

# Border relational status in two Brazilian-Argentinian border newspapers

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-5844202012>

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## Abstract

This paper discloses results of a research on how *Folha de São Borja* (1970-) and *Unión* (1977-2010) newspapers covered two major border-crossing changes over Uruguai River between São Borja (Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil) and Santo Tomé (Corrientes, Argentina), namely: the opening of their ports for trading activities (1982) and the construction of Ponte da Integração Internacional (1997). The aim of the present article is to focus on the “border relational status”, which is a category planned to find evidences on these newspapers’ position taken about situations in the border area and about contacts with the neighbor country based on a corpus of texts. Among the results, we noted that the Brazilian newspaper emphasized integration on an international level and the Argentinian one valued the bonds between the twin cities.

**Keywords:** Journalism. Border press. Border. History of the press. Newspaper.

## Introduction

The book “The Talisman” by Sir Walther Scott describes the meeting of King Richard Lionheart and Sultan Salah ad-Din, who were rivals in the Crusades, which touches of chivalry. Evidences of loyalty between the two sovereigns in the book contrast the cruel acts observed throughout this conflict between Christians and Muslims, which are based on historical reports. Chivalry between kings is the thin edge that links the two leaders from cultural worlds in conflict. The common point is the peculiar personality traces of the two characters. The British king shows a sort of rough, foolish and tenacious profile and the Sultan has a refined intelligence and determination.

Somehow, the cultural traces shared by border peoples follow these very dynamics, which is marked by slight differences. Speech, cuisine, garments and habits are mixed

in such a relevant extent, but they never become actually equal. The border between São Borja, Rio Grande do Sul State – Brazil, and Santo Tomé, Corrientes –Argentina, as well as between other twin cities throughout the Brazilian border, shows many similarities, but such similarities are marked by differences in daily life activities, due to the mix of Portuguese and Spanish cultures.

The crossing of national limits is one of the most interesting aspects that mark and are marked by life in the borderlines. The act of crossing this line brings along many meanings, it is the opportunity to be in another country, which has a different State and bureaucratic structure. All senses of the human body are activated by such action, the perception about new flavors, new cuisine, smells, voices and particular habits, language; the expectation of exploring the other side of the border, even if it is just a search for cheaper goods.

Such crossing has been gaining different meanings for local citizens who were used to the vicinal transit, as well as for visitors who occasionally cross the border, or who either want to have a new experience or to satisfy their curiosity. On the other hand, each change in the way to cross the borderline has its own peculiarity, bureaucratic transactions, transportation means, trip duration, visas, interdictions by state organs – changing presences based on technological innovations, international agreements and changes in the country's political scene.

Accordingly, it is expected that any innovation in transportation means between the two sides of the border can change such coexistence, which is prolonged in time and limited by the sharing of spaces individuals live in. The research motivating this article is based on reports from two newspapers about events that have changed the crossing of Brazil-Argentina borderline in São Borja (Rio Grande do Sul State, Brazil) through Uruguay River. *Folha de São Borja* and *Unión's* editions from 1981 to 1982 were the documental sources describing the events surrounding the renovation of the river ports in the two cities and their further opening to imports and exports between 1996 and 1997. This renovation included launching *Ponte Integração Internacional* (International Bridge of Integration), which is currently an important intersection point of the two countries. The main question was whether these factors were widespread and covered by the two newspapers, the conflicting points, similarities, how local communities faced this new situation, and the cultural traces disclosed through news reports. In order to explain all these factors, it was necessary investigating the production conditions experienced by these newspapers, their managers and whether the relationship between both sides of the border could be well-understood based on the journalistic coverage.

Content analysis followed recommendations by Bardin (2011). News reports about the renovation and opening of São Borja and Santo Tomé ports for imports and exports in 1982 were collected, as well as about the construction and launching of *Ponte Integração Internacional* between 1996 and 1997.

