 1.20, the name of the country (Brazil) and the subtitles (1849 - 1949, Rui Barbosa).

After slavery was abolished, he continued his struggle through his *Jornal da Bahia*. Rui Barbosa, with many other exponents of Brazilian journalism, founded *A Imprensa* in 1889 and became the director of *Jornal do Brasil* in 1893, advocating a "free, independent and lawful" journalism (BAHIA, 1990, p. 118).

Barbosa also appears in a stamp issued in 1999 (Figure 5). In the same year a postage stamp was issued - with the same characteristics as that which portrays Rui Barbosa - in honor of Joaquim Nabuco (Figure 4).

The politician, journalist and abolitionist from Pernambuco "opened paths for newspapers devoted to the cause of the slaves" (BAHIA, 1990, p. 113) by leading the Brazilian Society Against Slavery, creator of *The Abolitionist* newspaper, in 1880, that did not last more than a year. In a letter addressed to the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, he announced that he would introduce a bill establishing a deadline for the abolition of slavery:

I know that this deadline is far off, but it is necessary. It is the only way to overcome the difficulties, which are huge. A pre-set date, like that of January 1, 1890, gives time for farmers to prepare for large developments, and at the same time awakens in the hearts of



the slaves an invaluable hope with an infinite price, that will make their lives increasingly less arduous, with every step that brings them closer to their freedom (NABUCO, 1880, p. 14, electronic information).

The *Jornal do Brasil*, of which he was one of the founders, was a newspaper which published severe criticism of the newly-established Republic and was attacked in 1891, when the aggressors clamored for his death (BAHIA, 1990, p. 117).

The commemorative stamps portraying Rui Barbosa and Joaquim Nabuco resemble each other in the rectangular shape, colors, typography and layout of elements. Both have as background references to the writings of the intellectuals. The two journalists, who were contemporaries and friends, were quite different physically, but their pictures on the stamps are similar due to the mustaches and clothes:



Figure 4 – Joaquim Nabuco's commemorative postage stamp



Figure 5 – Rui Barbosa's commemorative postage stamp

The birth centennial of the jurist, philosopher, poet, politician and literary critic Silvio Romero (Figure 6) is commemorated in a 1951 stamp. He was a contemporary of Rui Barbosa in the *Diário de Notícias*, a newspaper edited and directed by his colleague in Salvador from 1885 to 1895, with an editorial orientation that embraced abolitionism and later the republic (BAHIA, 1990). Using the pseudonym of Feuerbach, he wrote texts in the press positioning himself as opposed to the Portuguese Empire (RODRIGUEZ, 2003, electronic information).



Figure 6 – Silvío Romero's birth centennial

Silvio Romero published, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a book that can be considered “one of the biggest misconceptions of Brazilian literary criticism” (SCHNEIDER, 2005, p. 40), in which he harshly criticizes the work of Machado de Assis, recognizing only the merits of his style.

Just like Rui Barbosa, the image of Romero refers to the representation and therefore stereotype of the journalist as a social actor who protests against social injustices. To reinforce this construction, there is a motif-phrase printed in the upper left corner: “Enthusiasm, Work and Fervor for Humanity.”

This picture involved many of the journalists of that time, because since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the exception of some newspapers, “all the Brazilian press played a decisive role in the abolitionist and republican movement” (BAHIA, 1990, p. 113). This sometimes romantic image of the journalist as a voice of freedom is also on the stamp issued in 1953 (Figure 7) to commemorate the centennial of José do Patrocínio.

Considered one of the greatest Brazilian abolitionists – he was the son of a vicar with a slave – he led an obstinate campaign against slavery (in the *Gazeta de Noticias*, in 1878, in the *Gazeta da Tarde* in 1881, and in the *Cidade do Rio* in 1887, of which he became the owner), with texts calling for the abolition of slavery and the lack of compensation for slave owners.



Figure 7 – Commemorative postage stamp of José do Patrocínio 's centennial

The image of Patrocínio is portrayed in blue, with a newspaper in his hand, supported by the ethereal figure of an angel whose open wings seem to support and inspire the abolitionist intellectual trajectory. This representation that does not correspond to some aspects portrayed in some biographical texts, describing him also as a man of temper (COELHO, 2010, electronic information). But if we analyze more carefully the angel and the wings – they may appear to refer to his last great unsuccessful passion: to build an airplane. As described by his friend Olavo Bilac, in a 1903 chronicle :

[...] Patrocínio, tight on that Meier corner, inside that hut in which he lives his dream, he buried his health, his youth, his life - and his newspaper! a newspaper that was all of his glory, of his past, of his soul! To put that world in motion, the inventor destroys and kills himself (BILAC, *apud* DIMAS, 1996, p. 91)

Patrocínio broke with Silvio Romero after the latter wrote an offensive and racist article against abolitionists. Patrocínio fired back, calling him the "Teutonic maniac from Sergipe".<sup>2</sup> The fight he had with Quintino Bocaiúva, also honored with a stamp by the Post Office in 1962, also became famous.

In an article published on October 29, 1888 (five months after the *Lei Áurea* which freed the slaves), he distills his fury against Bocaiúva, who had accused him of betraying the Republic:<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Quintino Bocaiuva was wrong to edit the outrages in *A Província de S. Paulo*. It gave me an opportunity to fully justify myself to my fellow citizens and to show that he was the one who made his debut in the press to support a life insurance company for slaves, from which he received a salary and which was nothing but a shameful trap laid by the ingenuity of the masters (PATROCÍNIO, 1996, p. 255).

Quintino Bocaiuva, who at the time controlled *A Província*, had a stamp issued commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death.



