

Book Review



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A Synthesis of the Cultural History of the Brazilian Press (1980–2010): Traces and Vestiges of a Journalism in Transformation Toward the Construction of “Media Time”

Uma síntese da história cultural da imprensa brasileira no Brasil entre 1980 e 2010: rastros e vestígios de um jornalismo em transformação para a construção do “tempo midiático”

Una síntesis de la historia cultural de la prensa brasileña en Brasil entre 1980 y 2010: rastros y vestigios de un periodismo en transformación hacia la construcción del “tiempo mediático”

Book Review of:

BARBOSA, Marialva. **Cultural History of the Press: The Present Time – Brazil 1980–2010**. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad X, 2024.

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Abstract

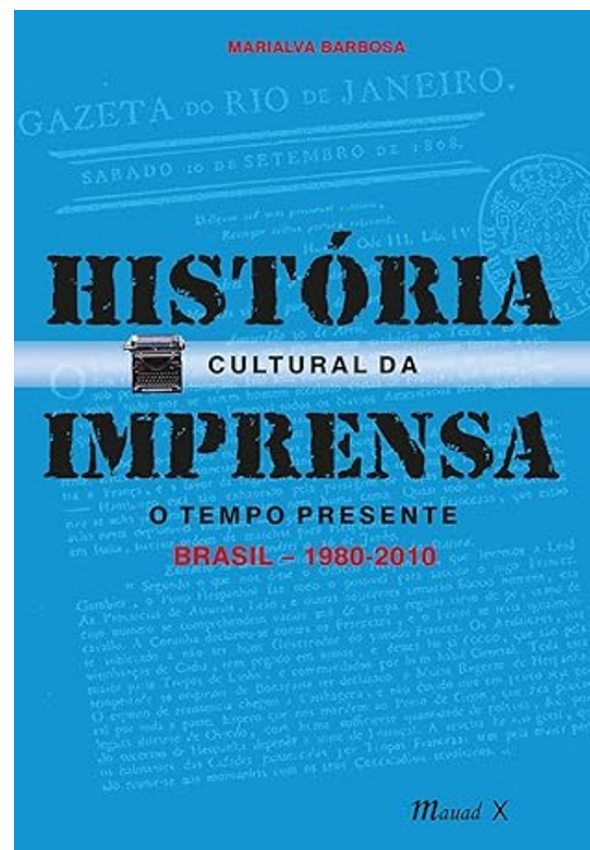
This text presents a review of the book *História Cultural da Imprensa – o tempo presente – 1980–2010*, written by researcher Marialva Barbosa. Published in 2024 by Mauad, the work offers a historical panorama of the contemporary Brazilian press, subtly divided into two sections. The first, titled *Relembraças: o dentro* (“Remembrances: the inside”), and the second, *Relembraças: o fora* (“Remembrances: the outside”), articulate the author’s varying degrees of proximity and distance from the events and narratives she recounts. The result is a subtle and engaging narrative about the paths taken by the Brazilian press over a thirty year period.

Keywords: Press; Brazil; History; Journalism.

Resumo

Esse texto apresenta uma resenha do livro sobre “História cultural da imprensa - o tempo presente – de 1980 -2010”, de autoria da pesquisadora Marialva Barbosa. A obra lançada em 2024 pela editora Mauad traça um panorama histórico da imprensa brasileira contemporânea, sutilmente dividida em duas partes. A primeira parte denominada de Relembraças, aborda “o dentro” e a segunda, Relembraças, “o fora”, para registrar a proximidade e o distanciamento com que a autora se relaciona com os fatos e as histórias que são contadas, em uma narrativa sutil e envolvente sobre os caminhos trilhados pela imprensa brasileira no arco desses trinta anos.

Palavras-chave: Imprensa; Brasil; História; Jornalismo.



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Marialva Barbosa is a full professor at the School of Communication of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (ECO/UFRJ). With a PhD in History, she is dedicated to the study of Communication and its connections with historical processes. The work *História Cultural da Imprensa – o tempo presente – Brasil 1980–2010* marks the conclusion of a trilogy developed by the researcher, whose two previous volumes addressed: first, the early years of the Brazilian press in the nineteenth century—an important contribution to the study of the transition from monarchy to republic (1800–1900); and second, *História Cultural da Imprensa: Brasil 1900–2000*, which offers a panorama of the press in Rio de Janeiro from the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century through the early years of the twenty-first century, demonstrating the influence of the press in Brazil.

Fourteen years after the publication of the second book, in 2024, the author presents yet another contribution to studies of the Brazilian press. The work *História Cultural da Imprensa – o tempo presente 1980–2010* is divided into two distinct parts: the first, titled *Relembraças: o dentro* (“Remembrances: the inside”), and the second, *Relembraças: o fora* (“Remembrances: the outside”). Before these two parts, in the Introduction, the author presents the challenges, questions, and motivations that guided the writing of the book. Barbosa makes her intentions clear by drawing on Walter Benjamin’s dialectical model. She revisits her previous books carefully, ensuring she does not repeat herself. Given the impossibility of delving into the extensive content of the work in full, this review selects the points that most engaged us within the universe of a book that synthesizes thirty years of the Brazilian press.

