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Paper: *Partisanship versus professionalism: the role of the journalist in the democratization process*

6.1. Introduction

Journalism in Brazil in the last two decades has been immersed in the contradictions of the consolidation of political representative democracy since 1985 and the effect of the entry of the country into the global free market. Many South American countries which left authoritarian regimes in the 1980's struggled in the 1990's to endorse fully the tradition of US classic liberal journalism with its values of objectivity and professionalism. Waisbord (2000) has argued that the print press during this period maintained its close-knit ties to the state in a reality which saw the continuity of the highly politicised nature of many of Brazil's institutions.

The press in the contemporary years was thus plunged into the conflicts concerning citizenship and consumerism rationales: on one hand it functioned as a restricted arena of public debate in response to growing democratisation and popular political participation, on the other it had to attend to increasing marketing demands. Such tensions were a result of the strengthening of political civil democracy and the need of markets to expand. This forced the mainstream press to represent wider views, to criticise authority and to engage in critical surveillance over the activities of the state. Market liberal democracy thus gave the media capacity to modernise its practices and to invest in professionalization procedures, with

newsrooms seeing the decline of partisan routines and the flourishing of the objectivity regime.

The shift from the practice of militant journalism to a commercial model notably shaped Brazilian journalism significantly in the last decades. The development and industrialization of Brazil from the 1970's onwards ran parallel to the creation of a wider and more sophisticated consumerist society (Nassif, 2003), one which demanded the attention of markets. The rise of professionalism and objectivity in the Brazilian newsroom was part of the whole process of professionalization and modernization of Brazilian media industries, such as *Globo Organizations*, the publisher magazine group *Abril* and the newspaper *Folha*. In journalism, this was exemplified mainly by the 1984 *FSP* reforms and the emphasis placed by the daily on an understanding of news as a product, and of the role of journalists as objective professionals, a debate examined in Chapter 2. However, the transformation that journalism experienced in the last years did not result in a total break with the journalistic militant practices of the past. Journalism continued to be shaped by both the different interests of news organizations as well as by the political and economic environment in which it was immersed, thus remaining ambiguously defined in the contemporary phase.

Given the favouring of the professional and objective journalism style over partisanship in the decades of the 1980's and 1990's, one might ask how did journalists manage to contribute to advance democracy and promote social and political change if they relied mainly on instrumental tools (professionalism) rather than idealistic ones (militancy)? Was any contribution possible if newsrooms had substituted idealistic and political concerns for more technical worries regarding news-making, such as catchy headlines, human interest stories and the use of journalism routines of objectivity and accuracy? The critical examination of the press' coverage of the presidential elections from 1989 to 2002 pursued here has indicated that professionalism and objectivity in contradictory ways grew from the

coverage of one election to the next, and that this contributed for a fairer and complex portrayal of Brazilian politics and society.

Contrary to what one might imagine at first, these liberal journalism values were crucial for the incorporation of wider debates in the mainstream media, and for the treatment of counter-discourses and left-wing aspirations as democratic and legitimate. Naturally, this was a result of the ongoing democratization of Brazil and a consequence also of the pressures placed by members of the population, civil society representatives and new political leaders on the media system in opposition to the influence of traditional business and oligarchic political elites, who previously had most of the attention of the communication vehicles. Thus through balance the media were able to reflect more the (elite) divisions and political disputes that were occurring in Brazilian society over the direction that Brazil should take in the post-dictatorship phase.

This chapter will argue that journalists *did* make contributions to the democratisation process through the use of multiple journalism identities. In the contemporary years, however, these contributions were mainly made possible through journalists' commitment to progressive readings of professionalism and social responsibility. The limits imposed on these contributions were less related to issues of the use or not of liberal journalism values of objectivity, and were more a consequence of political and economic (market) pressures. This chapter will argue that the professional model and objective regime are not flawed, and that they actually did contribute to a more mature and advanced discussion of Brazilian politics and representation of its multiple interests in the last two decades. If the dictatorship period saw the functioning of wider political constraints, the contemporary phase was perhaps more dominated by economic limits although, as we have seen, political interests did and still do pose a series of threats on journalism practice.

