

# NEWS AGENCIES, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE STATE:

models of the BRICS countries

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**ABSTRACT** - News agencies have had a privileged role in the development of national and international communication systems, particularly at the periphery of capitalism, being primarily responsible for circulation in the information economy. In countries of Africa, South Asia, Eurasia and Latin America, they constituted prioritised foundations whilst building the institutional structure of the state, designed to boost development. Different models supplied determinants to policies in those countries, such as the choice between public or private ownership, independence or links to global agencies, import or export of information. Taking into account these paradigms and their hybrids, this paper examines the various models of constitution and operation of news agencies that were adopted in emerging countries in the 21st century, nominally the so-called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), particularly in regards to the State, to ownership and business, and to their respective roles in strategies for national development.

**Keywords:** News agencies. Development communication. BRICS.

## AGÊNCIAS DE NOTÍCIAS, ESTADO E DESENVOLVIMENTO: modelos adotados nos países BRICS

**RESUMO** - As agências de notícias tiveram papel de destaque no processo de desenvolvimento dos sistemas nacionais e internacionais de comunicação, particularmente na periferia do capitalismo, por serem primordialmente responsáveis pela circulação na economia da informação. Nos países da África, sul da Ásia, Eurásia e América Latina, elas constituíram alicerces prioritários na construção da estrutura institucional do Estado, pensadas para promover o desenvolvimento. Os diferentes modelos forneceram determinantes para políticas públicas nestes países, tais como a opção por agências estatais ou privadas, independentes ou associadas a multinacionais, de importação ou exportação de informação. Considerando esses paradigmas e seus híbridos, o artigo examina os distintos modelos de constituição e operação de agências de notícias adotados nos países emergentes do século XXI, nominalmente os do chamado grupo BRICS (Brasil, Rússia, Índia, China e África do Sul), no que têm de particular em relação ao Estado, ao modelo de propriedade e de negócio, e seus papéis dentro das respectivas estratégias de desenvolvimento nacional.

Palavras-chave: Agências de notícias. Comunicação para o desenvolvimento. BRICS.

## AGENCIAS DE NOTICIAS, ESTADO Y DESARROLLO: modelos adoptados en los países BRICS

**RESUMEN** - Agencias de noticias han tenido rol destacado en el proceso de desarrollo de los sistemas nacionales e internacionales de comunicación, precisamente en la periferia del capitalismo, por ser primordialmente responsables por la circulación en la economía de la información. En los países de África, sur de Asia, Eurasia y Latinoamérica, ellas constituyeron bases prioritarios en la construcción de la estructura institucional del Estado, pensadas para impulsar el desarrollo. Los diferentes modelos suministraron determinantes para políticas públicas en estos países, tales como la opción por agencias estatales o privadas, independientes o asociadas a multinacionales, de importación o exportación de información. Considerando esos paradigmas y sus híbridos, el artículo examina los distintos modelos de constitución y operación de agencias de noticias adoptados en los países emergentes del siglo XXI, nominalmente los del llamado grupo BRICS (Brasil, Rusia, India, China y Sudáfrica), en qué tienen de particular respeto al Estado, al modelo de propiedad y de negocio, y sus papeles dentro de las respectivas estrategias de desarrollo nacional.

**Palabras clave:** Agencias de noticias. Comunicación para el desarrollo. BRICS.

In the process of developing national and international communication systems, a leading role is usually performed by news agencies, primarily responsible for the circulation in the information economy. Especially at the periphery of capitalism, they have constituted prioritised foundations in building the institutional framework of de-colonised nations, between the 1940s and 1970s, especially in then newly-emancipated countries of Africa, South Asia and the Caribbean, as well as the countries in Latin America and the former socialist countries in Central-Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Among the dozens of countries which gained their independence in the period of de-colonisation (in the context of the Cold War), several of them had the initiative of establishing news agencies soon after founding their respective sovereign states. In general, these companies remained under state ownership, often with law-guaranteed monopoly over both domestic and foreign distribution of international news items.

But why news agencies? What could such wire services offer as so important to the newly-created governments to be among national priorities in countries with so many urgent shortcomings? Why not directing their limited investments to traditional media such as print and broadcasting, which had already been proven efficient in the industrialised nations?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to proceed to a contextualised approach into the reality of the information needs of developing countries.

### **News agencies as strategic tools for development**

News agencies, at first, were privileged by governments of decolonised countries in their national development strategies, at the expense of mass media (newspapers, TV, radio), because of some particular features they offered. Among them, it is possible to highlight the relatively low operational cost (as compared to the consumption of paper by the print media or broadcasting, even when wire transmission is considered), the centralisation of processes (easing control over the information sent) and their multiplying potential (by distributing information both domestically and abroad).

For the poorest countries, the wire services offered instantaneity and enabled circulation and de-territorialisation (being themselves organised into networks). On the other hand, although this is nowadays regarded in a more critical fashion, the fact of being subject to direct state control was an advantage of agencies in the eyes of the newly-established regimes, many of which were authoritarian or militarised, due to the violent circumstances of the struggle for independence.

Thus, in the age before Internet, up until the 1980s, establishing a news agency had strategic and economic implications, such as saving costs in public spending and increasing the power of reach of the information that was intended to be spread. Then, not only were news agencies to become mouthpiece and showcase of their respective governments before the media (and, indirectly, the public) around the world, but also domestically, they would exert control over the flow of foreign information to the local press.

