

“THE SAME RIGOUR, THE SAME PLURALISM”: AN ANALYSIS OF THE “TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP” BETWEEN *PÚBLICO* AND *FOLHA DE S. PAULO* NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on the premise that, through journalistic discourse, socially shared meanings and symbolic power disputes can be recognised. It aims to identify and understand how normative commitment manifests within Portuguese-Brazilian journalistic discourse. The normative perspective is examined here, as its traditional association with democracy in the United States does not necessarily apply to all societies. For this analysis, a broader case study was conducted, focusing on the editorial published jointly by *Público* (Portugal) and *Folha de S. Paulo* (Brazil) on July 9, 2020. Under the theoretical-methodological framework of discourse studies, critical discourse analysis was applied. The results indicate that Portuguese-Brazilian journalistic discourse spans five key axes: digital information, the idealisation of journalism as an advocate of democracy, migration issues, the Portuguese language, and European objectives. Broadly, *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* are collaborating to strengthen their position in the journalistic field. However, despite their aspiration for an alliance between Portugal and Brazil, the political and institutional particularities of each country undermine this ideal. The case also highlights strategies adopted by traditionally printed newspapers to reaffirm their journalistic credibility, particularly in the face of digital media and misinformation.

KEYWORDS

critical discourse analysis, Brazil, democracy, meta-journalism, Portugal

“O MESMO RIGOR, O MESMO PLURALISMO”: ANÁLISE DA “PARCERIA TRANSATLÂNTICA” ENTRE OS JORNAIS *PÚBLICO* E *FOLHA DE S. PAULO*

RESUMO

Com base na premissa de que, por meio do discurso jornalístico, é possível reconhecer os sentidos socialmente partilhados, bem como as disputas simbólicas de poder, este artigo objetiva identificar e compreender de que maneira o compromisso normativo se manifesta no discurso jornalístico luso-brasileiro. A perspectiva normativa é aqui revista, pois sua tradicional associação à democracia dos Estados Unidos da América não se aplica a todas as sociedades. A partir de um estudo de caso mais amplo, selecionou-se o editorial publicado conjuntamente pelos jornais *Público* (Portugal) e *Folha de S. Paulo* (Brasil), em 9 julho de 2020, para a análise do fenómeno. Sob o guarda-chuva teórico-metodológico dos estudos do discurso, aplicou-se a técnica da análise crítica do discurso. Os resultados mostram que o discurso jornalístico luso-brasileiro atravessa cinco eixos: a informação digital; certa idealização do jornalismo como defensor da democracia; as questões migratórias; a língua portuguesa; e os objetivos europeus. De maneira alargada, *Público* e *Folha de S. Paulo* unem-se para ampliar a sua força no campo jornalístico. Entretanto, por mais que se almeje uma irmandade entre Portugal e Brasil, as particularidades político-institucionais de cada país abalam a fantasia criada. O caso também aponta para

estratégias que os jornais tradicionalmente impressos têm adotado para reafirmar sua qualidade noticiosa, sobretudo diante dos mídia digitais e da desinformação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

análise crítica do discurso, Brasil, democracia, metajornalismo, Portugal

1. INTRODUCTION

At its core, journalistic discourse invites the audience to observe society from within, as both newspapers/journalists and the audience are inherently part of it (V. França, 1998). News production, however, is shaped by public events — that is, issues of interest to the community — which are influenced by a complex set of professional, organisational, technological, political, economic, and cultural factors (Belair-Gagnon, 2019; Deuze & Witschge, 2018). News, as a symbolic construction, is not a mirror but rather represents a given reality; for this reason, it is a site of ongoing struggle (Couldry & Andreas, 2017; Martins, 2017). This perspective positions journalism as a provisional entity since its institutionalised practices form part of a web of overlapping and/or conflicting discourses (Carlson, 2016). The acceptability of any representation will depend on a broader cultural understanding of valid expressive forms, which are always open to contestation.

It is therefore important to understand the discursive environment in which journalism takes place — its conditions of production, the actors involved, and the interpretative processes that directly impact the quality of communication — especially in countries like Brazil and Portugal, which have historical ties, where cultural and political power networks have not only been maintained but have also multiplied (T. França & Padilla, 2019; Vargas et al., 2017). However, both countries are currently positioned as semi-peripheral (Borges & Afonso, 2018), occupying ambiguous spaces within the global economic system. The former, once a Portuguese colony, acts in a somewhat imperialist manner towards South American and African countries; the latter, once an imperial power, is seen as a “subaltern coloniser”, oppressed within European politics (Scalabrin Müller et al., 2023).