The cases of journalism bias which I highlighted in the textual analysis done on news stories of the presidential elections were examples of the reflection on media messages of the partisanship practices that still exist in newsrooms as well as the politicised nature of news organisations, in spite of alleged commitments to objectivity. This is why some radical critiques (i.e. Kucinski, 1998) attacked the mainstream press, accusing the professional model of being flawed and media industries of having favoured candidates who represented the views of the establishment.

Objectivity and balance are thus crucial elements in journalists' attempts to explain an increasingly complex world which goes beyond one-sided arguments, rigid ideological or class conflict maximums (Lichtenberg, 2000). Thus I defend here a continuous strengthening of professional journalism practices combined with public service commitments and social responsibility ideals. This chapter engages in international debates concerning the cultures of liberal journalism before focusing on the particular case of Brazilian contemporary journalism, supporting the argument that in fact both journalism cultures co-existed during the contemporary phase. Interpretative journalism and commentary analysis have also seen a significant expansion in Brazil, with new technologies and the Internet facilitating the emergence of political blogs in mainstream newspapers.

Thus the tradition of opinionated journalism has maintained its influence, although interpretative journalism has functioned very much within the ideals of objectivity. The evidence gathered here suggests that in general the Brazilian press was at its best when it produced an equivoque coverage which gave rise to professionalism over ideological biases or sensationalism. Exceptions go to the direct elections campaign or other moments such as the Collor impeachment process, when journalists were not "objective" but rather assumed a non-partisan stance in favour of universal democratic ideals, having produced nonetheless a solid press coverage that contributed to pressure for change. Thus the competing journalism

cultures of objectivity and partisanship, and their relevance to Brazilian journalism, is the core debate investigated in this chapter.

6.2. Balance and fairness in Brazilian journalism: the partisanship versus professionalism debate

Academics and historians (i.e. Schudson, 1978; Curran, 1985, Hallin, 2000) have examined the changes in the American and European press from the 18th/19th centuries onwards, addressing the impacts that these modifications had in the transformation of news into a commodity in the 20th century and examining the decline of the partisanship press amid the development of the current commercial ideal. In Chapter 1, I examined how Brazilian journalism was transformed during the two centuries of its existence (Seabra, 2002). We saw the emergence of the Brazilian press in the end of the 19th century until the plural and final phase, which began around the 1970's. Waisbord (2000; 124) has argued that the model of commercial journalism gained presence in South America around the 1920's and 1930's, with the proliferation of a consumer market and the rise of a middle class with increasing economic and political influence. By the 1950's the Brazilian media were already considered to be commercial enterprises. However, the industrial character of the Brazilian media was maximized mainly from the 1970's and 1980's onwards in the light of the slow transition to democracy and the entry of the country back in the realm of market liberalism.

Critics and academics (Alzira de Abreu, 2003) have argued how the mainstream media during the military dictatorship period tended to stick more to officialdom practices, rarely engaging in cases of political criticism in opposition to the more explicit militant journalism style of the alternative press. The later bloomed because of its engagement with watchdog

journalism and exposure of human rights abuses, thus assuming a more political dissident role under the authoritarian military regime (1964-1984) (Kucinski, 1991; Waisbord, 2002).¹ It soon disappeared however amid the return of the country to civil democracy, and also as a consequence of the suffocation imposed on these dailies by the generals throughout the dictatorship years.