Governments may sometimes prefer to use broadcast media as national news outlets, and this may mean that the broadcast media will act as primary news sources for the world agencies. The usefulness of broadcast media in practice is often low by comparison: a national agency provides an immediate written record of an announcement or an event, whereas a broadcast station has to be monitored by the world agency, which must arrange to tape key bulletins. This consumes extra manpower, although both agency and broadcasts may sometimes be monitored. Radio may be more important than other media for a government which is communicating directly to its people, many of whom may not be reached by any alternative media-form; but in communicating with its own media or with those of other countries, a government will

often find a national news agency to be a more sophisticated policy-communicating instrument. (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, p. 205)

By feeding the media, domestic and foreign, public or corporate, news agencies have the potential of multiplying content for spreading information and discourses that may respond to the planning for national development. As distributors of mass information to the media, these companies always had a quantitatively insurmountable power to disseminate information and opinions (there including propaganda), all elements of strategic importance to states in an incipient phase of nation-building. The permanent distribution of news services by state-owned agencies, as well, was the antithesis of the free-market in the field of communication, materialised in the ‘free-flow doctrine’, especially when they had a monopoly on this type of service to the press (something usual in several developing countries, in the context of Cold War). They were seen as analogous to strategic industries which were also nationalised – such as oil, electricity, banking, airlines – to ensure economic activity in favour of their own national interests and not imperial ones.

National agencies, especially in the Third World, are very often government agencies run by or heavily subsidized from ministries of culture or information, perhaps with management participation from client media. National agencies are very often virtual monopolies in the supply either of domestic and foreign news to their retail clients, either because governments have decreed that they should be monopolies, or because monopoly is the inevitable outcome of market conditions. (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, p. 192)

In the vision of the ideologues of autonomous development, news agencies are political tools for construction of the symbolic space through the circulation of information. This power was quickly noticed by the new countries and used to meet specific demands created during the process of de-colonisation. With independence, the former colonies gained responsibility for their defence, investments and maintenance costs, formerly held by their colonial powers. Achieving sovereignty in these areas was a strategic and permanent goal for the new governments. So, they suddenly had to look after replacements in the broad universe of world economy, obviously by starting in disadvantage. Therefore, in order to make themselves present toward the international public sphere and the imaginary of civil society – mainly among certain elites as “opinion leaders” – distributing news was a quick and relatively inexpensive tactic in this strategy.

The development strategy pursued by those countries ascribed to agencies the function of publicising their achievements and demands,

to defend their stances, to record their actions and, perhaps in a lesser level, to inform the public and stakeholders about global geopolitical events and the daily process of nation-building. Ultimately, it was about making themselves present in a world where the communication channels were already extremely concentrated and controlled by corporations based within the great powers, back in the day when there was no Internet. In such a context, their news agencies got the role (both noble and questionable at the same time) to be heralds of the peoples who were struggling for national emancipation – not just a political one, but also economical, technological, scientific and cultural.

At the same time, domestically, another factor which prompted the creation of such companies was the government demands at various levels (from the national top to local branches) for reliable and quick information to facilitate decision-making, faster than waiting for publishing by the press or broadcasting. “Governments must also be well informed to govern well. They need to be well informed about international news, and about their own country.” (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, p. 203) Therefore, reminds the author, much of the activity of global news agencies is associated with the “transmission of news about governments, and governments are among their most avid consumers” (ibidem).

Schramm (1965), a representative of the diffusionist wing within communication for development, of a classical liberal frame, says that “the national development process” remarkably illustrates how “free” information has social effects for liberating a society “from ignorance and unilateral manipulation.” According to him, “the *amount of information available* and the *wideness of its distribution* is thus a key factor in the speed and smoothness of development” (op.cit, 12) – that is, so that development happened not only in the fastest way, but also the most peaceful and less conflicting one. At the same time, since developing countries have a disadvantageous status regarding possibilities for distributing information (LERNER & SCHRAMM, 1967, pp. 37-38), the importance of intermediaries for national-local communication is increased in the Global South (SCHRAMM, 1965, p. 141-142). Hence the strategic importance of news agencies as ideal tools to distribute information under precarious infrastructural conditions in de-colonized countries.

Our point is that communication is always at the very centre of existence, for any society, developing or not. Wherever dangers or opportunities need to be reported, decisions need to be made, new knowledge needs to be distributed, or change is imminent - there information flows. These needs are especially urgent and widespread in developing countries, where the tasks assigned

to the communication media are vastly greater than before the time of development. If the flow of information and the channels of communication are not adequate to these tasks, they must be built up to the level of need. (SCHRAMM, 1965, p. 15)

With this goal established, news agencies were perceived by the State as efficient tools to perform such “adequate flow of information,” taking into account some needs as mass diffusion of content, standardized and codified in different languages (or in one single language accessible to elements in several groups, usually that of their respective tribal or local elites).

Thus, agencies were born by performing both the role of *information exporters* (spreading news abroad about their country), and *importers* (domestic distribution of foreign news), and only secondarily cared about circulating national news to the media of their own country. Back in the late 70s, the international content represented at least half of the total production of the vast majority of national agencies, both large and small (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, p. 193). Particularly in developing nations, thanks to the strategy of the lawful monopolies on subscribing and redistributing wires of foreign agencies, national news agencies kept the primary filter on what was happening and being said in the world – especially when concerning their own country. A national agency was the hand of the state closing and opening the gates of news as true gatekeepers, at a time when there were no available news aggregators nor online search tools for mapping, searching, or finding other sources of information.