Part I refers to the spaces of movement between territory and the researcher’s own memory as she assembles the puzzle of the history of the Brazilian press. This first part is composed of three chapters that seek to elucidate the history of the Brazilian press, with the subtle approach of someone who followed and observed all developments from the Rio–São Paulo axis.

This chapter presents the process and pursuit of modernization in the press after twenty-one years of civil-military dictatorship. According to the author, the arrival of modern computers in newsrooms became a true symbol of new times for the Brazilian press:

“A década transforma-se num tempo de interregno entre um mundo que gradualmente deixava de ser analógico para tornar-se digital” (BARBOSA, 2024, p. 16).

The changes were not only the result of technological advances but also of a liberal economic project that transformed the journalistic profession:

“Essas empresas adotam o modelo taylorista nas indústrias de mídia, seguindo os padrões neoliberalistas advogados pela política e pelo mercado (com mais intensidade a partir do governo de Fernando Collor [1990–1992])” (BARBOSA, 2024, p. 17).

Drawing on an important survey of the concentration of daily newspapers in state capitals, Barbosa conducts a national-level investigation of afternoon and morning papers that disappeared between 1960 and 1979. Using the 1960s as a reference point, she offers a radiography of the Brazilian press and its transformation during the period.

At the end of each chapter in Part I, a section titled *Iluminuras* (“Illuminations”) presents the foundational concepts that guided the author’s investigative process, including key authors, research, and sources, intended to “illuminate” the reader and stimulate historical inquiry. At the end of the chapter, Barbosa suggests that the modern journalism of the 1980s supplanted the previous movement, identifying it as backwardness, and presents several foundational concepts for the chapters: “present time,” “liberalism and neoliberalism,” and “modern.”

The title makes an analogy to Danilo Angrimani’s classic study *Espreme que sai sangue* (1995). Barbosa (2024) focuses on newspapers labeled as sensationalist but that self-identify as popular, or as the “new popular journalism.” These periodicals, targeted—according to the commercial departments of media companies—at classes C and D, are identified as newspapers “made for the people” and that reveal the “culture of the people.”

Sensationalism in the press, with the popularization of narratives, had its first moment in the early twentieth century. The second occurred between 1920 and 1930, when newspapers were entirely dedicated to criminal narratives. A third movement of “newspapers for the people” emerged in the 1950s, when conflicts intensified among the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB), the National Democratic Union (UDN), and the newspapers *Última Hora*, *Tribuna da Imprensa*, and *Luta Democrática*. In the 1970s, *O Dia* (Rio de Janeiro) and *Notícias Populares* (São Paulo) marked the apex of the genre, displaying the grotesque and the scatological in their



pages. The final movement identified in the publication occurs in the 1990s, with *O Dia* and *Extra*, both in Rio de Janeiro.

This is an important reflection that seeks to understand “What people is this?”, what sensationalist newspapers aim to reach in the “world C”: their characteristics, desires, and interpretations of sensations, and what they seek in the “new popular journalism,” grounded in gossip, sports, city news, politics, and services. The chapter ends with *Illuminuras*, presenting a treatise on the popular press and “the people,” with pathways for deepening the themes and a catalog of authors.

This chapter begins with a retrospective of magazine stands in the 1980s and 1990s, through the widely discussed segmentation of the magazine market. The reflection on the meaning of the explosion of this segment—driven by competition for readers and a multimillion-dollar advertising market—is detailed throughout the chapter.

Using official publication data, the editorial market and its companies are presented in a didactic and fluid manner. In 1987, 488 magazines were identified and categorized by genre, with fourteen subcategories. Data on the profile of Brazilian readers are related to magazine segmentation:

“O hábito de ler é maior nas chamadas classes A e B e naqueles que possuem maior grau de instrução” (BARBOSA, 2024, p. 76).

Some data, such as “women surpass men,” also reflect the growth of magazines like *Manequim*, *Nova*, and *Capricho*. Another highlight is the emergence of magazines aimed at specific segments such as surfing, volleyball, boxing, and diving. Publications on computing and youth-oriented magazines also proliferated.

The memory and part of the history of *Veja*—the fifth best-selling news magazine in the world—are included in this chapter. The author’s perspective, under the sign of magazine consumption, demonstrates that female and youth audiences were the preferred targets of the sector. A reproduced excerpt from an interview with Roberto Civita, founder of Editora Abril, emphasizes the need to conduct research, talk to readers, and monitor sales and subscriptions routinely to maintain a slow but reliable indicator of performance.

