

DEFEATED PROFESSION, ILLEGITIMATE DISCIPLINE

it is time to understand the
journalistic field's institutionalization

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EDUARDO MEDITSCH
Federal University of Santa Catarina

ABSTRACT

The difficulties of theoretical development in Journalism in the specific academic field (considered as the Journalism discipline, as well as the Communication discipline), and the problems that they cause both in the professional and the academic fields' legitimizations, lead to the necessity for an investigation of its sources in the institutionalization of the field. Identifying that the dichotomy-based explanations are not enough to enlighten the issue, nor are the earlier investigations made by me, this paper has the objective of increasing the knowledge about the history of Journalism in the academic field, from the perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge. This study analyzes data about the social and cognitive institutionalization of the field, its relation to Journalism and the University's development, within the major contexts of society and culture. The hypothesis is that the identification and the description of the *frames* socially constructed in the institutionalization of the field can help to understand the epistemological difficulties observed in this development.

Key-words: Journalism; Academic Field; Institutionalization; Frames; Epistemology.

INTRODUCTION

Recently published studies, like ZELIZER (2004) and SCHOEMAKER & COHEN (2006), have recalled an uncomfortable situation, observed thirty years ago, when some American sociologists entered the newsrooms to study the production and nature of the news: in the words of Philips (1976:88), journalists do "not conceptualize their own experiences or place concrete particulars into a larger, theoretical framework."

The difficulty and/or the disdain observed in this situation, after so many repetitions and so many studies, emphasizes a chronic problem in the process of professionalization of the craft: the inexistence of a specific body of knowledge, scientifically and philosophically mature, internally accepted and socially recognized to justify the exclusivity of the labor market for its owners, in the name of the quality of a public service: the requirement of social recognition of any profession (REESE,

1999; FIDALGO, 2008). In Brazil, this theoretical deficiency was in line with the Supreme Court decision that eliminated a previous requirement of a specific university degree to enter the profession in 2009.

But, if on one hand that deficiency shows the weakness in the professionalization process of Journalism (its difficulty in surpassing the level of a quasi-profession), on the other hand it denotes the developmental stage of the academic field in which this professionalization is included. As it does not lend the would-be profession the theories it needs to assert its specificity and relevancy, the academic field of Journalism (or of Communication, no matter which one) exposes the weakness of its own process of academic legitimization (its difficulty in surpassing the level of a quasi-discipline). The challenges of the “academic professionalization” (REESE & COHEN, 2000), and its recognition in the scientific field (BOURDIEU, 2005; SPROULE, 2008) also need to face this question.

The debates within the Brazilian academic field in 2009 regarding the Supreme Court decision and regarding the project for a new National Model Curriculum of Journalism Education (developed under the impact of the former) brought to the surface once more the fissures in the “cognitive institutionalization” of the field that periodically stresses its “social institutionalization” (WHITLEY, 1974).

International academic literature about Journalism Studies and Journalism Education shows that the fissures in this area are more general than its isolated manifestations, discussed in the various national contexts (MEDSGER, 1996; REESE, 1999; TURNER, 2000; ADAM, 2001; BROMLEY et al., 2001; SKINNER et al., 2001; SCHADE, 2006; PIETLÄ, 2008). As part of the process of the globalization of culture, in which the internationalization of science plays a vanguard role (ORTIZ, 1994), it is improbable that the accepted construction needed for the epistemological maturing of the field will find local solutions to the question never solved of the *oneness* and *diversity* in the Communication discipline.

Twenty-five years ago, when I studied this issue for the first time in my M.A. research, it was impossible for me to view this scenario. I was concerned with the discrepancy between theory and practice in Communication Education, and investigated its roots. The result of that research surprised me, because nobody in Brazil had analyzed it before. I diagnosed this incongruity as a consequence of the compulsory introduction of “Social Communication” as the parameter of the national Model Curriculum of Journalism Education since 1969. This change did not bring just a new science, but also the idea of a new professional associated with it: the “polyvalent communicator”, who should replace

the journalists (and other area professionals) who had graduated from Journalism Schools.

In this way, Communication as an academic area would no longer be introduced in our country as planned by Journalism Professor Pompeu de Souza for the University of Brasília Project, inspired by the American experience: a School of Mass Communication with diverse professional careers (SOUZA, 1965). In Brazil, existing professions would become extinct and would be replaced by a new one (NIXON, 1981). As it could be anticipated, this never happened in the real world outside the academic sphere, because the labor market had its own dynamics. In the same year of 1969, when that Model Curriculum was imposed, the government created new rules for the practice of the Journalist Profession, requiring a specific university degree in Journalism.