However, journalists and the mainstream media would have a significant role in the pressures to accelerate the return to civil democracy (Nassif, 2003; Alzira de Abreu, 2001; Conti, 1999), with the particular case of the *FSP* coverage of the direct elections campaign being an emblem of such efforts. As we have seen, a last breath of *auteur* journalism and militancy was felt in the *FSP* coverage during this movement, with the daily soon afterwards embracing commercialization and the free market/watchdog journalism theory. Thus conflicts between professionalism and objectivity versus partisanship in the context of the decline of militant journalism practices in newsrooms were debates which dominated the last two decades. Newspapers jiggled between consumerism and citizenship rationales, with journalists assuming both public service ideals as well as commitments to an understanding of news as a commodity.

Journalists interviewed for this research have positioned themselves differently in relation to the role that the press had in the process of contribution to political and social change. Some journalists endorsed a radical position which was somewhat nostalgic of the type of journalism conducted during the military regime years. These were seen as being part of a 'golden era' of rational and intelligent journalism militancy. Such critiques dismissed the contemporary years as being too market-driven, not acknowledging an expansion in professionalism and in the public debate that occurred in the mainstream media during this phase. These years have thus been seen by critics as having been dominated by conservative thinking (Carta, 2003; Arbex Jr., 1999; Kucinski, 1998). They practically did not recognise,

or minimised, the contributions that journalists and contemporary journalism made to the democratisation project following the end of the dictatorship.

Others painted a more 'realistic' and complex picture, recognizing both improvements as well as regressions (i.e. Coelho, Lins da Silva, Nassif, Freitas, Ventura), although some have opted to celebrate the powers of the market. As discussed in Chapter 2, the mainstream press during the dictatorship was very much allied with the regime, engaging in little resistance to it. Exceptions included the cases of the publication of poems by *ESP*, the *Veja* stories of human rights abuse and other political pieces done through the hands of the then newsroom director Mino Carta, responsible for launching the magazine (Alzira de Abreu, 2003). These facts make romantic views of a 'golden' era of journalism and rational public debate problematic.

Consequently, contemporary journalism and liberal journalism values of objectivity have been considered by some of these radical critiques as contributing to the decline of journalism's commitment to democratic ideals. General worries have been expressed in relation to the limits imposed on the extension of public debate because of the favouring of consumerism and marketing strategies by media firms, with liberal journalism values being seen as working to support the structures of the status quo, thus disengaging public service ideals in journalism. I consider this a partial and limited reading of the whole picture. Discussions on these classic journalism principles, such as why balance and professionalism are still valid to journalism today, must be explored first in order to set the Brazilian case in a clearer context.

6.2.1. *International perspectives on objectivity*

According to US historians, journalists and academics (Waisbord, 2002; Tumber, 1999; Schudson, 1978), a more sophisticated reading of the ideal of objectivity gained strength amongst American journalists because of their continuous questioning of their own subjectivity. Beliefs that human beings cannot be objective started to grow. Subjectivity was seen as needing to be subjected to standard methods and practices. Historians and journalists have arguably linked the rise of objectivity in journalism in the 1920's, and its transformation into a liberal journalism consensus, to various causes. These include the development of the dominance of scientific thought in Western civilizations and of social sciences and philosophy in the light of journalists' own questioning of the validity of facts. Objectivity was also seen as vital for publishers and their needs to move away from highly politicized publications that could alienate audiences. It also began to be considered a necessity by journalists who wanted their work to be taken seriously and to be valued professionally, and in this way be less subject to attacks of bias and misrepresentation (Tumber, 1999; Merritt, 1995; Schudson, 1978; Tuchman, 1972).

The introduction of the electric telegraph in the 1840's has also been mentioned as a crucial factor associated to the emergence of news objectivity as a professional ideal, with the wire service reporting helping to secure the codification of objectivity as a normative standard (Stuart Allan, 1997; 306). The model of "information" and factual journalism, for instance, was mainly represented by the success of the *New York Times* since the 1890's. According to Schudson, journalists had a naïve empirical understanding of objectivity then. After the First World War, a more sophisticated reading of objectivity emerged, one in which

facts were taken to be not aspects of the world, but validated statements about it (Schudson, 1978, 194). By the 1960's, both critics of the press and defenders of objectivity saw this value as being an emblem of American journalism, standing in contrast to the more sensationalism and party-press style of journalism practiced throughout Europe (Schudson, 1978; Tumber, 1999).