Without attempting to generalise the results, this paper¹ aims to identify and understand how normative commitment manifests itself in Luso-Brazilian journalistic discourse. Based on a broader case study, the newspapers *Público* (Portugal) and *Folha de S. Paulo* (Brazil) were selected to analyse the phenomenon. Given that both newspapers offer digital subscription sharing (<https://login.folha.com.br/assinatura/jornalpublico>), it is possible to identify how social meanings are constructed around similar themes, as well as the strategies used by newspapers that traditionally produce print editions to reaffirm their strength in the journalistic field (Bourdieu, 2005). This premise aligns with Franklin’s

¹ This paper is partly the result of the thesis *Narrativas Jornalísticas Sobre o Dia do Fogo na Amazônia (2019-2020): O Caso da Folha de S. Paulo (Brasil) e do Público (Portugal)* (*Journalistic Narratives About the Day of the Fire in the Amazon [2019-2020]: The Case of Folha de S. Paulo [Brazil] and Público [Portugal]*), developed as part of the PhD in Communication Sciences at the Communication and Society Research Centre, University of Minho. A preliminary version of this article was discussed in the Journalism and Society Working Group at the “XIII Sopcom Congress”, held in Braga between January 24 and 26, 2024.

(2012) observation: rather than disappearing, newspapers that traditionally produce print editions have shown themselves to be increasingly integrated into the changes imposed by the digital environment and have been adapting editorially and financially to accommodate innovations in media technologies and changing market requirements.

Initially, the normative nature of journalism and its relationship with democracy will be discussed. The methodological procedures will then be presented, with an emphasis on the technique of critical discourse analysis, which will be used to examine the editorial jointly published by the newspapers *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* on July 9, 2020. Through this work, we aim to contribute to journalism studies, particularly to comparative Portuguese-Brazilian analyses. *Folha de S. Paulo* is a centennial newspaper with an extensive bibliography documenting its trajectory, marked by various political and editorial positions. On the other hand, *Público*, which has been in operation for just over three decades, emerged in a context of freedom after the Carnation Revolution (1974) as the result of an endeavour primarily planned by journalists who had previously been associated with the newspaper *Expresso*. In agreement with Moisés de Lemos Martins (Carvalho, 2019), the mere sharing of the Portuguese language holds little value unless common projects and efforts are developed. In this regard, the challenge posed by Oliveira and Paulino (2017) has been addressed: to understand what is common to Portuguese and Brazilian journalism, acknowledging that the socio-cultural environments are distinct.

2. (META)JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY: A CRITICAL-NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVE

One of the main characteristics of journalism, from a communication perspective, is its normative awareness (Carlson et al., 2018). Rooted in the idea of the social construction of reality, adherence to a universal standard of behaviour grants meaning and legitimacy to journalistic practice without assuming that news is inherently indispensable to democratic societies. The emphasis on "consciousness" conceptualises the norm as a complex and reciprocal arrangement between ideal and practice, reconciling what has been accepted as dogma with what is fluid and subject to transformation by various forces. This understanding enables journalism studies to navigate between what McNair (1998) terms the normative paradigm (which expresses the ideal or how things are supposed to be) and the critical paradigm (which focuses on things as they are and the gaps between the real and the ideal).

Initially, the normative perspective emerges as a counterpoint to communism, where the media serve as tools to suppress democracy. Subsequently, it is framed as a means of combating other threats, notably international terrorism, sometimes linked with religious fundamentalism or other "extremist" or revolutionary movements (McQuail, 2010). From a historical standpoint, in discussions on the rise of the nation-state and nationalism, Carey (2007) is frequently cited for arguing that the origins of journalism are the same as the origins of republican or democratic forms of governance — no journalism, no democracy.

Normative communication theory explains how public discourse should be structured to enable a community or nation to address its challenges (Christians et al., 2009). In other words, it seeks to explain how certain forms of public discourse — such as journalistic discourse — contribute to sound collective decision-making. Its core feature is the relationship between a society's conception of democracy and the concrete roles of actors in public discourse. In this context, democracy is understood as popular sovereignty, defined by two fundamental criteria: equality and freedom.