In 1971 there were national agencies in 90 sovereign countries, a 76% increase on 1950 when there were national agencies in 51 countries. There were still 40 countries without national agencies, and of these 25 had populations greater than a million. In 56% of all cases the national agencies were state-controlled; most of the others were corporate newspaper endeavours or public corporations established under state auspices. (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, p. 193)

In spite of that, it is worthy to make clear that, by “national agency”, one does not necessarily denote a state-owned company, nor that it provides news services exclusively to the domestic press, but an agency that has as the majority of the media in one country as its commercial basis and, at the same time, that is a reference abroad as a reliable source for continuous flow of information about its own country. The concept is similar to that of a national carrier airline, be it private or public in ownership. DPA, private, is the national agency for Germany, as much as Télam, state-owned, is the national agency of Argentina.

## Paradigms of international communication

Different paradigmatic models established by each country for their national news agencies are mainly related to their structural position in the world-system of communication – core, peripheral, semi-peripheral, in a Wallersteinian scheme – which ultimately refers to their role in the international division of labour. Since at least the 1970s, critical studies on international communication and global media have found that imbalances in international flows of information largely matched those in the global trade of tangible goods, which in turn extended hereto some concepts such as structural underdevelopment and dependence (THUSSU, 2006, pp. 46-51).

A sequence of theoretical schools came and fought for hegemony in the field of international communication studies (now more often ‘global media studies’) throughout the Cold War, not only to explain such imbalances but also proposing ways to correct them. The synthesis of such struggle, according to Mattelart (1994), varied around two types of determinisms: that of the *technology* and that of *modernization*, both presented as sufficient to boost development on their own.

The conception of development that drove communication initiatives of the rich countries toward societies in de-colonisation (or from multilateral organisations to these), as pointed out by Mattelart (1994, pp. 185-186), was the paradigm of modernization. It regarded the reproduction of techniques, processes and values of Northern (industrialised) nations by those in the Global South (developing or underdeveloped countries) as something ‘natural’, while disregarding the particularities and priorities of the latter.

Futures receptacles of a progress introduced from outside, these societies, labeled ‘traditional’, were reduced to waiting for the revelation of the *dei ex machina* charged with spreading the good cosmopolitan word. There was a mirror-and-screen effect: development-modernization theory incited societies on the one hand to see the image of their future in the ideal model embodied by modern societies of urban and industrial North, and on the other to consider their own cultural heritage as a handicap on the road to social and economic evolution. (MATTELART, 1994, pp. 201-202 [1994, p. 172])

Among the theories of modernization, the *diffusionist* approach clearly argued that the process of development would spread from the core to the periphery, then demanding not just an infrastructure to convey it but also superstructural values, ideologies, relations of production and power. In the words of its main representative, Everett Rogers (apud MATTELART, 1994, p. 159), “development is a type of social change in which new ideas

*are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per-capita incomes and levels of living through more modern production methods and improved social organization*" (my emphasis)<sup>1</sup>.

Such ideas and values, as Dantas highlighted (2002, pp. 129-131), were also conveyed by the news agencies, since they conducted a continuous, unidirectional North-South flow – through regular coverage of the political, economic and cultural processes of the First World.

News agencies provided and keep providing, to those elites, a single framework of the world with which everyone must identify, if they want to look 'developed'. Even the most critical reformers in local elites eventually resigned to reduce their political and historical options to the boundaries previously designed by the hegemonic colonial culture. (DANTAS, 2002, pp. 130-131)

This was often reinforced by their own national agencies, in the agreements they signed with global agencies (or "world news agencies", a nomenclature used by Boyd-Barrett in his seminal work of 1980). Given that the government apparatus in these countries had neither equipment nor qualified human resources in a sufficient scale to operate their news agencies to meet the required output volume to feed the national press and foreign media, in many cases these same apparatuses set "partnerships" with news agencies from developed countries (including the Soviet Union, in the context of the Cold War) to promote "cooperation" and exchange dispatches in a relationship that Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (2002) classified as being as much dependent as that of other economic sectors.

The world agencies do not control the distribution of their own product to all their 'retail' newspapers, broadcast and other clients. An important intermediary in many countries and for at least some clients in most countries is the national news agency, and nowhere is this more the case than in the developing countries of the Third World. Where dependence on the global agencies is already great, therefore, the scope for news selection by the individual retail media organization is further reduced by the intervention of a third party. (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, p. 192)

Such a relation of dependency and asymmetry was denounced by studies in international communication conducted in developing countries, particularly in Latin America and India. Global agencies were the "main target" of these studies (MATTELART, 1994, pp. 212-213), which aimed to quantify the concentration of sources for the information circulated in those countries, whilst economic research identified the concentration of capital in the Third World in the hands of multinational companies. By this analogy, there emerged the theory of *media imperialism*, that Boyd-Barrett (apud MATTELART, 1994, p. 209) defined as "the process whereby

ownership, structure, distribution, or content of the media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressure from the media interests of any other country or countries". The very idea of media imperialism was largely due to the dominance exerted by global news agencies and the "unequal partnerships" that these established with national agencies of developing countries.