Figure 8 - Quintino Bocaiúva`s 50<sup>th</sup> death anniversary

The verbal elements chosen to illustrate the stamp and to describe the journalist classified him as the “Patriarch of the Republic” and “Prince of Journalism”. Pictured in nib style, Bocaiúva appears in the foreground in vertical design, which contributes to the prominence of his slim, slender profile. The designations in the “motif phrases” (SALCEDO, 2010) or subtitles are the only “clues” for identifying the name of the journalist and his profession.

Despite his significant political career, having been the Governor of the State (Rio de Janeiro) and Minister of the Republic, it was as a republican journalist that he made history. According to Silva (1992, p. 102), to reinforce his image of a journalist who fought for a cause (which was the journalistic stereotype of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and appears on the stamps analyzed), the “prince and patriarch” led “a life devoted solely to serving the nation and the regime”, living as an old man “without material resources.”

One of the images that stands out for its uniqueness, among those identified in the *corpus*, is a stamp commemorating the centennial of the journalist Lindolfo Leopoldo Boekel Collor. The emphasis is not necessarily given by the verbal-visual elements, or by the pictures of the newspapers in which he worked or which he founded, but especially in the symbolic and contextual dimension of this stamp. That is because it was issued in 1990, precisely during the first year of the administration of President Fernando Collor, his grandson.



Figure 9 - Lindolfo Collor 's centenary of birth

Below, we have included the commemorative postage stamps honoring four media companies, our second category. And also below, the only stamp that commemorates a meeting of Brazilian journalism professionals, issued in 1953, commemorating the 5<sup>th</sup> National Journalists Congress, our third category.



Figure 10 - Diário de Porto Alegre (1977)



Figure 11 - Jornal do Brasil (1991)



Figure 12 - Diário de Pernambuco (1985)



Figure 13 - Diário de Pernambuco (1995)



Figure 14 – 5<sup>th</sup> National Journalists Meeting

This stamp not only embodies a verbal-visual discourse regarding a professional meeting, but also bears a close relationship with the political debate regarding the representation of professional journalism in Brazil in the 1950's. Gomes explains (electronic information, our italics):

The Union of the Professional Journalists of the State of Pernambuco was founded on November 27, 1947, or at least that is the date recorded on its Association Charter. However, the history of the journalists' union in Pernambuco begins a little earlier, in 1941,

according to the second record made by journalist Luis Veloso at the opening of the first book of minutes of the Union of Journalists of the State of Pernambuco [...].

The efforts of a group of members, headed by Luiz Veloso, Lúcio Coura Goés and Aristophanes de Andrade managed to persuade the Ministry of Labor to acknowledge the transformation of the Association into the Union. However, (there is no record of the date) the Letter of Assignment gave the title of Professional Journalists' Union of Recife. According to Veloso, 'once more the lack of support from the professional category almost caused the end of it' (no quotes date) [...].

The absence of the union emphasized the difficulties of organization and was reflected in the lack of wage increases. At that time the wage adjustments were awarded nationally. In 1953, the National Congress, by decision of the Senate, shelved the bill for the salary increase for journalists, which had already been approved by the House of Representatives after two years of discussion. That same year, the Fifth National Congress of Journalists, held in Curitiba, approved a resolution that said it was necessary to organize the category in states where there was no union. Journalists from Pernambuco, Luiz Veloso and Leocádio Mitchell, who attended the Congress, were chosen to join the union and the organizing committee was charged with reorganizing the Union of Pernambuco.

### Conclusions

To classify a group of people or a profession, rather than finding a way to condense in a brief description the entire arsenal of ideas concerning those subjects, is to choose "one of the paradigms stored in our memory" (MOSCOVICI, 2003, p. 63) in order to "establish a positive or negative relationship with it".

We observed in this study that one of the State representations of journalism, by the issuance of postage stamps depicting the theme, focuses the construction of meaning through the image of the journalist - more than that of the press itself (through the media companies ) or that of major events.

If we consider that the idea of classification, the description of a class (like journalism), provides "a prototype model suitable to represent the class and a kind of picture of all the people who supposedly belong to it", we can propose that this model or stereotype of the journalist portrayed on Brazilian postage stamps condenses some recurring characteristics that may be taken as "positive".

The 18 stamps analyzed pay tribute to journalists who are men who acted in outstanding newspapers, campaigned in the press on behalf of great causes, directed or founded important newspapers in Brazil, and were also strongly associated with a history of erudition, intellect and high culture, and in cases like that of Rui Barbosa, even of genius.

The idea of a journalism of outrage that supports causes, an interpretation that may arise from brief biographic descriptions of the

journalists who had their stories immortalized on stamps, represents a deviation from the impartiality and objectivity of journalistic practice.

However, it also seems to get closer to the common sense, to the “world consensus” (MOSCOVICI, 2003) that surrounds the professional and personal identity of the journalist. Although always “contradictory” (RIBEIRO, 1994, p. 165) and historically occupying underprivileged spaces in the field of professions (TRAQUINA, 2004), it still has some association with the “romantic” imaginary that involves the activity: the stereotype of the indefatigable reporter, on 24-hour alert, who does not hesitate to sacrifice his/her personal life on behalf of a great and noble social cause.

## | NOTES

- 1 Paper presented in Working Group 1 - Journalism. INTERCOM/NE – June, 2010.
- 2 The study of coins and bank notes is called Numismatics.
- 3 Sílvio Romero was known and marked as a supporter and a user of the German philosophy and language, as well as for the admiration he had for Tobías Barreto, an enthusiast of the German language and philosophical traditions.
- 4 This was because of his stance against the alliance of some Republicans with former slave masters, who demanded compensation (COELHO, 2010, electronic information).

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