Critics have argued how objectivity serves as a defense system for journalists and news organizations to repudiate charges of bias (Tuchman, 1972, 1999). Tuchman (1972) has stated that professional norms produce stories that support the existing order. She has examined the newsman's notion of objectivity by focusing on some standard journalism practices, such as the presentation of all sides of a story during a period of time (the balance criteria) and use of quotation marks to include opinions of interviewees, procedures which guarantee ways of the journalist defending his work. Journalists can thus claim that their material is "objective", and that the positions are not theirs but that of other people. Nonetheless, journalists are admitting more and more that institutional and personal values can intervene in news selection, and that partisan distortions can be inevitable (Waisbord, 2000; 150). This is why academics and historians (i.e. Schudson, 1978, Merritt, 1995; Baker, 2002) have attacked objectivity, stating further that such a principle does not exist and serves only to maintain the structures of the establishment, limiting discussions and promoting public passivity.

Scholars however disagree on what should be put in the place of the objectivity regime. Some favour the substitution of objectivity for more mobilizing journalism formats capable of engaging wider publics, but differ in the ideological ways and practices of doing this (i.e. Merritt, 1995; Baker, 2002). Balance is also accused by some critiques as being a centrist ideology, a mere balancing of opinion of elite groups, something which eventually restricts journalism's commitment to public debate. In his defense of the centrality of the existence of

partisan media, which can be controlled by groups who engage in civic mobilization, Baker (2002, 201-202) condemns balance as being “the last thing that mobilizing media need”.

The detachment stance associated to objectivity has also come under heavy attack from segments of the US public journalism school. Worried about the retreat of the Americans into private life and their disinterest in public affairs, Merritt (1995) states that “telling the news” is not enough. He argues that the professions’ own means of survival is dependent on the revitalization of public life. Merritt (1995, 365) views objectivity as stimulating journalists’ detachment from reality. He sees balance as the presentation of issues by journalists in extreme opposing ways, all of which contribute to disengage debate. Nonetheless, I believe that the creation of public debate can be achieved through a critical engagement with the notion of balance and the realization of a critical dialogue between the press and its society. Civic journalism however has also come under attack by critiques of liberal journalism values, and has been considered by some (i.e. Baker, 2002) as mere good intentions of market liberals. In his criticism of the practice of civic journalism in some newspapers in the US, Baker (2002, 160-161) notes the differences between social responsibility and civic journalism, undermining the latter as being a “refined technique for legitimizing the existing order without challenging major...structures of domination”.

Such critiques are missing the point. They are placing too much the blame for the decline of public life and the worldwide journalism crisis on liberal journalism cultures. The issue of the decrease of interest in public affairs runs much deeper. It can be argued – but this again can be open to debate – that it is strictly related to the decline of the modernist project, the increase in relativism, rise in cynicism and fall of ideologies. Hallin (1994; 11) has argued that the problems with political life in the US are political and not just journalistic problems, and that their solution lies in part with political parties and social movements, although he stresses that some initiative from journalism is also essential. Journalism worldwide is thus

reflecting this decline of civic commitment because an increasing part of society *is* actually uninterested in politics and public life. This is especially so in the advanced capitalist societies of the West, which have seen the rise of public relations professionals and professional politicians who are strictly involved in public affairs, and who alienate the wider public. The latter are slowly retreating into the private sphere because of this.

This is also not a new phenomenon of the post-60's 'post-modern' period. Lippmann (1922) in the 1920's had already detected the little amount of time that most people spend with informing themselves on public affairs, and how most people have confused ideas in their heads in relation to politics and to other interests which transcend their small circle of friends. Thus the decline of interest in politics is a complex phenomenon which I do not aim to explore here. Nonetheless, it can be argued that in the case of Brazil, the ongoing democratization process in the last two decades has produced actually the opposite, mainly a rise in political mobilization, especially in the context of the presidential elections, as we have seen. However, such sentiments have co-existed with disillusionment and apathy of various segments of the population, especially in the last years with the disappointments caused by the governments of Cardoso and Lula.