News reports collected from *Folha de São Borja* newspaper were photographed at the physical files of the newspaper in São Borja City. *Unión* newspaper was closed in 2010,

its physical files were digitalized by a renowned editor, who now works at Prefeitura Naval de Santo Tomé<sup>1</sup>. Thus, almost all registers processed during the research were copies of the digital files provided by the aforementioned editor. During the observation the authors noted that some of 1997 editions were missing in the Unión files; therefore, it was necessary to look for and photograph physical files. The Content Analysis form was used in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

In order to complete the Content Analysis, two editors of the assessed newspapers - Roque Auri Andres from Folha de São Borja, and Carlos Segundo Zapata from Unión – were interviewed through semi-structured interview between September 18 and 20, 2016. The interview followed a previous script of questions. Answers were recorded and the editors were asked about the background of the newspapers, their production practices, the storage of memoirs about changes in borderline crossing and about their impressions about the coexistence on the borderline. This technique allowed data not included in the original aims of the script to be recorded. Interviews were carried out between September 18 and 20, 2016 at Carlos Zapata's house, São Tomé City and at Folha de São Borja office.

Given the amount of collected data, the aim of the current article was to focus on the border relational status as a category to analyze the two newspapers, and the potential element from other studies about borderline inland press.

## **Folha de São Borja and Unión newspapers**

Both newspapers can be analyzed based on suggestions about the ideal types of inland press (BUENO, 2013). Thus, it is possible observing the main features of each communication vehicle without aiming at having an ultimate identification of the model. Bueno (2013) highlighted the following ideal types: “Almost artisanal press”, “local press” (sub-type “consolidated local press”) and “regional press”. Differences concern the range of geographic coverage, which is a factor closely related to newspapers’ production capacity and structure. It has strong influence on the relationship of communication vehicles with their readers, and with the consequences from it:

[...] the local newspaper, which is “almost artisanal”, the structured newspaper and the regional newspaper. The first two, have the city or the county where their headquarters are in as their circulation limit and the third one aims at influencing a certain region. It aims at having some cities and counties as circulation limit. Accordingly, in order to avoid ambiguity between local newspapers, the first type will be called “almost artisanal” and the second one will simply be the local newspaper (consolidated, structured) (BUENO, 2013, p. 45).

<sup>1</sup> Prefeitura Naval is one the armed forces in Argentina, it accounts for protecting the rivers.

Carlos Segundo Zapata launched Unión in September 1977 by in São Tomé City. Its last edition was printed in May 2010, when the editor/owner retired. Journal office was in the living room of Zapata's house, who worked with many edition-production stages. Based on Bueno (2013), the Argentinian newspaper is close to the "almost artisanal" style due to its production structure. It is always limited to the close relationship with Santo Tomé readers through its trajectory, it is mostly based on newspaper circulation range and advertising revenue. However, it is not possible talking about "low aggressiveness": the Argentinian newspaper had some circulation in the *gaúcha* city of São Borja and a consistent relationship with Brazilian advertisers, as proven by advertisements of restaurants and other services bought by Santo Tomé's inhabitants. By constantly crossing the border before the bridge was launched in 1997, Unión newspaper used to reach Brazil and had some income from São Borja sources.

José Grisólia launched the Brazilian newspaper, Folha de São Borja, in September 1970 and it was bought by the Andres family in 1977. This newspaper can be classified as "local newspaper" (consolidated). The Andres family was granted with the concession to broadcast AM (Rádio Cultura) and FM (Rádio Fronteira FM) radio stations, sometime after they bought the newspaper. These communication vehicles compose the Andres Group, which had its own print shop until 1992. The newspaper's editorial focuses on São Borja City, but it sometimes mentions facts from other cities. Because it comes up twice a week (Wednesdays and Saturdays), Folha de São Borja sets its relationship with locals and counts on a team of journalists who share the tasks to be accomplished<sup>2</sup>. This team was larger than that observed in Unión, at any time. Yet, this newspaper did not get the practice of selling advertisement to Santo Tomé's businessmen, and such feature was different from practices achieved by the Argentinian newspaper.

Advertisement-selling points towards circulation in the advertisers' market and it can indicate how the two newspapers faced the possibility of circulating and announcing in the borderline area. The border can be, or not, crossed and it can also be often or eventually trespassed, but it does not depend only on the will of the newspaper company; although it seems to be a relevant factor. The governmental structure controlling the border includes documentation and means to cross the border and the relationship between the two countries, or among other interested parties.