This contradiction, added to the unconformity of the schools themselves with the new imposed pedagogical orientations, kept the classical professions as “specializations” of the new Social Communication career, and made the ‘polyvalent communicator’ one specialization among the others, that would be abandoned after some time (MELO, 1974). Nevertheless, the theory for the education of this idealized professional occupied its place in the remaining curriculum, while the technical skills were oriented to the existing professions, without any theoretical discussion regarding it. So, the theory-practice dichotomy, if it already existed in the former schools of journalism, became harder to revert in the new Social Communication schools in Brazil (MEDITSCH, 1990).

More recent studies on the history of the area confirm my conclusion that a political intervention by the military government, in the context of the Cold War, was the main motivation for redesigning the field. But my limited sources of empirical data and my dualistic theoretical references did not permit me to see, in 1990, that quite the same thing had happened in the democratic “first world” universities, where a science created for social control had entered the schools of journalism, with the new academic area of Mass Communication (POOLEY, 2008).

However, the sole discovery of the “illegitimate” origins and of the “impure” development of Communication as a scientific discipline, through its political use, does not by itself alone lead to the understanding of what became of the academic field. The dichotomies usually make an excessive simplification of reality, producing reductionist ways of thinking. Therefore, it is necessary to avoid falling into the trap of new reducing dichotomies.

The perspective of *Journalism vs. Communication* may have been

converted into a new dichotomy, although it had had an important role in the recuperation of the focus on the subject. There is evidence that most of the troubles observed in the development of a journalism theory inside the Communication discipline were not solved more adequately outside it, where Journalism became independently institutionalized. As much as in the period before the existence of Communication, in places where Journalism maintained its academic independence, the problem of a specific theoretical-conceptual development is still present (REESE, 1999; REESE & COHEN, 2000; WEINBERG, 2008).

The need for a Journalism Theory and the deficiency in satisfying this necessity by Communication Theories were well pointed out in Brazil by Genro Filho (1987) and other authors, and have remained an unsolved problem until the present, notwithstanding some progress in this sense in the last 25 years (BENETTI, 2005). A reason already identified is the displacement of the focus of interest in the theory produced in the area, from media products to media effect (REESE, 1999). As the main subjects of professional education are the production and the products, the mistaken evaluation of these subjects by the theoretical part of the curricula created a gap difficult to transpose.

In the field of scientific production, this situation created a “no man’s land” that would be occupied by researchers from other disciplines besides Communication, attracted by Journalism’s relevance and by the gap to be filled. As pointed out by John Hartley, “Journalism is terra *nullius* of epistemology, deemed by anyone who wanders by to be an uninhabited territory of knowledge, fit to be colonized by anyone interested” (HARTLEY, 1996:39). Consequently, the recent interdisciplinary impulse caused Journalism to be taken seriously, but just as a subject of other disciplines, not necessarily Communication (ZELIZER, 2004). As a specific field, its academic legitimization requires the production of its own theory, incorporating the multidisciplinary approach of *Journalism Studies* to develop proper concepts and methodologies, from a necessary original perspective (GROTH, 2006).

A narrower focus on the specific subject may ease this task, but it does not guarantee success. Without the interdisciplinary widening and the scientific habits that Journalism scholars learned in the Communication field, it may be more difficult to accomplish (REESE & COHEN, 2000). For these reasons, Journalism tends to be more productively developed as a Communication subfield, where the *oneness* and *diversity* of this major field are more adequately equationed to manage the job with the plurality of subjects and aims that it involves.

The challenge of a harmonic and consensual institutionalization of the field is difficult to meet successfully, and not only in Brazil. An example is the *Model Curricula for Journalism Education for Developing Countries & Emerging Democracies*, proposed by UNESCO in 2007. It represents a 180-degree turn in the historical position of the entity that in earlier decades introduced the Communication discipline all over the world. The document disregards this past, does not justify the change, and neglects the fact that Journalism Education nowadays takes place in Communication Schools in most countries. The very existence of an academic discipline called Communication is ignored, and the curricula do not include Communication Theories (UNESCO, 2007).

