

NEW (AND OLD) TRENDS IN JOURNALISM RESEARCH¹

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ABSTRACT In this paper, I look back to the vast area of communication sciences, that first arrived in the university sphere by means of journalism subjects. In reality, one of the first academic magazines in the area of communication sciences was a magazine concerning journalism. During the 1940's and 1950's, journalism research was at the center of the renowned studies by Lazarsfeld. In the years that follow, Journalism study's dependence on sociological inquiries and content analysis was left behind in the explosion of studies that took place in the 1960's and 70's. In the more recent years, the explosion of studies of Journalism was marked by the recourse to a multiplicity of new methodologies (such as, for example, the ethno-methodological approach, discursive analysis, focus groups), by the emergence and growing influence of television, by the interest relating to journalism's ideological role, as well as by the appearance of new paradigms for understanding the news.

KEY-WORDS Journalism studies; multiplicity; methodologies; novelty

In my opinion, the academic community should not follow in the footsteps of the journalistic community in the latter's obsessive fascination with novelty. The content of this contribution will emphasize the continuity of journalism research in the beginning of the XXI century, without overlooking novelty. And with respect to continuity, it is not a matter of the quantity of the research but above all of its diversity and richness – richness of subjects, issues and methodologies, that is to say, in its multi-dimensional dimension. Furthermore, it was this dimension that my Portuguese colleagues, Cristina Ponte and Jorge Pedro Sousa recalled with their contribution to journalism research presented at the IV Congress of the SOPCOM in Aveiro this year. They recalled the recommendation by academician Barbie Zelizer regarding the “need for

superimposing various subject lenses for a study of journalism that takes into account its complexity and political, economic and cultural intersections that constitute its field of activity as a social institution” (PONTE & SOUSA, 2005: 1). The two authors quote Zelizer when she wrote in her latest book *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy*: “The more we enrich our perspectives on the analysis of the news involving alternative perspectives as a more integral part of our thinking, the more we can appreciate what each type of inquiry has to offer us and offset the former consideration that one single type of inquiry can give us a complete answer to what we are looking for” (2004: 214).

Looking back a little, the vast area of communication sciences first arrived in the university sphere by means of journalism subjects. In reality, one of the first academic magazines in the area of communication sciences was a magazine concerning journalism. Two more magazines were created at the close of the XX century, *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* and *Journalism Studies*, and now in the XXI century, the magazine *Media & Jornalismo in Portugal*, and the *Brazilian Journalism Research* in Brazil by SBPJor. During the XX century the study of the media was often confused with the study of journalism. Nevertheless, for the first time, during the 1940’s and 1950’s, journalism research was at the center of the renowned studies by Lazarsfeld (LAZARFELD, BERELSON & GAUDET, 1944; KATZ & LAZARFELD, 1955).

The same thing happened with a significant part of the studies comprising the line of research that was developed starting in 1972 involving the agenda-setting theory (MCCOMBS & SHAW, 1972) and which today takes on a new shape with the studies regarding framing, as for example the excellent article by Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston (2005) concerning the second, and hopefully last, Iraqi War in the magazine “Media & Jornalismo”. The recognition of this fact explains the discovery of the power of journalism on the part of the researchers of the agenda-setting theory. In an article published in 1993, Gerald Kosicki emphasized the growing importance of the study of journalism in the communication sciences. Kosicki (1993: 111) wrote: “The studies of journalism work are crucial for the study of public issues because they offer the key for the understanding of how specific issues are framed and offered to the public”. In an article published twenty years after the first article that advanced the agenda-setting theory, the very founder of the theory, Maxwell McCombs, discovered the power of journalism (and journalists), calling for the need for studying the journalistic agenda and the way it is decided. McCombs (1992: 820-821) wrote: “The selection of the

topics for the journalistic agenda and the selection of the framings for the “stories” about these topics are powerful agenda-setting roles and terrible ethical responsibilities”.

Another academic figure, the prominent French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, emphasized the central role of journalism and journalists in contemporary societies on writing that “there is no discourse (scientific analysis, political manifesto, etc.) or action (demonstration, strike, etc.) that, in order to accede to public debate, should not be subjected to this test of journalistic selection, in other words, to that formidable censorship which journalists exercise” (1997: 43). Bourdieu (1997: 61) added: “(...) Nowadays all the fields of cultural production are subjected to the structural coercion of the journalistic field”. Regarding journalists, Bourdieu (1997: 48) wrote that they, and this was increasingly so for female journalists, “(...) practice an absolutely rare form of domination: they hold the power over the means of public expression, of public existence, of recognition and of access to public notoriety”.