The social, cultural, economic and political context of borderline cities between Brazil and Argentina, mainly between Rio Grande do Sul State and Corrientes and Misiones Provinces in Argentina, have more clear similarity evidences, such as bucolic landscape, similar customs, mate tea drinking, music and the Pampa biome, among other factors such as having the cities as the points to cross from one country to the other.

The main reason to see the border press as a sub-category within the "inland press" category lies on its location in small- and mid-sized counties that are located away from the

<sup>2</sup> In 2017, this team encompassed one editor, a writer, a diagrammer, a commercial manager and a trainee. There was one police journalist, a radio reporter – who was in charge of police reports in the AM radio station – and a writer and columnist.

state capitals and on the country's border. This statement corroborates the proposition by Assis (2013) about the meaning of "inland" in journalistic research.

Borderline regions tend to be less developed due to their isolation from state and federal capitals, to their low political and economic representativeness, as well as to their dependence on the primary sector, mainly on monoculture (CORRÊA; OLIVEIRA, 2012). All these factors can be linked to historical national security policies focused on avoiding the existence of valuable assets in areas exposed to regional conflicts. Given the trend to economic commodity exploitation cycles experienced by the agricultural sector, these regions have slow development. Their populations face migration; they lose inhabitants who go to other regions.

The recent history of these populations highlights a pacific coexistence - there are no records of relevant tensions after the territories were actually defined. The marriage between Brazilians and Argentinians is common, as well as border crossing to shop, to go to restaurants or just to spend some time on the other side of the border. There is also the trend of a distant relationship between cities on the borderline area and decision-making centers:

The lines dividing the border in these cities are alive, the relationship between their peoples is dynamic, their interactions are permanent, although the integration does not seem to be complete, but emerges in many ways of cooperation and in the mix of current social fields. The needs of one side are fulfilled by the participation of the other side, the gaps in one side are fulfilled by the actions of the other one [...]. The borderlines in these locations are overcome. They become, thanks to the action of man, porous – limits set by definitions from the decision-making centers are far away and, most of the time, they are elaborated by individuals who do not know the reality of people living on the very edge of the national territories (MÜLLER, 2002, p. 230-231).

Different from the overlaps observed in urban centers, which makes the coexistence of two national countries almost meaningless, such as the case of "*Fronteira da Amizade*" between Livramento and Rivera, the meeting points between *gaúcha* and Argentinian cities involve resources to service suppliers or binational construction sites. Regardless of the case, another factor is the absence or the presence of Federal organs to control security and fiscal regulation, which has some effect.

This association between cultural data and socioeconomic development in borderline cities is relevant to allow analyzing journalism in these areas based on inland and borderline reports in local newspapers. The cultural and identity marks characteristic of the borderline areas observed in previous studies about local press tend to reflect writing styles, newspaper structure - local topics are addressed, as well as the interaction between readers and their local newspapers<sup>3</sup>.

3 Other references: Müller (2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2015), Müller & Oliveira (2005).

Although borderline press overall has features similar to those of inland press, they tend to replicate views of metropolitan press about border areas due to a safety bias (SILVEIRA, 2005, 2006, 2011, SIMI; SILVEIRA, 2010, SEIBT; SILVEIRA, 2004). Such attitude changes when it comes to demands of local communities, since it is seen as a factor linked to inland press. This second reason makes many inland newspapers call themselves “community press” (DORNELLES, 2004).

The difference between press scale tend to be an important factor to explain the distinct viewpoints about the limits of the national territory, such as the case of Rio Grande do Sul State (GRIMBERG, 2014). There are special situations when factors comprising the international scale, such as conflicts between countries, can be widespread by borderline newspapers based on a local profile (NAZÁRIO; HAUSSEN, 2015).

Changes in border crossing are important factors for borderline inland journalism because: a) they are binational projects that depend on different negotiation levels (they take long) and, overall, they are previously announced by the political sector (they are expected by the local populations and by the local press); b) they have impact on the economy and on the political scene in borderline locations, such as new job positions and fiscal income sources, as well as the reinforcement of State presence due to the implementation of local bureaucratic organs; c) they often result from historical demands from borderline communities that long for improving the daily transit between counties due to many reasons (trade, leisure, coexistence); and d) they change the infrastructure and procedures required for border crossing, they close some possibilities but open others.