Hanitzsch (2019) notes that most normative roles attributed to journalists stem from the belief that journalism contributes to the proper functioning of democracy. Accordingly, the media are expected to monitor and inform the public about relevant events and their contexts; offer commentary, guidance, and advice on complex issues; facilitate access, expression, and political participation; foster shared awareness; and serve as a critic and watchdog, holding the powerful to account. Similarly, Thomas (2019) views journalism as both central to democracy and an agent of both social control and social change.

For Martins (2010), journalism, as a discursive practice, constitutes the foundation of the wider public space, making collective experience and discourse inseparable. The author argues that journalism's *raison d'être* lies in fostering citizenship and constructing public memory — both of which are justified as essential training for a more sustained practice of civic participation. Moreover, journalism upholds values fundamental to the democratic order, such as freedom, social justice, equity, and the public good.

Traquina (2005) asserts that democracy is inconceivable as a system of government without freedom. In this context, journalism plays a crucial role in informing the public without censorship and, within the division of power among government branches, assumes the responsibility of acting as a watchdog. From a normative perspective, journalistic freedom serves citizens who seek to be sufficiently informed to fulfil their civic duties. By default, and in principle detached from political affiliations, newspapers should prioritise presenting facts over opinions to serve their readers effectively.

The normative nature of journalism forms the basis of its professional identity; that is, it distinguishes journalists from other professionals in the industry and defines the way in which other journalists and different forms of journalism are assessed, criticised and judged (Mesquita, 2023). However, it is an understanding open to interpretation, and its rules and norms change according to ideological constructions and cultural contexts. Hanitzsch (2019) points out that the normative paradigm of journalism is articulated within Western notions of democracy, which emphasise freedom and individual liberty. Thomas (2019) emphasises that his considerations about utility as the normative anchor of journalism are restricted to a democratic structure of government. The relationship between journalism and democracy indeed stems primarily from the United States between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century (Hallin & Giles, 2005). However, "journalism has developed beyond the stage where one country can ever again assume to have found the right paradigm for all other countries" (Josephi, 2013, p. 445).

Schudson (2011) does not deny the importance of journalism for democracy; on the contrary, its role is fundamental to democratic theories of the profession. However, he argues that journalism alone does not represent or create democracy. Similarly, Zelizer (2017) contends that while journalism has historically been necessary for democracy, the reverse is not necessarily true, as the idea of democracy as journalism’s lifeline has not been consistently supported in practice. This does not negate the fact that being a journalist in democratic societies is generally less dangerous than in non-democratic regimes; however, the author suggests that journalism has, to some extent, flourished even in places where democracy has not.

According to McQuail (2010), the normative paradigm of journalism presumes a certain kind of normally functioning “good society” — one that is democratic, liberal, plural, consensual, orderly, and also well-informed. In this view, social inequality is not essentially problematic or even unjust as long as tensions and conflicts can be resolved by existing institutional means. However, the author acknowledges that this perspective is based on an idealised view of Western society — the so-called “Western way of life” — and therefore fails to account for the contradictions faced by developing or Third World countries.

Albuquerque (2005, 2019b) concurs that, in the final decades of the 20th century, the American journalism became an almost universal benchmark against which journalism in other countries is assessed. In most cases, this influence is viewed positively, as it is associated with values such as professionalism, independence, and democracy. In the empirical model proposed by Brüggemann et al. (2014), Portugal is classified within a Western media system alongside Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland, and the United States. However, this classification does not extend to countries such as Brazil.

These distinctions reinforce the need to reflect on what journalism is — in a critical/descriptive sense — and what journalism should be — in a normative sense. While recent studies have analysed the discursive production of the newspapers *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo*, here we break new ground by adopting a metajournalistic approach — that is, journalism about journalism — to critique the codes, conventions, and circumstances of its construction (Deuze, 2001, 2003). This type of discourse appears to have gained traction in the digital environment, where the ability and willingness to reflect publicly on oneself and to engage in open self-criticism are generally welcomed. Journalism becomes “meta” when it examines its practices within a news product, such as in editorials or the specialised press. Contemporary forms of asserting journalistic authority have also emerged, such as podcasts (Perdomo & Rodrigues-Rouleau, 2022). A journalist’s self-perception — particularly regarding their social role and relative power — shapes their interactions with other public actors (Moon, 2021), ultimately leading to a reinterpretation of the normative nature of journalism over time. Similarly, meta-journalism contributes to the stabilisation of the field, as discourse and experiences help journalists make sense of the world and position themselves within it (Perreault, Perreault, & Maeres, 2022; Perreault, Tandoc, & Caberlon, 2023).