Journalism study’s dependence on sociological inquiries and content analysis was left behind in the explosion of studies that took place in the 1960’s and 70’s, which does not mean that there was no further recourse to these methodologies. The explosion of studies was marked by the recourse to a multiplicity of new methodologies (such as, for example, the ethno-methodological approach, discursive analysis, focus groups), by the emergence and growing influence of television, by the interest relating to journalism’s ideological role, as well as by the appearance of new paradigms for understanding the news. According to Tuchman (1991), in the new phase of research, the relation between journalism and the society acquired a central dimension in which the study of journalism questions the activity’s political and social implications. The sociological studies of journalistic companies, all the research involving newsmaking, have made an important contribution toward understanding the construction of the news, for example, the studies by Gans (1979); by Golding & Elliott (1979) by Schlesinger (1977) and by Tuchman (1978) just to mention only a few works.

Going beyond sociology, in her extensive bibliographic review of the study of journalism, “Taking America Seriously”, Barbie Zelizer presented the contributions of various fields of study such as History, Political Science, language studies and cultural studies.

According to Cristina Ponte (2005: 5), the significance of language studies enables “a connection between micro and macro analyses of the work involved in the news” compensating for the traditional lack of sociological interest in news texts. This lens on journalism mobilized contributions from

semiotic analysis, critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis. In this connection, the works of Dijk (1987), Hartley (1982), Fowler (1991) and Fairclough (1995) are reference points.

Political science paid attention to the relations between sources and journalists, for example, Sigal (1973), to the way in which the news media influence the agendas of public policies, for example, Graber, McQuail and Norris (1998), to the relations between journalism and different political systems, such as in the classic study by Siebert, Peterson and Schram (1956) and in a more recent study by Hallin and Mancini (2004), "Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics".

The field of History has contributed to the study of journalism, marked by the attention directed to specific periods and events, as well as to the history of journalistic companies and biographies of outstanding journalistic personalities.

The cultural studies agenda has given special attention to the cultural bases that unite journalists to non-journalists. According to Zelizer, the Cultural Studies agenda involves six points, namely, views of the world of journalism, journalism practices, moments of journalistic crises and dedication, journalism formats, representations of journalism and journalism's audiences.

As Cristina Ponte (2005) emphasizes, "the various lenses offer a given view of the study of journalism, making possible different responses to the questions of the journalism research agenda".

We would like to add another lens: "the political economy of journalism and the media" line of research has shown that the distribution of economic and political resources has an enormous impact on the circulation of ideas in the public area (HERMAN & CHOMSKY, 1988; GOLDING & MURDOCK, 1991; MOSCO, 1996, just to mention only a few studies).

During the 1980's and 90's, the study of journalism explored all these areas in an even more profound way. But novelties in the study of journalism also appeared with 1) the attention given to the reception of information on the part of the publics (GRABER, 1984); 2) a greater interest in the study of sources (ERICSON, BARANEK & CHAN, 1987; MANNING, 2001), correcting what Schlesinger (1990) criticized as being a research directed excessively to the media and what Rogério Santos (2003:36) called "analytic re-centering"; 3) due to the globalization phenomenon, the examination of the changes in the ownership structure of journalistic companies on a worldwide scale (HERMAN & MCCHESENEY, 1997) and of the impact of the reinforcing of the economic pole, to utilize Bourdieu's expression, on the content of information, that is to say, the study of the so-called "tabloidization" of journalism (ESSER, 1999).

The proof that the community of journalism researchers has been accompanying the change is the vitality of the research on cyber-journalism, also marked by the richness of approaches, methodologies, and questions that include the portrait of online journalists. In Portugal, for example, the contribution of João Canavilhas presented at the IV Congress of SOPCOM this year, and in Holland, the article by Mark Deuze and Christina Dimoudi (2002), the implications of the new technologies for journalistic language and for journalists' practices and routines and the consequences that the new media has for the social memory of society (ECHEVERRIA, 1999; MANOVICH, 2001; PAVLIK, 2001).