News reports in these newspapers about innovations in border crossing allow one to see traces of how these high-communal impact facts were addressed. The premise states that borderline newspapers take positions and outspread their perceptions about how the respective communities assess, value and emphasize the relationship with other populations and institutions in the neighbor country when they cover this type of event.

The Content Analysis has shown different profiles in coverages carried out by the two newspapers about changes in Uruguay River crossing. The first point to be observed was the difference between the coverage style of the two newspapers, between cargo transit in 1982 and the construction, launching and liberation of Ponte da Integração in 1997, as shown in Graph 2. With respect to the ferries, from June 1981 to June 1982, only 20 texts were selected as relevant: 12 texts from Folha de São Borja and 8 from Unión. On the other hand, in total, 152 texts from December 1996 to December 1997 were collected: 95 from Folha de São Borja and 57 from Unión.

Differences between their coverage concerns the structural distinctions of each newspaper and the very nature of each one of the innovations on the ways to cross the border. In 1982, back in the Brazilian and Argentinian dictatorships, the main reason for the improvement for the ports was one of economic order: the need of making soy imports feasible in order to supply the *gaúcha* industry (main advantage) due to improvements in the transit of local citizens (marginal gain).



The construction of the international bridge was a relevant bilateral investment, which resulted from the motivation of political forces at the democratic phase to support the concept of integration set by Mercosul (NAZÁRIO, 2017). Based on such context, the goal was to identify the positions expressed in the news reports and, consequently, the positions taken by these newspapers based on the border relational status category.

## **Relationship between borderline peoples and power centers in news reports**

Among categories used in the analysis, one finds the border relational status, which is herein seen as an indicator of positions taken, they

Point towards the multi-scale (from city scale to national scale) and varying character (which can range from a favorable reaction to the integration trend and reach the absence of information about the event) that features the interactions between local populations in São Borja and Santo Tomé, and between them and their regional administration centers and national decision-making centers. These relationships, whenever they are addressed in the text, can be classified as resulting in the gradation between integration and distancing (NAZÁRIO, 2017, p. 44).

The pendulum association between integration and rivalry is a concept from studies on International Relations field, which concern the background of positions taken by Brazil and Argentina (GRANATO, 2012). They find echo in studies on the Communication field, as described by Jacks, Machado and Müller (2004). The current research pointed out the ways through which the border relational status would be recorded in news reports from Folha de São Borja and Unión. It marks these newspapers' perception about topics related to changes in the means and documentations to cross the national limits, it is the contribution of these newspapers to the construction of the "possible world" (ALSINA, 2005) provided to readers.

Border relational status category was developed to classify different positions taken by participants in news reports about changes in Uruguay River crossing between São Borja and Santo Tomé. The aim is to make these positions and concessions visible, since they are reported in the news. Assumingly, news outspread by journalists and press assessors are triggered by the social reality, since they aim at building a "possible world" to be covered by newspapers and to be presented according to their formats and pace. News outspreading depends on peculiar selection, edition and broadcasting processes. The relationships below were searched and assessed, they share integration, distancing and absence/difference gradations:

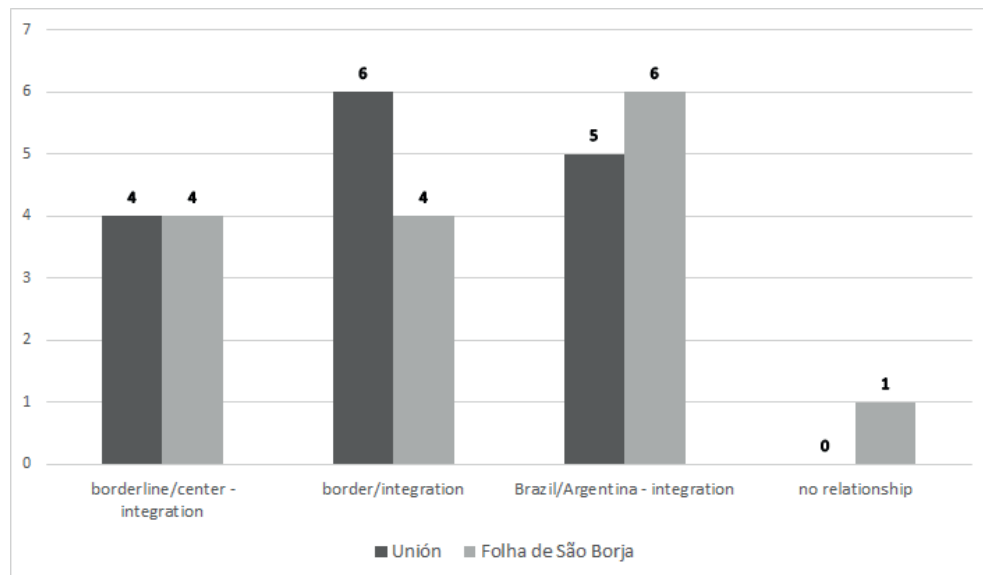
- a. **borderline population X regional decision-making center** – the metropolis/periphery relationship between capital cities and borderline cities: requests, projects, claims, demonstrations, gratefulness and the valorization of actions taken by authorities and sectors;

- b. **relationship between borderline populations** – concerns the records that value the actions taken between São Borja and Santo Tomé. Similarly, it concerns the understanding that the International Relations field extrapolates the diplomatic dimension and includes practices of individuals in contact with people from other countries, with emphasis on manifestation from representatives of the public powers and from businessmen and ordinary citizens;
- c. **Borderline populations X foreign authorities** – the meaning addressed by Grimson (2002) when he mentioned the contact of borderline visitors with the law and political order in other countries;
- d. **Argentina / Brazil relationship** – information in news reports about this variable address difficulties and solutions that Argentina and Brazil face when they discuss their differences. This variable regards the understanding that any official change in the way and rules to cross the border depends on the current scenario, on the conversations and debates between representatives from both countries.

## Results

Based on the period between 1981-1982 and the opening of the ports and the high capacity of the ferry services, one could observe the valuing of commercial agreements between Brazil and Argentina. It was highlighted by the comments about the potential to improve the trading activities between the two countries, which marked the national dimension of agreements about the transit over the border.

**Graph 1** – Perception about the border relational status - Ferries



Source: Nazário (2017).



Both newspapers had the same amount of information about the good relationship between regional centers and national decision-making centers in the borderline area and it was translated into the understanding of demands claimed throughout the assessed period. The *Unión*, although it had lower production in the assessed period than *Folha de São Borja*, it outspread positive relationship between neighbor peoples - 50% more than in the Brazilian newspaper. The *gaúcho* newspaper, in its turn, pointed out the “Brazil/Argentina – integration” status more often. However, this difference was quite small at this moment.

The positive relationship between São Borja and the regional and national government, based on *Folha de São Borja*, regarded the trips and reports of city hall representatives to the state government and the federal government, due to the construction of the harbor in the city. These factors can be associated with the fact that politics is a great topic for inland newspapers, mainly when they regard public projects or innovation in the provided services. The importance of the coexistence between neighbor cities is acknowledged, but emphasis is given to the closer binational relationships with the production of the *gaúcho* newspaper.

A factor highlighting the larger amounts of reports on the “borderline –integration” status observed in *Unión* is the association of the more personal and free tone by Zapata about testimonies of Argentinians and Brazilians when the cargo service was launched in Santo Tomé and São Borja ports in May 26, 1982. There was the trend to highlight fraternity bonds between neighbor peoples and between Brazil and Argentina.

One of the cases evidencing such status was a piece of news from December 1981, according to which, *Ministério de Obras e Serviços Públicos da Argentina* would have authorized the incorporation of cargo transportation to the harbors to facilitate preparations in the Argentinian side to launch a high-capacity ferry service.

With respect to differences between the two newspapers, the *gaúcho* newspaper gave more emphasis on the international integration and the Argentinian one highlighted the link between the two cities. It is possible noticing the functioning of some cultural identification mechanisms that were previously addressed in other studies<sup>4</sup>. Seemingly, *Folha de São Borja* stands out as the Brazilian newspaper on the border area, but it does not lose track of the coexistence with the foreign neighbors. This heading is reinforced by the team’s productive structure, by the existing human resources and by the production pace. This process favors the implementation of models and viewpoints that speed up and give coherence to the outspread news.