In the following section, we critically analyse the proposal by the newspapers *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo*, beginning with the editorial published on July 9, 2020. First, we present the research method.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study forms part of a broader qualitative research project and is grounded in discourse analysis methodology. Discourse analysis represents an overarching framework that encompasses various epistemological approaches (Guimarães et al., 2020). The analytical framework has evolved continually, reflecting the dynamic nature of the discipline, which regards discourse as a material entity in constant motion. In particular, this study engages with critical studies that view discourse as a complex socio-cognitive event involving social actors within a specific context (time, place, and circumstances). The objective is not only to understand the text itself but also to situate it within its broader environment (van Dijk, 2017).

The “transatlantic partnership” between *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* is framed as a case study, as it exemplifies journalistic production and offers insights into Portuguese-Brazilian society in a descriptive, in-depth, and non-confirmatory manner (Gerring, 2004). A non-probabilistic sampling of typical cases was employed, with the editorial entitled “Carta aos Leitores do *PÚBLICO* e da *Folha de S. Paulo*” (Letter to the Readers of *PÚBLICO* and *Folha de S. Paulo*) being selected for analysis. As a complementary data collection technique, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with journalist and university professor Joaquim Fidalgo, who played a key role in the creation of *Público*, and with Vinícius Mota, the current editorial secretary of *Folha de S. Paulo*. This technique proved valuable as it involved a limited number of participants while providing rich, detailed information (Guion et al., 2011).

Critical discourse analysis was employed (see Table 1), with the assumption that the construction of journalistic discourse structures can influence specific mental models and generic representations of the audience (van Dijk, 1998, 2015). Based on general schematic superstructures — that is, excerpts strategically positioned (according to journalistic hierarchy, codes, and conventions) in the editorial signed by Manuel Carvalho and Sérgio Dávila, the respective directors of *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* at the time — the following section will discuss the semantic macrostructures, which represent the overall meaning of the discourse. The fifth and sixth paragraphs of the editorial were excluded, as they contained repeated information, and the framing falls outside the scope of this study. Thus, it was determined that the normative commitment manifests in the Portuguese-Brazilian journalistic discourse along five axes: digital information, a certain idealisation of journalism as an advocate for democracy, migration issues, the Portuguese language, and European goals.

	SUPERSTRUCTURES	MACROSTRUCTURES
Subheadline	“Unrestricted access to digital editions”	Digital information
	“It is an original gesture — the first transatlantic partnership”	
First paragraph	“Although an immense ocean separates us, there is also a language, a culture, and a shared set of values that unite us”	Idealisation
	“Commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and our dedication to human rights”	
Second paragraph	“Journalism grounded in rigour, independence, pluralism, the rejection of sensationalism, and a commitment to public service”	
Third paragraph	“Large communities of Portuguese people living in Brazil and Brazilians living in Portugal”	Migration
Fourth paragraph	“The global reach of the language of Camões or Machado de Assis, or the culture that this shared language promotes”	Portuguese language
	“European challenges, environmental risks, pandemic crises, and threats to democracy”	European goals

Table 1. Superstructures and macrostructures of “*Carta aos Leitores do PÚBLICO e da Folha de S. Paulo*”

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. DIGITAL INFORMATION

The last decade of the 20th century marked the digital transition for *Folha de S. Paulo*, which evolved from being a traditional newspaper producing printed editions to a media group offering content across multiple formats and platforms through the Universo On-Line (UOL) portal. UOL is a holding company controlled by Luiz Frias, the current publisher of *Folha de S. Paulo* (Aguilar, 2016). *Público*, on the other hand, has been offering its content online since 1995. The digital trajectories of both newspapers became interconnected in 2014 when *Público* began presenting a Brazilian version of its website (<https://www.publico.pt>) on the UOL domain. During this period, it was possible to access the website at <https://www.publico.uol.com.br>. The connection between the two was further solidified with the introduction of shared digital subscriptions in 2020.