Arguably, certain aspects of the professional model – such as journalism's hostility to politics and the blind endorsement of some reporters of technical issues – can contribute to undermine public engagement. But I believe that the *essence* of the professional and objective regime does not. For it is important that journalists put aside their own personal prejudices to produce honest reporting which includes contending interpretations of political issues (Hackett and Zhao, 1998, 230). As Hallin (1994, 7) argues, the best journalism combines professional commitment, accuracy and balance with a sense of compassion. The main attacks on objectivity, according to Lichtenberg (2000, 238), come from critics who say that the media have misrepresented their views. This implies that fairness can be achieved

somehow. Lichtenberg (2000) argues further that most critics state mainly that journalism is not, cannot and should not be objective. These charges are grounded on relativism and post-modern beliefs which consider reality to be socially constructed and the “truth” to be impossible to achieve:

“We cannot coherently abandon the ideal of objectivity and, whatever they may think, objectivity critics do not abandon it either. To claim that a piece of journalism piece is not objective is to say that it fails to provide the truth.. How do we know that American news accounts on the Gulf War are partial, except by comparison with some other actual or possible accounts? We know how to distinguish between better and worse, more or less accurate accounts...” (Lichtenberg, 2000; 241-242).

Thus I wish here to pursue a defence of objectivity, endorsing Lichtenberg’s (2000) point of view that we must not abandon this ideal if we aim to take journalism seriously, judging its standards on the basis of which readings of the world are more accurate than others. As we have seen in the case studies of this research, this was exactly the core of the complaints posed by centre-left wing politicians during mainly the first presidential elections held after the post-dictatorship and also afterwards. They argued that the press was not producing a balanced coverage, one capable of representing their views in equal light. In my research I contrasted the more objective stories in opposition to the biased articles, stressing the accounts which were considered “better” or presented a more coherent picture of the contradictory Brazilian reality. As we have seen, ideological biases produced one-sided arguments, contributing for the continuity of an uncritical stance in relation to official candidates (see appendices of Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5).

Evidently, the balance regime hides a social and political struggle over media access. As Hackett and Zhao (1998, 88) state, the objectivity regime persists precisely because “it does offer openings, however unequal, to different social and cultural groups”. But then what should we make of the accusations that news professionalism (Tuchman, 1972, 1999) can also be seen as an effective means of controlling journalists’ behaviour ? Professionalism, as discussed in Chapter 1, is a double-edged sword. It can be empowering for journalists because it can afford them more editorial autonomy, safeguarding them from both internal and external pressures from media management, government and shareholders (Hallin, 2000).

Professionalism can also mean many different things to different people, and journalists often have a vague understanding of it. Curran notes (1996, 101) rightly that journalists are not given the credentials and regulatory controls of other professions, which leaves journalists with an ambiguous status which can both weaken their vocation as well as create confusions. Soloski (1989, 1999; 310) has observed also that news professionalism controls journalists through the setting of standards, norms of behaviour and the reward and punishment systems. Soloski correctly points to how this control is not total because professionalism “provides journalists with an independent power base” while also affording journalists “too much freedom”, with news organizations adopting procedures again to limit this same professionalism.

Hallin (2000) is in favour of retaining the philosophy of professionalism as a means of safeguarding journalism practice from economic and political pressures. I endorse this view. Hallin (2000) laments that in the US professionalism has declined in the newsroom due to marketing pressures. He points out that the events which followed the Cold War consensus war, such as Vietnam, Watergate and the pressures of civil rights movements, diminished ‘objective journalism’ in the US, opening the way for the trend towards interpretative journalism and subjectivity, which has been taken up by much of the media in Europe as

well. I tend to disagree here on this last point, as I do not necessarily see these trends as opposites. An analytical journalism stance should not be seen as opposite to objectivity, for it seems evident that a certain ideal of objectivity can be maintained in more interpretative and creative accounts of the world.