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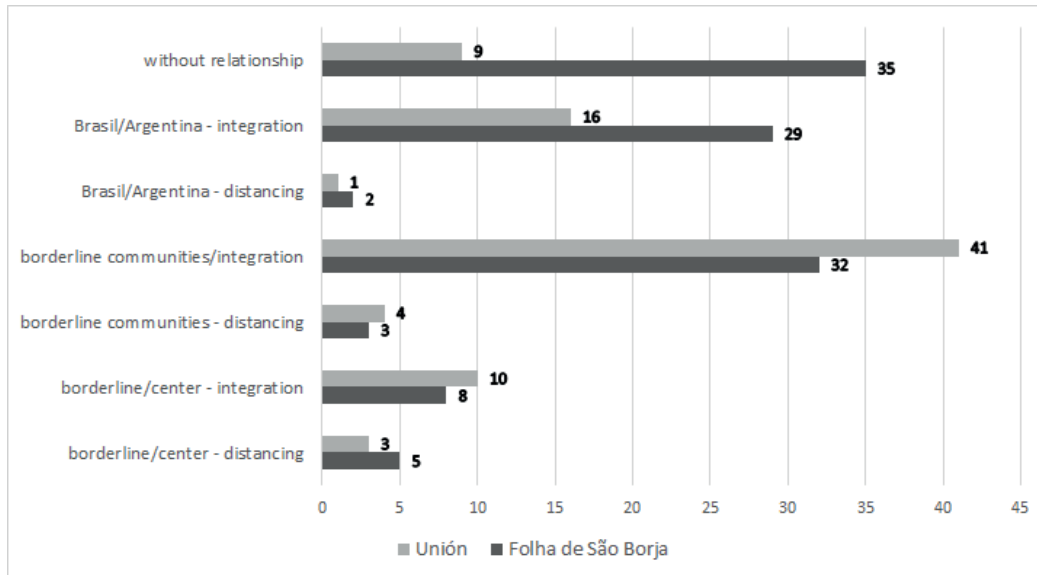
4 In-depth information about cultural identification in borderline cities: Müller (2001, 2015), Raddatz (2004), Silveira (2001, 2003, 2005).

Based on the business concept adopted by *Folha de São Borja*, and on the interview with its editor, the importance of novelty for the county's economy is more relevant than the interaction with Santo Tomé, given the fact that the cargo transportation for international trading is the main development factor in the city. *Unión* mostly outspread the value of bonds set through local experiences, the daily routines in the region, and the perception about binational integration. Mentions to *hermandad* between São Borja and Santo Tomé outspread by this newspaper are quite different from the mocking sense given to the term used by the company in Santa Catarina State in 2000, as shown by Jacks, Machado and Müller (2004).

The opening of the ports and the insertion of high-capacity ferries in routes between São Borja and Santo Tomé are complemented because they encompass the demands of the two cities, since they relieve the other border points for cargo transportation and consist in a joint effort by producers and politicians in both countries, at all decision-making spheres. It is understood that the opening of the ports was more interesting due to the benefits it would bring to the production sectors than to the immediate gain for the local population. Yet, the value given to this measure points out the approval to the contact with, and improvement in, the access to the neighbor city.

With regards to *Ponte Internacional da Integração*, back in 1990, assessments about the positions taken in the border showed that most occurrences favored the integrating center, mainly between borderline populations (73 occurrences) and between the two countries (45 cases). Reports from the 1996-1997 period in *Unión* present a strict coverage about the integration between the two cities - *Folha de São Borja* highlights the cooperation between Brazil and Argentina. The trend shown by the Argentinian newspaper points out the will of often referring to the neighbor city as the main factor accounting for the existence of readers and advisers in the two cities. It would be the result from the way they cross the borderline limits and from the freedom Zapata had in his newspaper office.

The series of texts that do not refer to the borderline relationships does not stand out, or, at least, it is not clear. It encompasses many factual news about the preparations, the development potential each city would face after the bridge was finished. These occurrences can be interpreted as a normal outcome from the focus on the city, which is a common feature of both newspapers, rather than a way to disregard the borderline area. The businesses of both newspapers are mainly focused on what is relevant for the county where they circulate in. Given the circulation of the *Unión* in São Borja, the number of such cases in this newspaper is lower than that observed in the Brazilian newspaper.