The concept 'imperialism' denotes an imbalance of power relationship between nations. The first agencies emerged among the great imperial powers of the nineteenth century and their relationship with agencies of other countries was and is to some extent still a reflection of the imperial balance of power. It should be understood, however, that this imbalance was not often completely unidirectional. The agencies did not everywhere impose their own news-gathering and distribution machinery. Rather, they established relations with local independent agencies. The essential characteristic of this relationship was the principle of news-exchange it embodied, although the exchange was rarely equal. (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, p. 195)

In other words, if a (state-owned) national news agency of a given African country held a monopoly on the provision of information to local newspapers but did not have either financial nor technical resources to ensure its customers a wide scale supply (mainly of foreign news), it would form a "partnership" with Reuters or AFP to provide their content to local clients; at the same time, it would be contractually obliged to grant exclusivity of its own content to the "partner" global agency for distribution abroad. Thus, the global agency (usually headquartered in the respective former colonial power) would be the sole source of foreign information to the press in that nation, as well as the only channel for international delivery of news from that same country out to the world – somehow perpetuating a colonial bond. Like Boyd-Barrett (1980, p. 193) put it, "through the national agencies, the world news services are distributed to media which otherwise would not or might not receive them."

This relationship allows not only information to flow, but also capital, in a centripetal stream – from the periphery to the centre, in the world-system of communications –, since the national agencies paid (and many still pay) a sum as "brokerage" to global agencies (and not otherwise, as one might expect for the provision of exclusive news) due to the customers obtained through the delivery of service (BOYD-BARRETT & RANTANEN, 2002). Thus, national agencies begun to provide "a good but unknown proportion of the world agencies' total overseas revenue" (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, p. 193).

The national agency is in a sense a convenient revenue device, whereby revenue is assured to the global agencies from media which individually might be unable to afford global agency

services, but which collectively, or through government help, can afford them. For that reason many national agencies have emerged in close relationship with one or more world agencies. (BOYD-BARRETT, 1980, p. 193)

Boyd-Barrett (1980, p. 194) remarked that one of the structural causes related to the imbalance in the international flow of information (including the “disrupted image” effect of poor countries in the news of the rich countries) was a severe lack of resources of the national agencies from developing countries, and that “national agencies are generally important news sources for the world agencies.” However, he noted, this failure reflected “the basic problem, which is the the non-existence or impoverishment of local markets in most Third World regions.”

The arrival of the news agencies to what would become the Third World was not devoid of serious political and cultural consequences. Their wires determined which events were relevant in the day-to-day of each nation and how they should be reported. Obviously, they did so according to criteria and priorities, often ethnocentric or even racist, of their reporters and editors. These agencies have internationalised a type of journalism, then rising in the United States and Europe, which focus on the instantaneous, the extraordinary, the sensational, the superficial, the bizarre, ignoring correlations of facts, social processes, cultural and historical differences between peoples. (DANTAS, 2002, p. 130)

This situation was a sample of the big picture of underdevelopment, as described in diagnoses by structuralist economists such as Raúl Prebisch and Celso Furtado. In a quest for overcoming this hurdle, following the precepts of *developmentalism*, several countries opted for a pure statism in their communication strategies, especially when it came to news agencies.

Governments soon became involved in agency newsgathering and dissemination. For this, they used a variety of means or combinations of methods that included direct ownership, control, tariff concessions for use of state communication facilities, intervention in news content, and overt or covert subsidy or direct financing of news agencies. (SHRIVASTAVA, 2007, p. 7)

Opting for the state, however, was not a novelty and did not begin in the Third World: it was first done by the imperial powers themselves in the 19th century. Thussu (2006, p. 9) reminds that the first three European news agencies – Havas, Wolff, and Reuters – were subsidized by their respective governments, while Shrivastava (2007, p. 153) says that Reuters, specifically, was “a national and imperial institution.” The State took part in creating the global communications network also with subsidies, not just to the agencies properly, but

mainly to telegraph companies, building the hardware infrastructure to be used by the information transmitters.

Building such infrastructure was an obvious imperial interest (THUSSU, 2006), drawing the flow of information along the same lines of international trade in early capitalism. According to Dantas (2002, p. 129), telegraph wires, both terrestrial and submarine, as well as radio and later technologies, followed “the routes of ships and railroads that conveyed the wealth of the colonies and dependent countries to Europe and the United States.” The author explains that “in the peripheral countries, as a result of their own technological and industrial submissive condition, (...) networks have been established and placed under the control of foreign companies, specialized in international communications” (idem).

Transport and information infrastructures of the peripheral countries served basically to the international insertion of their economies, source of cheap raw materials and manpower to core countries. Secondly, they provided telegraph or telephone networks to wealthy classes. In these countries, there were never talks, at the time, about universalising communications. (DANTAS, 2002, p. 129)

It would not be a surprise, therefore, that the global distribution of these flows, even decades later, reflected the international division of labour, with its asymmetries, its imbalances, and its centripetal structure both to material goods and to information as a commodity.

Historically, the first movement to try to reverse those figures has been the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), formed in 1961 by the first nations to be decolonised in Asia and Africa (India, Indonesia, Ghana), plus Egypt and Yugoslavia. Not only did they use international fora (where the principle of “one nation, one vote” was hallowed, equalling them to military and economic powers) to expose and challenge the international division of labour, but they also questioned the communication order derived from it. In fact, in the 1970s, at the NAM conferences in Algiers (1973) and Colombo (1976), the Non-Aligned countries blinded the appeal for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) to a parallel New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).