With the development of the feminist movements in the 1960's and 70's, there was an effort to make visible the (until then) almost invisible presence of women in journalism. In the last fifteen years, the wide-ranging "feminist studies" have propelled studies on the power relationships in the newsrooms, making obvious the existence of a "glass ceiling" which impedes the progress of women's professional careers to the top places in journalistic companies (CHAMBERS, STEINER & FLEMING, 2004). In the same period, there was the development of the study of the journalistic coverage of children in various parts of the world (see, for example, the study by Goonasekera (2001) on the journalistic coverage of children in thirteen Asiatic countries, or the study by Kunkel (1999) on the same topic in the United States, or the study by Ponte (2002) of four European countries, including above all Portugal). Here mention could be made of the work which is being done by ANDI, in Brazil, in the accompaniment of daily newspapers and production of reflection, such as the series *Media and Social Mobilization*.

Based on the analysis of the contributions presented at the recent IV Congress of the SOPCOM, as well as of the issues of the magazines *Journalism and Journalism Studies* published since their creation, in this new media environment we can identify some of the new interrogations in the study of journalism, such as, for example:

- The question of journalists' professional identity. As an example of this concern we can mention the contribution, "Os jornalistas na busca inacabada de identidade" (*Journalists in the unfinished search for identity*) presented by the Portuguese academician Antônio Fidalgo at the last SOPCOM Congress. There is also the article, "Who are these guys? The online challenge to the notion of journalistic professionalism" by the American academician Jane Singer published in the magazine *Journalism* Volume 3, Nº 2 of 2003, and in addition, the article by Mark Deuze, *What is journalism? Professional identity*

and ideology of journalism reconsidered, published in the last issue of *Journalism* magazine;

- The question of the implications of the loss by journalists of their monopoly as gatekeeper in news production. The study, *Unchained reaction: the collapse of media gatekeeping and the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal* by Bruce Williams and Michael X. Delli Carpini, published in the magazine *Journalism*, Volume 1, Nº 1 of 2000, attempts to account for this aspect;
- In the world marked by globalization and by the advent of the Internet which increased the capabilities for interaction of civilian society groups, it is also important to know the implications for journalists in their national areas of the formation of an incipient “global public space”. It is here that the study by Sônia Serra (2000), *The Killing of Brazilian Street Children and the Rise of the International Public Sphere* enters;
- The new phenomenon of blogs has already awakened the interest of academicians in the study of journalism field. As examples, we can mention the contribution, “Blogs: between opinion and participation” by Catarina Rodrigues, from the Universidade da Beira Interior, presented at the IV SOPCOM Congress this year, and the article by Jane Singer (2005), *The political J Blogger*, presented at the *Congress of the North American Association of Journalism and Media* in Toronto in 2004, and published this year in the magazine *Journalism*, Volume 6, Nº 2. Various researchers have already posed the question of knowing whether blogs are a new form of journalism, like Melissa Wall in her article, ‘*Blogs of war*’: weblogs as news” in the magazine *Journalism*, Volume 5, Nº 2, or J.D. Lasica in his article, *Weblogs: a New Source of News*. Among the questions raised, we can ask: what are the blogs’ influences on the journalistic agenda? Related in a more global way to the Internet’s impact, in what ways do journalists utilize the Internet in their professional activity? What is multimedia journalism? What are the basic questions that arise from the trend to convergence in journalism?
- With the growing presence of women in journalism, what are its consequences for the journalistic agenda and news values, that is to say, for the entire journalistic culture, with *Journalism* magazine having devoted a special issue to the “gender” variable in information production (CARTER, 2005). The articles by Maria João Silveirinha, “*Representadas e Representantes: as Mulheres e os Media*” (Represented

and Representatives: Women and the Media). in the magazine *Media & Jornalismo*, Nº 5, and the article by Marjan de Bruin that crosses the “gender” variable with the variables of organizational and professional identity (DE BRUIN, 2000) are especially interesting.

I am terminating this paper by saluting the growing globalization of research in the studies of journalism, in the search for methodologies and the fixation of concepts. I would like to refer here to the article by the Finnish academician Perti Alasuurti, “A *Globalização da Pesquisa Qualitativa*” (The Globalization of Qualitative Research), published in number 6 of the magazine *Media & Jornalismo*, the comparative study of five journalistic communities by Thomas Patterson (1998) and the publication this year of the book *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* by Benson and Neveu (2005).

NOTES

- 1 Based on a presentation made at the III National Encounter of Journalism Researchers during the Congress of the Brazilian Society for Journalism Research held on November 27-29, 2005 in Florianópolis, Brazil

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