**Graph 2 – Border relational status - Bridge**

Source: Nazário (2017).

Cases highlighting a negative relationship between the borderline and the center region call the attention. Items in the *Unión* regard reports from journalists in Santo Tomé about their experience during the coverage of the bridge launching. Three radio stations in Santo Tomé: FM Sol, Integración FM and Sin Fronteras FM, could not install their equipment to broadcast live during the event, although they issued the request as demanded. Thus, only *Rádio Nacional de Buenos Aires* could outspread content in the location during the event. Accordingly, the radio stations were forced to request to broadcast in chain. It is curious, because *Cultura AM* and *Fronteira FM*, which belong to the Andres group, provided the broadcast in chain, from São Borja. The Argentinian radio broadcasters acknowledged that procedure as careful and easy by.

Another case of distancing between the border area and the decision-making center is addressed in the news about “*Encuentro Argentino Brasileño*”, from July 16, 1997, which was covered by the *Unión*. The vice-intendent from Santo Tomé, Reginaldo Brandán, talks about the need of a “community citizenship” to improve international relationships, in order to stop with the “closed sense of sovereignty”. He criticizes the actions of political and economic decision-making centers in Brazil and Argentina, which set great deals, but also stop or jeopardize new initiatives and improvements in the life conditions of borderline communities due to eventual conflicts. This a reference to restrictive legislations for border areas in both countries and a claim for the constant evolution of border relationships to deal with common issues. The participation of instances and individuals living and knowing life in these areas may help solve those issues.

## Evidences for further research

Based on the observations by the Brazilian borderline press (which is, somehow, an inland press), the sense of border relational status may deserve to be argued and enhanced. It was useful to capture the signs of the positions taken in news reports produced and published in both newspapers.

The idea of connecting cultural and political-administrative interactions perceived in the border area to news production aimed at substantiating the categories of texts within methodological choices, by having in mind the positive or negative trends of the closeness between Argentinian and Brazilian cities due to changes in border crossing. It is possible to enhance this sense by adjusting it to different measurement scales and to other techniques and methodologies. It is interesting testing the methodology to investigate different news reports linked to experiences in crossing the border, to the negative (crimes) and positive (cultural events, cooperation) facts of it. The concept can also be useful in studies about news reception and newspaper circulation.

The metaphor about the pendulum relationship between Brazil and Argentina, as an analysis model taken from the International Relations field, is a lens that helps seeing the positions taken and their application in other relational contexts in Brazil, so that the country can benefit from previous studies about the background of the coexistence in the borderline. For example, nowadays (2019) it is possible to informally observe different evaluations about the connections, tensions and reports from the decision-making center and from points in the border among Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Venezuela. If the gradation between integration/brotherhood and distancing/rivalry may work as an analysis between Brazil and Argentina, it may be appropriate to take into consideration different analytical schemes for distinct borderline points.

The perception and study about news on and from the border areas can lead to the formulation of suggestions to journalistic companies in these areas and to their radio broadcasters. We understand that the mobilization of local newspapers and radio stations to favor the integration and solution of factors related to tension can help disclosing coexistence issues for the communities to face it together. As we see it, journalistic social networks, portals, websites and blogs are much more favorable to the integration of printed newspapers that were circulating before the internet.

We do not think that the borderline press will make these political, cultural, economic and administrative changes. It can point out ideas based on a positive perspective within its limitations. Binational and bilingual newspapers are valid initiatives that deserve attention, but not as forced workarounds for the communities. The technological moment is quite appropriate to agreements between local journalistic companies.

We believe that inland and borderline press can sow the seeds of other understandings about the border, it can help discussing topics of common interest, can open new perspectives about acting and may create its own and complex sight about the area it covers. It is so to

the extent to which it interacts, or not, with the rich and complex spatiality of the border, as it provides its version of the “possible world”, with or without considering the foreign neighbor alterity.

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Received on: 02.08.2019

Accepted on: 09.12.2019

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