The new UNESCO curricula bring advances in many ways, as when it reestablishes the focus on journalism specificities and when it recognizes the developing countries' right to have Western classical democracies. The document also shows concern for the challenges the profession faces in the areas of globalization, cultural diversity and technological changes, and restates the need for a broad foundation in the field of Human Sciences to prepare future journalists to be intellectual producers (UNESCO, 2007). In this way, it brings up to date the pedagogical project of the founding fathers of Journalism Education a century ago. However, it advances very little in the field of specific theorization, disregarding the interdisciplinary contributions of the flourishing area of Journalism Studies, which is given little consideration.

Journalism Studies is one of the new offshoots that, like Cinema Studies, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, etc, have diversified the area. Nowadays, these academic territories are assuming proper identities. As they move on, each of these new identities creates tension within the institutionalization of the Communication field as a unitary discipline. From a cognitive standpoint, the acceptance needed for its epistemological solidification becomes more difficult, and from a social point of view, cohesion becomes more difficult too, with a proliferation of networks and different entities.

The survival of Journalism's identity within the Communication discipline surfaced in Latin America at the beginning of the 21st Century, the same way that Journalism Studies seem to be internationally consolidating. This consolidation can be foreseen in the creation of interest groups in the international communication entities (ICA and IAMCR), the articulation of transnational networks, the foundation of specific entities, programs, groups and research, the emergence of new journals and the profusion of the specialized bibliography.

The renewed focus on journalism may have brought some advantages to the Communication area. Notwithstanding this, to be totally effective, the renovation of the subject needs to overcome a paradigm (KUHN, 1970). The change of paradigms not only affects the field's function, but also the perception of the present and the past of the discipline (SPOULE, 2008). The paradigm perspective allows one to rethink the dichotomy of *Journalism vs. Communication*, reshaping the question now as *Communication vs. Communication*. Thus we would have new standpoints, no longer based on subject offshoots, but on the nature and the purposes of the discipline.

The purpose issue generates diverse ways of seeing the history of Communication as a discipline: on one hand, the social institutionalization of the field, satisfying the demands for professional education since the beginning of the 20th Century, will be recognized as its true origin. This social purpose, even considered "extra-scientific", will be considered legitimate to guide the cognitive institutionalization, as it occurs in other applied disciplines, like Pedagogy (MELO, 2008). On the other hand, that period before the interdisciplinary fusion that received the name of Communication Science will be considered "pre-academic": a new cognitive institutionalization, with more strict scientific purposes (the construction of a "real discipline") will be the teleological basis seen as the only one that can legitimize its later social institutionalization, as it occurred in other social sciences, like Sociology and Anthropology (MARTINO, 2007). The watershed appears now as the issue involving the hierarchy of interests and aims between the academic world and the profession.

The *professional vs. academic* world dichotomy, like the one between Journalism and Communication, is also present in the field's history (REESE, 1999). It affects all Communication sub-fields historically connected with the practices, as well as Journalism (Advertising, Public Relations, Broadcasting, Audiovisual, etc) and those originating from disciplines without this connection, such as Sociology, Semiotics, Psychology, etc), stressing the relationship between the two great groups. The stress and accommodation between those poles - one interested in more concrete aspects, the other in more abstract themes - also marks the history of international entities (NORDSTRENG, 2008).

To rationally resolve these questions, one must understand more accurately the social and cognitive field constructions. The history of other disciplines which survived after their paradigmatic crises shows that the frustration of the primary mutual annihilation impulse required

a further development, on a higher level of theoretical integration, of the legitimizations of the several institutions (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1985:148-9). Nevertheless, to make this step possible, it is necessary to understand previously how the crystallization of the disputing symbolic universes takes place: “The crystallization of symbolic universes follows the (...) processes of objectivation, sedimentation and accumulation of knowledge. That is, symbolic universes are social products with a history. If one is to understand their meaning, one has to understand the history of their production. This is all the more important because these products of human consciousness, by their very nature, present themselves as full-blown and inevitable totalities.” (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1985:133)

The *frame* concept, as used by Stephen Reese to study media, can be useful for the comprehension of those explanations and how they have been constructed during the field institutionalization process. “Frames are organizing principles, socially shared and persistent over time, that act symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (REESE, 2001:5). For the linguistics and cognitive science expert George Lakoff, “Frames are the mental structures that allow human beings to understand reality – and sometimes to create what we take to be reality. (...) Frames facilitate our most basic interactions with the world – they structure our ideas and concepts, they shape the way we reason, and they even impact how we perceive and how we act. For the most part, our use of frames is unconscious and automatic – we use them without realizing it. Erving Goffman, the distinguished sociologist, was one of the first to notice frames and the way they structure our interactions with the world.(...) He found something quite remarkable: social institutions and situations are shaped by mental structures (frames), which then determine how we behave in those institutions and situations” (LAKOFF, 2006:25).