In this process, the institutional tool chosen by the Non-Aligned, as representatives of the Third World (developing countries, especially newly-decolonised, presently referred as the Global South) to bring about systemic change was the same that had been used by the colonial powers in the 19th century: the state.

It was up to the state, in the developmental strategy adopted by the poor countries, the task of overcoming problems in their national infrastructure to meet their own demands of development, no longer those of their colonisers. The state was also entrusted with the mission of organizing the new information systems (the national news agencies) to operate in accordance to endogenous interests of the new countries.

Once the national units of this system were formed, the Non-Aligned Movement sought to articulate a broader network: the Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool (NANAP), that, at least between 1975 and 1980, constituted a counter-hegemonic scheme for the international news flow among developing countries (for that matter, consult AGUIAR, 2010). The initiative of the Non-Aligned pool, formed exclusively by state-owned agencies, responded to the demand for “decolonising information” and the configuration of the NWICO (MATTELART, 1994, p. 212), until it was demobilised by various internal and external factors in 1980 (and later converted into the Non-Aligned News Network in 2005).

The model of news agencies belonging to the state, not private ones, clearly seemed to be the best – if not the only – to be adopted in developing countries, even by those with market-friendly and strongly anti-socialist regimes, because public information was treated as a strategic area. Just as sovereign development was sought, they also strived for “information sovereignty”, which would be effective in the operational and productive autonomy of national agencies relatively to the global agencies. As much as natural resources or civil aviation, the continuous flow of information carried by news agencies was seen as decisive to national sovereignty, a politically sensitive business, and therefore as naturally subject to state monopoly.

The intention, however, hardly ever came true. Developing nations, even bestowed with political and administrative autonomy, remained hostages to the transnational capital. Thus, they retained a relationship of dependency to their former colonial powers (MATTELART, 1994, p. 202), and their economies kept directing their infrastructure and logistics to the needs of their major clients – once more, the central powers of capital – frustrating the intended escape from the international division of labour as a less likely prospective. Just like the continuity of exports of raw materials kept railways, ports and roads heading the same ways as in the imperialist times, so did the information flows remain in North-South and South-North courses, and almost nothing on the South-South course.

It is never enough to remind that all the historical period of

Cold War, de-colonisation and foundation of national news agencies in these countries happened between the 1940s and 1980s, before the revolution in information and communication technologies (ICTs), but the digitization and convergence expanded the role of news agencies, rather than contracting it (Paterson, 2005). After the end of the Cold War, like all industries of the economy in developing countries (especially the strategic ones), the state-led systems of public information suffered a strong setback with the rise of neoliberalism as an hegemonic ideology of governance. Back then, international conferences and seminars abandoned the issue of the imbalance of news flows and turned eyes to the matter of editorial independence in the context of post-statism, as Shrivastava documented (2007, p. 164-167). In 1996, a meeting of the International Press Institute in Warsaw issued a statement demanding editorial independence for state-owned news agencies and restored the doctrine of “free-flow.” An identical statement was made the following year at the European Seminar on Independent and Pluralistic Media in Sofia, Bulgaria. In 2001, a workshop by UNESCO, “News Agencies in the Internet Age”, in Amman (with Boyd-Barrett as one of the leading consultants), drew attention to the frailty of the sector with the waves of privatization and deregulation.

At the same time, the ICT revolution broke out, triggering the processes of digitization, networking and convergence, in parallel with the cultural-political-economic phenomenon of globalization, which broadened the field of action of the news agencies. Today, by cutting costs with the digitization of their operations and reaching a much wider array of clients by networking the distribution of their content, agencies have much more presence than at the time of their creation.

But the phenomena of digitization and convergence, in parallel with the neoliberal wave (globalising, privatising and deregulating) far from relieving the North-South dependence and concentration, have deepened it in some scenarios, while they expanded influence and tightened ties with transnational capital in others. Among the news agencies from peripheral countries, a few were privatized (particularly in former socialist states), others deepened their dependence on global agencies by becoming merely echoers of foreign content, and eventually some went extinct due to lack of capacity or interest of states to keep them (especially in Africa).

Therefore, we can design four models derived from the paradigms adopted in different countries regarding their respective industries of news agencies, according to Table I.

<b>Table I. Models of national news agencies in developing countries</b>	
<b>model</b>	<b>features</b>
Private Industrialised (liberal)	private national news agency, with market goals international or transnationally information export and import (from/to North and South) nominal free competition ( <i>de facto</i> monopoly/oligopoly)
Private Underdeveloped (colonial)	private national agency dependency on a global agency (of former colonial power) reproduction of transnational models free competition, but weak market
Statist	state-owned national agency information export and import (from/to North) monopoly on content delivery from global agency to domestic media
Hybrid (modernizing)	private or state-owned national agency (or formerly, privatised) information export and import (from/to North) reproduction of transnational models and market control
Source: own work	

The neoliberal trend remained up until the second half of the 2000s, when the international financial crisis and the success of *neodevelopmentalist* experiences based on strengthening the state (mainly in Latin America but also in parts of Asia and Africa) have checkmated the privatised and deregulated model. Although they could not have foreseen this turnaround, governments in poor countries that overcame the neoliberal vague realized it and are now using news agencies to boost their new development strategies. For example, within the context of the “Turn to the Left” in Latin America, in the early 21st century, some interesting experiences came forth with news agencies newly-founded or reformed by the progressive governments elected in the region, such as in Venezuela (AVN, re-founded in 2005), Ecuador (Andes, founded in 2009<sup>2</sup>) and Paraguay (IP Paraguay, in 2009<sup>3</sup>).