In his analysis of the media coverage of the Vietnam War, Hallin affirmed how the changing political environment led to modifications in news reporting. Objectivity permitted certain views to be treated as acceptable, when before they were not. He concluded that backing or critique of policies depends on the degree of consensus that these enjoy amongst the political establishment (Tumber, 1999, 288). When consensus is strong, the media plays a relatively passive role and tends to reinforce official power. Nonetheless, when political elites are divided, they become more active. For Hallin, objectivity and balance reign in the middle region, which he calls the sphere of legitimate controversy. This stands in between the spheres of consensus and of deviance. It is in the sphere of controversy that electoral contests and legislative debates take place (Hallin, 1986, 1999; 331).

Professionalism was consolidated in the US in the mid-40's, having had its roots in the 'information' journalism model led in part by *The New York Times* (Hallin, 2000; Schudson, 1978). The notion that the press should attend to the public derives from the values of professionalism of the Progressive Era in the US (Hallin, 2000). Journalism developed an ethic of public service grounded on the assumption that journalists should serve the public, and not particular partisan or commercial interests. This was tied to the endorsement of the social responsibility model defended by the Commission on Freedom of the Press, which was already then identifying an expanding trend in media ownership and commercialization, and was worried that this could work against the public interest, undermining responsible reporting.

The Hutchins Commission report thus articulated the “social responsibility” theory of the press, which had deep roots in the American liberal tradition (Hallin, 2000). It identified five responsibilities for the press, such as 1) to provide an intelligent account of the day’s events through a commitment to objective reporting; 2) to serve as a forum for the exchange of criticisms; 3) to represent diverse groups in society; 4) to present the goals of society and 5) to serve the public’s right to be informed. Media scholars have stated that this report and its reassessment in the Cold War classic, *Four Theories of the Press*, would become the universal model for journalism practice worldwide (Baker, 2002, 154). Nonetheless, the “social responsibility” role of journalists, and the points set out by the commission, has been criticized by those who demand that the media in capitalist societies adhere more to democratic interests (i.e. Baker, 2002).

As discussed in the last chapters, the consolidation of balance in Brazilian journalism, and the favouring of a professional and, to a certain extent, a social responsibility role of journalists permitted the views from non-elite players to be treated as legitimate. In the last chapter we saw how the press maintained objectivity standards, rarely having succumbed to the partisan pressures of segments of the financial market. We also saw how the Cardoso era was marked by a consensus amongst certain elite groups, with little media critique emerging until 1999. After that, the media started to reflect more the divisions in Brazilian society concerning Fernando Henrique’s administration. I also discussed how this process of incorporation of social positions and counter-discourses in the media pages was something that happened gradually, having started in the post-dictatorship phase with the *diretas*.

Thus liberal journalistic principles such as objectivity and social responsibility have remained important tools for journalism in its relation to democracy. These should not be underestimated by those who sometimes place excessive and unrealistic demands on media systems and journalists. The contemporary years in Brazil combined multiple and diverse

readings of such liberal journalism values, with certain journalists focusing on social responsibility and public service ideals whilst others emphasized objective detachment.

6.2.2. *In between two journalisms: militant/romantic journalism versus professionalism*

Market liberalism thus paved the way for the media to embark on the free market press/watchdog thesis, expanding watchdog and investigative reporting, increasing professionalism and improving its political coverage. In such a context the values of romanticism and idealism, associated with the type of militant journalism which was practiced more in newsrooms of the 1970's, gave way in the 1990's to pragmatism and to less creative journalism routines. As the case studies of this research have shown, a total rupture with the values of the past was not made in the aftermath of the dictatorship. Conflicts arose in relation to different understandings of the role of the journalist due to tensions which exist between politicized Brazilian institutions and increasing marketing demands.