The frame concept thus helps to explain the institutionalized “programs” and “prescriptions” (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 2004:56) and the “*habitus*” built during the institutionalization process (BOURDIEU, 2005). Consequently, it is necessary to improve the knowledge of Journalism’s intellectual history in the academic field, beginning with the last one hundred years’ accomplishments in American universities. The importance of the United States of America is due to this country’s undisputed central role in the events that molded the subject during the last century; however, academic Journalism history is much older in European countries (SOUZA, 2004).

In the 20th century, the USA became the planet’s major economic and military power, projecting this hegemony on the mass culture and

scientific production fields. This leading role has decisively influenced the ways Journalism is exerted nowadays in most countries (CHALABY, 1998), as well as the paradigms through which it is studied and the ways they are reproduced by university professional education (MELO, 2008b; WEINBERG, 2008).

“Critical studies”, founded on a strong reaction to American influence, motivated by European matrices and developed with great creativity in Latin America, rejected for some time most American scientific contributions in the area (NORDENSTRENG, 2008:234). The almost total exclusion of the Latin American academic area from the Journalism Studies developed in the USA, which endured for more than a decade, has interfered negatively with the theoretical development of news studies in Brazil. The international literature that will reposition the production processes and the analysis of media in the central focus of Communication as a discipline takes a long time to appear in Journalism Theories discussed in Brazil.

The end of this isolation happened only after the mid-90s, with the introduction of text collections and didactic compendia about *Journalism Studies*, mainly brought from Portugal or translated there (WOLF, 1987; TRAQUINA, 1993, 2001, 2004; SOUSA, 2002), that rapidly became the most cited works among the scientific production about Journalism in Brazil (MEDITSCH & SEGALA, 2005). According to Marques de Melo, “We began to adopt the excellent manuals produced in Portugal by Professor Nelson Traquina. However, they assemble ‘out of place ideas’. Their theoretical marks reproduce critically the postulates they are founded on (...). This is exactly why they denote a natural absence of empathy for the peculiar phenomena of Brazilian Journalism” (MELO, 2006:35).

The use of “out of place ideas” has been central in Brazilian intellectual and academic debates since literary critic Roberto Schwartz used this expression when analyzing the assimilation of bourgeois ideas in the slavery context of the 19th century (SCHWARTZ, 1988). But if the “out of place ideas” worked as a contribution to the artistic and literary Brazilian creativity, as Schwartz demonstrated, they caused difficulty for the Human Sciences in solving epistemological problems. The use of concepts out of the theoretical contexts in which they originated, mostly in an interdisciplinary field as Communication in which these concepts are imported not only from different countries, but from diverse academic disciplines, creates even greater difficulties. The continuous and cumulative quotation of successful concepts in Journalism Studies, such as *gatekeeping*, *agenda-setting*, *newsmaking*, *framing*, *social*

construction of reality, etc, ignoring the research and facts that originated them, often leads to glorifying them or to making them banal, in discord with the methodologies that created them (MEDITSCH, 1997).

Although cultural dependency theories have contributed to a greater conscientiousness in this sense, they often induced a new dichotomy in the national subject, which intended to explain all themes through this approach, which makes it difficult to see the emerging phenomenon of cultural universalization (ORTIZ, 1994). This other theoretical reductionism obscured the fact that many local experiences were similar to those of central countries, despite some specific differences. Consequently, the more than a century-old experience in the United States and the debate and strife surrounding it, partly reflected here, have not been used in a more positive way, due to the lack of a systematic effort towards their retrieval, based on a perspective of replacing “the ideas in their right places” and then compare them to the Brazilian reality.

At a time when the necessity of the reinvention of journalism becomes evident, the responsibility and the pressure on the academic area to participate in this process increases (DOWNIE & SCHUDSON, 2009; FAUSTO NETO, 2009). As this takes place as a part of culture globalization, and as the USA still exerts an unquestionable international leadership, already shown in our area by diverse projects involving the universalizing of studies and education (SHOEMAKER & COHEN, 2006; REESE, 2007; LÖFFELHOLZ & WEAVER, 2008; WAHL-JORGENSEN & HANITZCH, 2009), a more accurate understanding of American matrices is imperative for development of the Brazilian participation in this process.