In a second wave, some middle-income countries whose governments had resisted or reversed the neoliberal trend in time (whether democratic or authoritarian, with or without transfer of power) managed to develop greater immunity to the crisis and took off as “emerging powers” in the global hegemonic scenario. Among them, frequently featured are Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Mexico, and Turkey. Of these, the first five have formed a core institutional cooperation group called BRICS. Although not exactly investing in new experiences as the aforementioned agencies in Latin America, the BRICS countries have different models of owning and operating their own national news agencies, which shall be described henceforth.

## **Models enforced in BRICS countries**

The countries that make up the BRICS, grouped by their semi-peripheral position and by their economies' growth potential, have all at least one national news agency (Russia and India having more than one). Politically, the BRICS have inherited a role that was exerted by the Non-Aligned Movement (which still exists, although lost much of its lobbying power) to defend interests of the peripheral countries before multilateral organizations and Northern powers. Respectively, it could be expected, their national news agencies would be able to pose themselves within the international information order in the same fashion as the non-aligned agencies did back in the era of the Cold War. This, nevertheless, has not been achieved owing to the different models of news agencies adopted in each of those five countries.

### **Russia**

In Russia, the field of the news agencies suffered a series of mutations that followed state features and institutional breakdowns with a long period of dominance by TASS, since the Soviet times. Its origin, yet in the tsarist era, was in the Trade Telegraph Agency (Torgovo-Telegrafnoye Agentstvo in Russian), an office of the Ministry of Finance of the Russian Empire. In the beginning, it was specifically dedicated to commercial and financial information (Rantanen, 1985). With the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, the government changed the news service range to include coverage of the conflict. While maintaining equipment and facilities, the organization was renamed the Saint Petersburg Telegraph Agency (Sankt-Peterburgskoye Telegrafnoye Agentstvo). When the name of the Russian then-capital was changed to Petrograd in 1914, the agency followed suit. This lasted until the Bolshevik Revolution.

In December 1917, the agency was renamed once again as CIA (TsIA), subjected to the Council of People's Commissars (executive cabinet of the Bolshevik government). By September 7, 1918, the TsIA was merged to the Press Department of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist government to form ROSTA - Russian Telegraph Agency (Rossiyskoye Telegrafnoye Agentstvo), a new agency specifically for Soviet Russia. Other republics also set up their own agencies as they emancipated from the Russian Empire and became Soviet republics (the USSR would be officially founded in 1922), such as Ukrainian RATAU, Belarusian BELTA and Armenian ArmenPress.

In 1925, under Stalin, ROSTA and the other agencies were “federated” into a kind of supra-agency that would coordinate the work of all them: TASS (Telegrafnoye Agentstvo Sovietskogo Soyuz or Telegraphic Agency of the Soviet Union). The main function of the supra-agency was to ensure centralized control over the circulation of international information (import and export) without “offending” the respective monopolies set by other nationalities and, formally, without extinguishing the ROSTA (KRUGLAK, 1975, pp. 8-9). Rantanen (2007, p. 151), which studied the Russian case and the former Soviet Union specifically, explains that, in the era of monopolistic TASS, “the Soviet model was a satellite model with the headquarters in Moscow and branch offices in the capitals of different Soviet republics.”

Apart from the fact that this was a very centralised model, where the ultimate power lay in Moscow, there is clear evidence of early forms of transnational communication in a socialist context. This was a Soviet network society, for all its faults, where the national territory and the network society corresponded (...), the influence of which cannot be underestimated. It was still based on the idea of the national, as was the Soviet Union itself, which acknowledged to a certain extent national differences and the sovereignty of Soviet republics, although the overall political system was highly centralised and vertical. (RANTANEN 2007, p. 151)

Converted into a state committee of the Soviet government in 1971, TASS was rebranded as ITAR-TASS, barely a month after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, but kept as state agency subject to the executive branch. Although it was not privatised, TASS had to compete with other news agencies, not only in the domestic market but also abroad, for the status of “reference agency” about Russia before the foreign media. The most important among these are Sputnik (also state-owned, placed under the umbrella of Russia Today and heir to former RIA Novosti, founded in 1961 and disbanded in 2013), and Interfaks (or Interfax, in Roman spelling), a private company. Yet, TASS remained as market leader: in the beginning of 2000, Shrivastava (2007: 210) noted that TASS had 130 offices abroad and in Russia, and cooperation agreements with 80 foreign agencies. In 2015, the company claimed to have 5,000 subscribers worldwide, amongst 20% were media outlets, while employing a staff of 1,500 and sending wires in Russian, English, Spanish, French, German, and Arabic. The number of offices was up to 138 (being 70 in Russia and 68 abroad)<sup>4</sup>. It was renamed ITAR-TASS in 1991 but reverted to the original acronym in 2014.

## China

China's model firstly mirrored that of Soviet agencies, but even more centralized. Chinese national news agency Xinhua ("New China") has origins in Red China News Press, founded by the Chinese Communist Party in 1931, during the Civil War against the Kuomintang. According to Rantanen (2007, pp. 151-153), "Xinhua later adopted the TASS model for organising its operations, but gave its headquarters in Beijing centralised control over its branches." Although it is formally subordinate to the State Council (government), Xinhua is placed under the 'oversight' of the Communist Party (Elliott, 2000: 343). The state character of the model remained unchanged even after the reforms towards the "market socialism" introduced with Deng Xiaoping's *Gaige kaifang*, the "Chinese perestroika", from 1979 on.