The current joint initiative between *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* reinforces Franklin’s (2012) argument that newspapers are not confined to publishing print editions, nor are they on the brink of disappearing. While both newspapers continue their print runs, they are also demonstrating their influence in the digital space with the creation of podcasts and active social media profiles. Both newspapers rank among the audience leaders in their respective countries within the daily publications segment. According to the Índice Verificador de Comunicação, in July 2023, *Folha de S. Paulo* was the most consumed newspaper in Brazil, with 796,088 paid copies, of which more than 94% (752,019) were digital subscriptions. Meanwhile, data from the Associação Portuguesa para o Controlo de Tiragem e de Circulação reveals that in the second quarter of 2023, *Público* had a digital paid circulation of 47,227 copies, compared to a print circulation of 10,256 (just over 21% of its digital circulation).

O’Sullivan et al. (2017) highlight that the materiality of the printed object and the cultural structures surrounding it serve as a foundation that fosters innovation, enabling

newspapers to coexist with digital media. In line with this, Mesquita (2023) argues that the production of information by various social actors — which, prior to the widespread use of information and communication technologies, was the exclusive domain of journalists and newsrooms (Deuze & Witschge, 2018) — compels traditional media to produce journalism aligned with normative values, thereby promoting social change and transformation. This demonstrates that *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* are keen to compete for the audience, particularly the digital one, by differentiating themselves based on specific principles. While internet access limitations persist, the sharing of digital subscriptions is not a drawback but rather an asset for both newspapers — elevating them to an international or at least Luso-Brazilian level, especially in a space where misinformation² tends to be more prevalent. The argument for internationalisation may be contested, as journalist and university professor Joaquim Fidalgo notes that cosmopolitanism is a core characteristic of *Público* — with international events often highlighted in the headlines across all segments (economy, politics, society, culture, sport, etc.) since its inception in 1990. Similarly, *Folha de S. Paulo* relies on news agencies and some correspondents to stay informed on major global events.

For the Portuguese newspaper, access to *Folha de S. Paulo*’s content may be valuable not only for its audience but also for its journalists, who gain a channel of information sources within the Brazilian newspaper. This is particularly relevant for covering broader issues affecting both Portugal and Brazil — such as environmental concerns — especially when human and financial resources are limited. For the Brazilian newspaper, sharing digital subscriptions is symbolically significant, setting it apart from its national competitors. Since its founding in 1921, *Folha de S. Paulo* has sought to engage with readers from the urban middle class, including civil servants, small shopkeepers, and segments of the working class, maintaining an urban focus in contrast to newspapers like *Estadão*, which historically aligned with the agrarian oligarchy (Souza, 2019). Even today, ownership concentration within family groups remains a defining feature of the Brazilian media system, with *Folha de S. Paulo* controlled by the second generation of the Frias family (Azevedo, 2006). The partnership with *Público* aligns it more closely with normative journalism and socially engaged practices. Mesquita (2023) argues that even in less democratic contexts or developing democracies — such as Brazil — the civic function of journalism, its ethical commitments to democracy, plurality, and access to information, and its adherence to professional roles and norms remain prevalent. Thus, the Portuguese-Brazilian initiative does not remove *Folha de S. Paulo* from internal competition but rather strengthens its position, allowing it to frame national and international issues from a European perspective.

² The term “fake news”, popularised during the 2016 American presidential election, has a broad scope, encompassing both fabricated news circulating on social media and the general discrediting of the press (Quandt et al., 2019). In this study, following L. Wu et al. (2019), we adopt the term “misinformation” in a broad sense to include all false or inaccurate information shared on social media, regardless of whether it was intentionally created.

4.2. IDEALISATION

The reference to the originality of sharing digital subscriptions reaffirms the normative commitment of *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo*. In a landscape marked by the proliferation of online content sources — many of uncertain reliability and veracity — self-reflection and transparency in the journalistic production process serve as distinguishing factors in the information market (McNair, 2017). However, there is also a romanticised portrayal of these newspapers as advocates for democracy. Acknowledging that journalism and democracy are not necessarily synonymous (Hanitzsch, 2019; McQuail, 2010; Schudson, 2011; Thomas, 2019; Zelizer, 2017), Nerone’s (2013) critique is pertinent: the emphasis on journalism’s normative character verges on fantasy, as norms idealise what perfect agents do in ideal conditions. In this regard, Eldridge (2017) argues that by presenting themselves through idealised archetypes and celebrated values — almost as “heroes” and representatives of “good” — journalists project their “dominant vision” as their best offering to the public.