The American scholar James Carey was one of those who questioned and tried to answer where Journalism education went wrong. Our research question has a similar motivation, but focuses on a slightly diverse perspective: what created obstacles to the theoretical development of Journalism inside the specific area (either seen as Communication or just Journalism)?

Carey noted, little more than a decade ago, the inexistence of a history of communication research *stricto sensu* (CAREY, 1997:14-5). To satisfy this demand, more critical field history studies appeared, such as those collected by David Park and Jefferson Pooley (2008). The authors note that the history of scientific disciplines is a marginal sub-field, although necessary for understanding them. Specifically within Journalism and Communication, most of the American historical accounts were made “from within”, disregarding the distance necessary for permitting a consistent contextualization of the events. To counterpoint this, they

propose a “qualified historicism” to “reconstruct ideas, figures, struggles over resources, and any other object of study, within the full context of their original location in space and time” (PARK & POOLEY, 2008:5-6).

This study must be made from the Sociology of Knowledge perspective, considering the history of journalism’s academic area as “objective reality” and simultaneously as “subjective reality” (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1985). Discussing History and its relation to Journalism as research fields, Romancini (2007) underlines the role of the New Cultural History: “a kind of centrality given to the culture category allows it to be studied from a great variety of perspectives (...) Therefore, according to certain areas, there is a clear proximity with the contemporary or, at least, a historical time closer to the historian. That’s why the use of more traditional investigation techniques from social sciences (...) and even new methods that already have historical methodological status, due to the reflections about them, as with oral history, in its various dimensions (...)” (ROMANCINI, 2007:28-9).

Revising the “hermeneutic situation” debate, Minayo proposes that “only as the analyst discovers the reasons that cause a statement by a certain speaker, as it is, he can learn what the subject intended to say, i.e., the speech signification” (MINAYO, 2004:222). Under the discourse study perspective, this consists of capturing the “responsive comprehension” postulated by the speaker in the social dialogue, as “each utterance is a link to a much more complex chain of other utterances” (BAKHTIN, 1992:291).

Romancini shows the advantages of the possibility of combining “modern” and “post-modern” perspectives in a historical study: “It’s difficult to deny that, on one hand, the ‘post-modern’ historiography brings relevant proposals and themes to the historical epistemology, in a broader sense, as acknowledgement of the narrative and discursive character that even a structural story assumes, forcing the researchers to greater reflection on this matter (...); the micro cut was also able to make History more dynamic by criticizing idealistic analysis models, placing the researcher’s own presence and motivations in discussion. At the same time, the possibilities of combining macro and micro approaches are noted” (ROMANCINI, 2007:29).

As noted by the author, this eclectic perspective is sometimes poorly understood by peers more comfortable with established points of view. Despite the risks of incomprehension it carries, theoretical eclecticism will be maintained during the data interpretation of this research, assuming that the paradigm transposition is presupposed by the scope of the

project, to collaborate with “ a further elaboration, on a higher level of theoretical integration, of the legitimizations of the several institutions” (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1985:148-9).

My starting working hypothesis is that the identification and description of the *frames* built during the social and cognitive institutionalization of the academic field, in an international perspective, can help to explain the epistemological difficulties observed in Brazil. In this sense, collected data must be analyzed taking as a starting point the theoretical references described, aiming at the construction of an original explanation for the social and cognitive institutionalization of the academic field. Such analysis must be compared with the field history in Brazil and other disciplines´ historical references. It is a work plan as broad as possible to answer the questions that discomfort us at this moment about the future of the profession and also the future of the academic discipline.

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Eduardo Meditsch is a Researcher of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Professor at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), Coordinator of the Journalism Studies Interest Group of the Latin American Communication Research Association, former Scientific Director of the *Brazilian Journalism Researchers Association (SBPJor)*, former chairman of the Journalism Undergraduate Program at UFSC, founder of the *Estudos em Jornalismo e Mídia* magazine. Published the books *O Conhecimento do Jornalismo* (The knowledge of Journalism) Florianópolis: Edefsc, 1992 and *O Rádio na Era da Informação* (Radio in the Information Age) 2nd ed. Florianópolis: Edefsc/Insular, 2007.
E-mail: eduardo.meditsch@pq.cnpq.br