Xinhua also has agreements with global agencies (XIN, 2006, p. 119) and runs newspapers in English for foreigners, as well as in Mandarin, for domestic readership and the diaspora. The close link between the agency and the Party is defined by Elliott as the "eyes" and by Xin as "throat and tongue", as Xinhua sees (imports information) and speaks (exports it) on behalf of the interests of the ruling bureaucracy. The function of control is foreseen even in the charter of the company, whose newsroom is split in four desks: national news for domestic output, foreign news for domestic output, national news for international output and foreign news for international output (ELLIOTT, 2000, p. 345).

Moreover, Xinhua stands out from other news agencies for playing the role of market regulator *de facto*, by holding legal monopoly over the syndication of economic and financial news (a major source of income for big agencies), both from global agencies to the Chinese press and vice-versa. Foreign media which want get it must request authorization by Xinhua itself. This double role as supplier and regulator has led to a conflict of interest between Chinese and foreign competitors like Reuters, AP and Dow Jones, as they tried to enter the Chinese market (XIN, 2006, p. 119-120).

## South Africa

In South Africa, the colonial model prevailed until recently. The national news agency was SAPA (South African Press Association), formed as a cooperative of private newspapers (SHRIVASTAVA, 2007, p.

235) in the same fashion as the U.S.-based Associated Press. However, its operational pattern (and global news provider) was that of Reuters. SAPA was created in 1910, the year of South African independence, as a local branch of the British agency. It was originally called Reuter South African Press Agency (TOPUZ, 1962, p. 48). In 1938, the branch was converted into an autonomous agency, constituted as a cooperative between subscribers, but retained exclusivity of importing and exporting news to Reuters. A small domestic cultural conflict emerged from there: newspapers that supported the regime of racial segregation (Apartheid), mainly Boer (or Afrikaner) complained about the editorial line of SAPA, deemed as “too British”, which had the UK press as a reference, which on the other hand pleased the English-language newspapers in South Africa. With strong pressure from the National Party (Boer-dominated and pro-Apartheid), the close association with Reuters was gradually removed since 1966 to be fully cut in 1995, when the country had already ended segregation policies. However, in March 2015, SAPA ceased to exist, as the media companies which owned its associates decided to invest in their own news services – such as News24, owned by Naspers, a giant in the South African market, and ANA (African News Agency), founded in February 2015 by Sekunjalo Independent Media<sup>5</sup>.

### India

India has a model which was born in a similar way, and very early, but took a different course. The first agency established in the country was also a subsidiary of Reuters, even in 1905, but it developed in relative autonomy. The British agency already worked in India, then a British colony, since 1866, and four years later a submarine telegraph cable connected Mumbai to London. In 1910, same birth year of SAPA, Keshab Chandra Roy founded the Press Bureau, which soon defaulted. Asked by representatives from Reuters, Roy was convinced to create a new agency, named the Associated Press of India (API), and obtained an exclusive mandate to syndicate the services of the British agency and then consolidated it as the main Indian news agency<sup>6</sup>.

India's independence in 1947 turned this dependency an inconvenient model, as the main distributor of news of the newly-born country was in practice subject to the agency of the same imperial power from which India had been freed. The solution was found in creating the Press Trust of India (PTI), also formed as a cooperative of Indian newspapers just 12 days after the proclamation of independence.

The evolution of the concept of a national news agency was the direct consequence of the spirit of independence that swept the country since the days of the Quit India Movement. The desire to shake off the imperial domination in the field of news supply was at the heart of this evolving thought. (GOENKA apud SHRIVASTAVA, 2007, p. 45)

According to Shrivastava (2007, p. 45) the creation of PTI was both a business and political decision, to which forefathers of Indian independence like Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel intermediated negotiations with owners of newspapers, journalists and representatives of Reuters. The London-based agency tried to keep a monopoly in the country even after the British decision to grant independence, and was pressured to give it up both by the Labour government of Clement Attlee, by the first Indian government (with a personal intervention by Patel), but mainly by the native press, which gathered in a consortium to form PTI. The new agency inherited the syndication contracts of API with the British agency (later cut off in 1952) and became the first national agency of independent India, to this day. According to the same author (*idem*, pp. 154-155), it was by order of Nehru himself that the distribution of foreign news to the Indian press was banned to foreign agencies (nominally Reuters) and left to domestic ones (then mostly PTI), setting the pattern for the Third World model of redistribution of content from global agencies through “partnership” arrangements with national agencies.

Today, the scenario is diversified, with thematic and regional agencies operating in conjunction with PTI, many of them founded in the years following independence: Hindustan Samachar (1948), Eastern India News Agency (1949), Near & Far East News (1952), Indian Press Agency (1957), Indian News and Features Alliance (1959) and United News of India (1961).

## **Brazil**

Finally, Brazil is an outlier among emerging countries. As said already, while major powers and developed countries operate such international companies as suppliers of foreign information for the domestic media market, developing nations commonly use them as a means of publicity to their governments, their economies and their cultures abroad. However, in the Brazilian reality, there is not, nor ever was there, any news agency to perform either input role (providing their own national media with foreign coverage) neither the output role (providing national news, preferentially in English, to the media abroad).