Folha de S. Paulo has had different owners throughout its centenary history. In the first decades after its founding in 1921, it remained relatively insignificant. It was not committed to democracy, even supporting the 1964 military coup and maintaining an acquiescent and discreet stance until nearly the end of the dictatorship (Albuquerque, 2019a). Ideologically, the newspaper aligned with the business-military pact to counter communist ideas (Dias, 2012). This position shifted between 1983 and 1984 when *Folha de S. Paulo* joined the Diretas Já campaign — a popular movement advocating for the reinstatement of direct presidential elections. However, this transformation was driven by strategic considerations: its owners at the time, Octavio Frias de Oliveira and Carlos Caldeira Filho, recognised that the newspaper’s success depended on a democratic regime. Consequently, it repositioned itself as a voice of resistance during the democratic transition process.

When *Folha de S. Paulo* joins *Público* and publicly declares its commitment to democracy, it is important to recognise that its primary commitment may, in fact, be to its own interests. Despite claiming to be non-partisan, independent, and pluralistic, the Brazilian newspaper adopts specific positions when covering certain topics (Paixão Marcos, 2018), particularly when it comes to internal affairs. Regarding former President Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2021), *Folha de S. Paulo* was notably critical, especially in its coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside other media outlets (g1, UOL, *O Globo*, *Extra*, *Estadão*), it consolidated data on cases and deaths after the federal government made it more difficult to access such information. However, its criticism of the Workers’ Party governments, which held power from 2003 to 2016, contributed to the animosity that ultimately played a role in the 2018 presidential elections, in which Bolsonaro emerged victorious.

Público’s normative commitment is stronger despite the fact that the Portuguese newspaper is also linked to private capital through the group Sociedade Nacional de Estratificados (Sonae)³. This is because the idea of creating a daily newspaper originated

³ *Público* Comunicação Social S.A. is part of the Sonaecom sub-holding.

from a group of journalists already working at the weekly *Expresso*, who aimed to modernise the press in Portugal, following the example of other European countries. In other words, the values came from within (the professionals) to the outside (the investors). Furthermore, the context provided by the Carnation Revolution — which ended Salazarism (1933–1974) in Portugal and, unlike in Latin America or Spain, was not the result of a planned elite agreement (Rezola, 2008) — confirms the reliability of *Público*’s normative discourse. When interviewed, Joaquim Fidalgo stated that the leader of Sonae at the time, Belmiro Mendes de Azevedo, saw *Público*’s independence as a beneficial arrangement — much like his perspective on *Folha de S. Paulo*’s commitment to democracy. However, the separation between journalism and profit was clearly established from the outset:

in the newspaper’s first edition, a joint statement was published — our Magna Carta — formally outlining the roles of both journalists and investors. Mr. Belmiro de Azevedo told us that there were people within the Sonae group who were annoyed by some of the uncomfortable stories we were publishing. He responded by saying that he could not interfere in *Público*’s work. The only thing he asked was that both sides be given a voice — we could “badmouth” the group, but we also had to hear their version of the facts. In this regard, it was an exemplary case, although many people had doubts about it. (Joaquim Fidalgo, personal communication, October 21, 2020)

Still within this “idealisation” category, when referring to the Atlantic Ocean — symbolising that physical distance does not impede the closeness between Portugal and Brazil — both *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* evoke memories of historical overseas expansions. Although this historical memory may be more visibly evident from the Portuguese side, it is crucial to remember that this socio-historical context encompasses the genocide of Indigenous peoples, the transatlantic slave trade, the transfer of the Portuguese court to Brazil in 1808, and the atypical process of Brazil’s independence (Scalabrin Müller et al., 2023). The attempt to strengthen ties between the two countries, without adequately acknowledging that this relationship is shaped by the social, political, and economic consequences of a colonial past, challenges the normative commitment advocated by the periodicals. After all, Brazilian journalists face greater vulnerability than their Portuguese counterparts — despite the generally precarious environment in which journalists work, marked by bureaucratic dynamics in newsrooms, deadlines, and relationships with sources. While the 2023 edition of the World Press Freedom Ranking⁴ places Portugal as the ninth safest country for practising journalism, with strong freedoms allowing journalists to report without restrictions — though some may face threats from extremist groups — Brazil ranks 92nd. In terms of environmental coverage, journalists from Third World or developing countries face higher risks of imprisonment, murder, assault, threats, kidnapping, self-exile, lawsuits, and harassment compared to those covering other topics

⁴ Refer to <https://rsf.org/pt-br/ranking>.