The *Illuminuras* section emphasizes context as a decisive factor for interpretation, especially because the author herself was part of this context. According to data on poverty and hunger, she belonged to a quantitative minority of readers amid the increase and segmentation of publications at newsstands.

In this chapter, the author presents her research justifications for shifting the analytical focus beyond the Rio–São Paulo axis and seeking references in the press of Pará and Amazonas, in the field of Communication and beyond. Her initial observation is that the fear and violence constructed by printed media contributed to the exclusion of those living in these territories.

Through a multifaceted—though incomplete—perspective, the author recognizes a silence regarding contemporary issues, due to both proximity and distance in relation to media discourses. The discussion of historical approaches, which may be generalist or particularist, places at the center the question of “scale variation,” as a way to break with silences and macro-structural hegemonic logics, addressing the diverse histories of the press in Brazil by bringing new dimensions of the Brazilian press regardless of context.

In the capital of Pará, two issues are highlighted. The first is the relationship between media and local power; the second is the narrative grounded in the popular, both of which are linked to the region’s exclusion—a press on the margins due to its distance from the country’s major political, economic, and urban centers. Terms such as regional media, journalistic regions, interior press, border media, and peripheral media were catalogued by the author.

At the end of the chapter, in addition to the provocations raised, three important points about the history of media in the Amazon region of Pará in the early decades of the twenty-first century are identified.

1. The first concerns the perverse consequences of coloniality as a determining factor in the complex processes of exclusion materialized in daily newspapers.
2. The second concerns local oligarchic power, which allows politicians to filter the information made available.
3. The third concerns the dominance of the tragic and of violence in the periodicals.

This chapter addresses the first decade of the twenty-first century and the production of uncertainties regarding form and processes in the mainstream press and in newspapers produced by non-hegemonic groups. With digitalization, there was an expectation of democratization of communication production, but this did not occur:

“A democracia da informação se transformou, algumas décadas depois, no barulho em

incerteza da desinformação, utilizada cientificamente e com método” (BARBOSA, 2024, p. 126).

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a multiplication of media outlets for social movements, coinciding with the political moment and the restoration of democratic order. Over time, these outlets diminished and migrated to digital platforms.

After years of silence due to the dictatorship, those considered divergent—women, homosexuals, and Black people—gradually gained public expression through the press. In the archives of the National Information Service (SNI), in 1980, this type of press was classified as “alternative” and highly pernicious, as part of a dossier on the Alternative Press. Another label attributed to some groups was “subversive organizations.”

The movement and its press are presented through research in repression archives, including *Nêgo*, the newspaper of the Unified Black Movement, among others. A reference chart listing the press of Black movements from 1980 to 1990 is organized by the author, totaling 68 periodicals in the country.

In the section “Giving voice to other movements,” an important record from the 1990s is presented, based on annual information reports from the Army, concerning divergent press outlets as well as institutions responsible for editions of “Popular Movements.”

In this chapter, the author explains her paths—often nonlinear—so that the history of the press may be reflected in Brazilian research. She expresses a sense of resentment regarding the erasure suffered by Communication studies. This occurs due to the lack of research groups in the main scientific associations of the field. The result is the prevalence of a “historical perspective” culminating in what the author calls the “eternal ultra-present.”

She identifies three tendencies:

1. research based on fragments, pieces, and misaligned temporalities;
2. what she calls a “shameful history”;
3. and a questioning of the need for synthetic works.

The chapter concludes with an appendix listing Communication dissertations produced between 2019 and 2020, totaling 18 dissertations.

The final considerations are titled *Iluminuras Finais* (“Final Illuminations”). In “Time: final scenario,” the author proposes to show how the theoretical question of time was the central category of the many reflections developed throughout the book. A range of authors is cited to compose the theoretical framework and the choices made for the work, such as Carlo Rovelli, Paul Ricoeur, and Reinhart Koselleck.

Historicities—the philosophical dimension of being and time—are reworked through the three temporal instances: future, past, and present, as historical-analytical elements. Thus, an interconnection between historicity and time is established through digressions by authors such as Ricoeur and Heidegger, in a process of epistemological construction of the term historicity.

Finally, time and narrative, as a poetics of history based on Ricoeur’s theoretical contributions, form the basis for the proposition of a concept: “media time,” a new field to be explored by media historians.

The author clarifies the possible incompleteness of the reflections and inflections on time, without neglecting the fundamental methodological connector: the traces and vestiges of the past, archives and documents, as well as the constant state of the art or of knowledge in major research databases and academic journals. All of this enabled a large volume of research findings that compose this work of broad scope and powerful reflective dimensions, characterized by synthesis and aimed at contributing to the understanding and deepening of a history of the Brazilian press in the present time, with a thirty-year focus from 1980 to 2010. A good read for anyone who wishes to venture into and learn about the Brazilian press of the present time.

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