The country lacks both types of news agency: be it one with foreign correspondents to be a provider of international news to the Brazilian press, or a nationwide agency (no matter if public or private) that caters them to foreign news media. The Agência Brasil (ABr), a state-owned news agency, does not operate with a view to foreign markets. Although founded in 1990, and incorporated into the public media company EBC since 2008, it established an English-language service only in 2013, as well as in Spanish, with less than 10 news items a day, handpicked from the general, Portuguese-language output. Like all other private agencies, ABr just feeds the Brazilian media with equally domestic content.

This situation contradicts the recent political and diplomatic efforts to position the country as a rising economy and emerging power in the international arena. The only international partnerships it has are a long-term agreement with Telam, Argentina's national agency, albeit with a tiny usage, as well as re-running news from Lusa, the Portuguese news agency, written in the language that is common to both countries. ABr also holds membership in the ULAN (Latin American Union of News Agencies), since 2011, and the ALP (Alliance of Portuguese-language News Agencies), since 1996.

Brazilian news agencies with national syndication have always been traditionally associated to press conglomerates and generally operate as commercial departments for selling their daily content to smaller-sized clients in regional media outlets. The main ones are Agência Estado, Folhapress, and Agência O Globo, all of which work as "brokers" of news and pictures already produced by their staff (therefore not original) of the flagship papers of each company. Earlier, the same model was operated by Agência Meridional (of the Diários Associados group) and the Agência JB of *Jornal do Brasil*, a former major daily which ceased to print in 2010 (MARQUES, 2005).

Brazilian agencies that are not subsidiaries of media conglomerates are linked to local power groups, like the Church, having regional and local media organisations as customers (and thus as economic support). Thus, they mirror in a smaller scale the same concentrations and asymmetries of the global flows, historically seen between the North-core and the South-periphery: agencies from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, largest cities in Brazil, feed and set the agenda for newspapers in the other regions.

As a result, in Brazil, neither the state-owned nor private news agencies are engaged in the international news flow, merely national and interregional flows, without competing with foreign agencies to

provide their own customers nor sharing content with their fellow agencies in the BRICS or other peripheral and semi-peripheral countries, making the country an exception in the global arena of communication.

### Overview

The outcome of this comparison evidences that news agencies in peripheral countries have a much wider role than simply production in the information economy, that sets the agenda for the profitable business of global agencies. In those countries, they are strategic tools in the pursuit of development, part of national efforts to correct structural imbalances caused by decades or centuries of colonial/imperial domination.

The models for this industry differ in each one, whose diversity is remarkably expressed among BRICS (Table II). Russia is closer to that of developed countries, which is not surprising in a former superpower that experienced accelerated industrialization in the 20th century. In China, on the other hand, the statist model remains strong, despite the doctrine of “market socialism” in other sectors of the economy. South Africa retained the colonial model until recently, and as of 2015 it is too early to predict where it will head to. And India, at last, follows a hybrid model among others, consistent with the paradigm of modernization. It is only Brazil that finds no parallel for the current model in its news agencies business.

	<b>Russia</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>South Africa</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Brazil</b>
Model	liberal	statist	colonial	modernizing	unique
national agency	TASS	Xinhua	SAPA (1938-2015)	PTI	Agência Brasil and private ones
agency ownership	state-owned	state-owned	cooperative	cooperative	state-owned and conglomerates
relationship with global agencies	reference	dependency	dependency and syndication	model reproduction	no relationship
function in news flow	import and export	import and export	import and export	import and export	domestic
competition	free ( <i>de facto</i> monopoly)	formal monopoly	free	free	free

Source: own work

But in all of them, except for Brazil, there is a strong presence of the state in determining the model followed, as well as in the establishment, operation and financing of their respective national news agencies, reinforcing the developmentalist argument that the state is and probably will continue to be the main driving force for overcoming underdevelopment.

\*This paper was translated by the author

## NOTES

- 1 Pages ahead, Mattelart (1994; 192) ponders that Rogers himself changed radically his idea 14 years later, when he began to propose a communication model for development based on horizontal projects, taken from experiences of the underdeveloped societies themselves and abandoning the quantitative parameters. This second vision, promoting community-based “micromedia” instead of centralized and vertical news agencies, is the one prevailing at later initiatives by the UN, like the IPDC (International Program for the Development of Communication), established in 1980.
- 2 Ramos, I. Orlando, R. “Activismo estatal y bloqueo mediático: contiendas por la regulación de la comunicación en el Ecuador”. **Corriente Alterna**. vol.I, # 2 (June 2012). Quito: Terranueva, 2012.
- 3 La NACIÓN. **IPParaguay celebró cuarto aniversario**. Jan. 19, 2013. [<http://www.lanacion.com.py/articulo/109843-ipparaguay-celebro-cuarto-aniversario.html>, retrieved in May 2013]
- 4 <http://tass.ru/en/today>, retrieved in Sept.2015
- 5 IOL Beta, 3/2/2015, <http://beta.iol.co.za/news/africa/african-news-agency-begins-operations-1825260> – retrieved in Sept.2015
- 6 Other agencies coexisted with API in different periods, such as Free Press from 1927 to 1947 and United Press of India from 1933 to 1949, but both succumbed before uneven competition due to the benefits granted by Reuters to API (for a detailed history, refer to Shrivastava, 2008; 37-71).

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