(Freedman, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, while Portuguese journalists dealt with the challenges of remote working (Miranda et al., 2021), their Brazilian counterparts (particularly women journalists) were directly targeted by former President Bolsonaro through insults, humiliation, and vulgar threats (Nicoletti & Flores, 2022). Thus, the political/institutional context of each country puts the normative stance of Portuguese-Brazilian journalism to the test.

4.3. MIGRATION

As previously mentioned, international journalism is one of *Público*’s defining characteristics, with the newspaper often spotlighting events in the United States — considered the epicentre of international news (H. Wu, 2000) — and other key European centres. When interviewed, Joaquim Fidalgo noted that Brazil does not fully align with the typical concerns of the Portuguese newspaper. In its early years, when Brazil was nearing the end of its military dictatorship, *Público* focused on the Brazilian cultural scene, particularly driven by telenovelas. Today, however, there is more emphasis on political and economic issues rather than cultural ones. As Fidalgo explained, “the growing number of Brazilians in Portugal has led to increased interest, not because it is Brazil, but because it is what is most present in the daily lives of the Portuguese” (personal communication, October 21, 2020).

T. França and Padilla (2019) highlight that there has been a steady flow of migrants from Brazil to Portugal since the late 1970s. The most recent wave of immigration began in 2016, driven by Portugal’s economic recovery, in contrast to Brazil’s political and financial crisis, which started with the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016). According to 2022 data from the Immigration and Borders Service, Portugal had 781,915 regular immigrants, with Brazilians forming the largest community, numbering 239,744 (30.7% of all foreign residents). In line with Thomas (2019), it could be argued that the collaboration between *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* helps people navigate the world around them. However, since the economy plays a significant role in determining international news coverage (H. Wu, 2000), it is plausible that the economic advantages linked to immigration, along with cultural proximity — as will be discussed below — explain the Portuguese interest in the Brazilian audience.

On the Brazilian side, the exodus of citizens may also drive an interest in understanding developments in Portugal and Europe — particularly since, in the first decade of the 21st century, Brazilian migration was largely directed towards the United States (Assis, 2021). However, this engagement appears more reactive than proactive. When interviewed, *Folha de S. Paulo*’s editorial secretary, Vinícius Mota, stated that the newspaper’s primary references are dailies in the United States and the United Kingdom. The partnership with *Público* provides an opportunity to expand its audience, as competition in the journalistic field extends beyond readership to include strategies for attracting and retaining that audience (Bourdieu, 2005). Just as the Portuguese-Brazilian partnership strengthens *Folha de S. Paulo* domestically, it also enhances its international prestige — establishing it as a benchmark for Brazilian journalism — through *Público*.

4.4. PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE

The mention of key figures in Portuguese-Brazilian literature, such as Camões and Machado de Assis, reinforces the notion of a shared culture bound by an intangible heritage: the Portuguese language. Notably, linguistic ties and colonial history are cultural factors that shape the international flow of news (Sakurai, 2017). However, Portuguese-Brazilian journalistic practices and approaches are shaped by their respective national contexts (Novais et al., 2013). This means that journalism in both countries is the product of distinct institutional, social, and cultural experiences, making it impossible to speak of a “deterritorialised” or translocal Portuguese-speaking journalistic community. Consequently, the idea of a “transatlantic partnership” is challenged. It is worth noting that the orthographic agreement — implemented in 2015 — standardises spelling (but not pronunciation) across Portuguese-speaking countries. However, criticism of this measure, particularly in Portugal, challenges the notion of a shared linguistic understanding. A recurring argument against the agreement is the perceived loss of Portugal’s linguistic prestige, as if it is synonymous with Portugal’s subjugation to Brazil, given that most of the changes affect European Portuguese (Ninitas, 2020). Additionally, São Paulo city, home to over 11 million people according to the 2022 census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics⁵, has a Portuguese-speaking population larger than that of Portugal itself.