Journalists in the last two decades thus switched in sometimes contradictory ways between different journalism identities, assuming either a militant, detached and objective stance whilst others opted for a more libertarian view of journalism and others still for a more socially responsible one. Journalists thus might not have embraced fully impartiality or objectivity (Lins da Silva, 1991), but they showed wider commitments to facticity (Waisbord, 2000), professionalism, balance and social responsibility.

Many journalists interviewed here work today for the mainstream media and have been veteran journalists, experiencing the shifts between the two journalisms. These journalists adapted social responsibility and public service ideals to the demands of a more market-driven media environment. Two opposing camps were formed: one which favours a return to

partisan forms of journalism or to more militant or citizenship understandings of news (Dines, 2003, Kucinski, 1998), while another which defends objectivity combined with social responsibility concerns, but immersed within a market logic. Veteran journalist Bernardo Kucinski, who has written on the role of the alternative press during the dictatorship, practically denies the existence in mainstream newsrooms of centre to left-leaning journalists, be them sympathetic to the Worker's Party or not. He sees current journalism as too market-driven and journalists as passive professionals working in conservative environments. "You cannot say that there are *petistas* in the newsroom. It must have been a very short period when there were *petistas* in some newsrooms, actually when most were so, the students, the professors. Now you look at the papers – *ESP*, most are not, *JB*, no, *Globo*, now, and then there is *Folha*. It was in *Folha* that this thesis was developed..”.

This is a somewhat simplistic view of the whole picture. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the mainstream media during the dictatorship period was heavily censored, with few cases of resistance of journalists in comparison to the alternative press. The mainstream vehicles which were the most censored were *Estado de São Paulo*, *Veja* and the newspapers *Jornal do Brasil* and *Folha de São Paulo*, but in different periods and contexts (Alzira de Abreu, 2003; Carta, 2003). *Veja*, which was launched supported on a strong political and interpretive editorial line envisioned by Mino Carta, was one of the main mainstream vehicles that faced problems with censors. According to Carta, *Veja* was censored until 1976, when military pressure forced him out of the newsroom so that censorship could be uplifted (Alzira de Abreu, 2003).

Notably, the control of the media was practically high after the establishment of the AI-5 in 1968. During the 70's, preliminary censorship was introduced, with newspaper editions being read by censors who highlighted the themes which were considered unacceptable, threatening also to apprehend editions which published prohibited subjects. *ESP* for instance

published poems of Camões in the place reserved for stories which had been censored. Other forms of control included the direct intimidation of media firms and journalists, calls to newspaper owners and the handing over of lists to newsrooms of the forbidden topics of the day.

FSP columnist and veteran journalist, Janio de Freitas, emphasized how the climate of fear predominated in newsrooms during the 1970's. According to him, this culminated in journalists being told to leave newspapers and go home. Freitas has put in a more realistic perspective the nostalgic heroism that has been created around the period by some journalists: "The behaviour of the media was of total alliance with the regime. During most of the dictatorship years, I did not work in newspapers. I was part of the group of journalists who was not wanted by the regime. I did not work from 1964 to 1966. In 1967, in the beginning of the opening of the regime during the government of Costa and Silva, I was directing the newspaper *Última Hora*. This half liberty was maintained in reasonable conditions for journalism practice....The problem was that the regime wanted more from the mainstream press, and introduced censorship one more time..."