Público and *Folha de S. Paulo* talk about “creating ties, bringing Brazilians and Portuguese closer together, heirs to the same language and a common cultural root”, but for the Portuguese newspaper, the language issue is a sensitive point. In its opinion articles, *Público* includes the message “the author is a columnist for PÚBLICO and writes according to the new spelling agreement” at the end of the text, which signifies agreement with the orthographic spelling agreement. However, when a columnist does not adhere to the instrument, this phrase is omitted. This stance contradicts not only *Público*’s normative commitment but also one of the European objectives, which is to respect the wealth of cultural and linguistic diversity.

4.5. EUROPEAN GOALS

By committing themselves to addressing contemporary social challenges, *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* align themselves with the European values agenda, which centres on a fundamental issue: the proper functioning of democracy. However, drawing direct parallels between Brazil and Portugal in this regard is not feasible. Despite the growth of the Chega party in Portugal, led by André Ventura, who challenges formal democratic norms and advocates for changes to the current constitutional system (Serrano, 2020), it remains uncertain to what extent Portuguese public institutions are destabilised by one political leadership that expresses itself predominantly through social media. The normative commitment of both newspapers is clearly at odds with Ventura’s populist stance, given his frequent harassment of immigrants and Roma communities.

⁵ <https://www.ibge.gov.br/cidades-e-estados/sp/sao-paulo.html>.

However, as discussed earlier, Brazil does not have a pluralistic media landscape but rather oligopolies that were formed during the authoritarian period (Avritzer, 2020) — with *Folha de S. Paulo* being one of them. Albuquerque (2005, 2019b) asserts that Brazil has appropriated the rhetoric and journalistic practices of the United States — seen as an example of Western democracy — adapting them (rather than adopting them) to its own cultural environment. In the author’s view, Brazilian democracy was once considered the most solid in South America, having developed a network of accountability systems involving institutions from all three branches of government (the Public Prosecutor’s Office, the media, and civil society organisations), as well as positive developments in the Brazilian press towards more autonomous and investigative practices. However, the parliamentary coup against elected President Dilma Rousseff revealed that, as a product of history, there is no guarantee that the balance of power underpinning Western democracies will endure indefinitely. The government of former President Jair Bolsonaro, marked by the widespread sentiment that everything was permissible and open to oppressive violence (Barretto Filho, 2020), exemplifies Brazil’s instability.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This paper aims to identify and understand how normative commitment manifests itself in Luso-Brazilian journalistic discourse. Based on a critical analysis of the editorial jointly signed by *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo* to announce the offering of joint digital subscriptions, five key themes were identified: digital information, a certain idealisation of journalism as an advocate of democracy, migration issues, the Portuguese language, and European objectives. Overall, the two newspapers are aligning to strengthen their position in the journalistic field. However, despite Portugal and Brazil’s aspirations towards a brotherhood — that is, an ideal Luso-Brazilian society inspired by democratic theories — the political and institutional particularities of each country undermine this fantasy.

The relatively recent positioning of *Folha de S. Paulo* as an advocate of democracy (to the extent of collaborating with other media outlets to challenge the misinformation spread by former President Jair Bolsonaro during the pandemic) does not erase its past, when it colluded with the military dictatorship, nor its present, which centres around the interests of the Frias family, the newspaper’s owners. The partnership with *Público* elevates its international prestige. Still, caution is needed to ensure that the pursuit of high-quality journalism does not veer into arrogance, particularly when critiquing domestic affairs. In contrast, the fact that *Público* was founded after the Carnation Revolution lends greater credibility to its commitment. Nonetheless, it is evident that the interest in Brazil, to some extent, challenges national pride, as illustrated by the controversial adherence to the orthographic agreement by Portuguese journalists.

In order to understand the journalistic field, it is crucial to consider the level of autonomy within it and, within that, the independence of individual media outlets (Bourdieu, 2005). The Portuguese-Brazilian distinctions do not undermine the normative commitment of *Público* and *Folha de S. Paulo*. On the contrary, they highlight the significance

of examining newspapers that traditionally publish printed editions to understand the strategies they employ to reaffirm their journalistic quality, particularly in the context of digital media and misinformation. Focusing on the printed edition allows for more straightforward comparisons between different socio-cultural contexts.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

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