Concerns in regards to objectivity were a part also of the discussions of the dictatorship phase. Writing in the context of the repression of the military years, and worried about the "manipulation" of facts, the Brazilian academic Nilson Lage (1979, 24) made a case in favour of objectivity: "...the proposal of a language absolutely transparent, behind which the intact fact presents itself so that the reader can make his own judgment, led the journalists to a questioning attitude and gave them, in certain circumstances, the power of searching for their own equilibrium point..."(quoted in Moretzsohn, 2002, 203). Writing during the re-democratization years about the influences of the American model on Brazilian journalism, Lins da Silva (1990) also pointed out the distance between the recognition of a liberal democratic theory of the press and the activity of putting it in actual practice, tensions which

prevailed throughout the 1990's: "...in Brazil everyone says that they are objective but nearly no one is. ...this is in the sense of being very partisan in the coverage, with editorialized titles of stories and a clear preference for one political tendency or ideology, intentional distortion of facts to favour one particular view of the world" (1990, 101).

In this sense claims to objectivity have been always problematic in Brazil, a country pervaded by politicized institutions. Nonetheless, a sense of social responsibility towards Brazilian society and its problems has remained, functioning alongside professional values but in opposition to journalism partisanship or party militancy, which have been downplayed. Advocate of the importance of seeing the role of journalism as being embedded in public service values, *O Globo's* columnist and veteran journalist Zuenir Ventura has stressed that this value should not be confused with "political militancy": "I do not know if it is possible to speak of a generation that looks at journalism differently. We live in a moment in the country when a journalist can hardly chose to live without a social preoccupation because this is something so present in our lives. The social reality of Rio.. you trip on kids sniffing cocaine.. Any citizen from Rio or from any other city has to be very insensitive to this. You cannot confuse though the social responsibility role with political militancy. You cannot wear the shirt of any religion, party or firm....you have to go to a situation without pre-judgments."

Zuenir's reading of professionalism as social responsibility is one that many Brazilian elite journalists share, although others place more emphasis on the role of the press as mediator or transmitter of information in the model of a Fourth Estate. The editor-in-chief of *Reuters*, Mario de Andrada e Silva, underlines an "informational" role of the press, arguing that the function of the media is to "inform society about everything that it does not know and would like or needs to know". Bucci (2000), who has written widely on journalism ethics, affirms that in order for a journalist to be a good professional he must be a democrat by nature. These sentiments signal to the existence of links between instrumental liberal

journalism practices and the need to serve the interests of the public, thus exemplifying what journalism should – and in many ways does - stand for.

Citizenship rationales and the need to serve the public are thus not exclusive of journalism militant cultures or of the “old” generation of journalists of the 1970’s, as some radical critics have implied. It is not only elite journalists who favour social responsibility ideals either. Contrary to what it might seem at first, a certain segment of the journalists from the younger generation, like former *Globo Online* reporter Juliana Braga, have defended that the press should endorse more its role as a social mediator amid the intensification of the commercial pressures being placed on news organizations: “Journalism must have a social role, calling attention to the irregularities that exist in society and highlighting more the works of people who really contribute for the development of the country. I don’t believe the media has total freedom...But I think we have advanced more in relation to other historical periods in Brazil. Maybe the Brazilian media still do not know yet how to make total use of their new liberty..., which now is constrained more than ever by commercial interests...”.

Admittedly, the new generation of journalists who entered journalism in the post-dictatorship phase engaged in the profession equipped with different understandings of their role. Not all of them embraced public service ideals. These journalists were influenced by the US tradition of careerism, were more skeptical about party politics and less influenced by ideological dictums (Dimenstein, 1996; Kucinski, 1998). The ideology of professionalism is best exemplified by factors such as the rise in the educational levels of journalists, with the entrance in the field of college-trained reporters such as Braga, the creation of mechanisms of regulation of the profession and the opening of possibilities for journalists to pursue careers. Journalists can now be rewarded with prestigious prizes for their work.²

This entry of a whole new generation of journalists is a reflection and consequence of the increasing professionalization of Brazilian journalism since the 1970’s, with college diplomas

functioning as a dividing line between professional and nonprofessional reporting. A contrast to the old days, when journalist's passion and creative talent were considered more important than college education. Newsrooms of the past were crowded with bohemian reporters, struggling poets and aspiring politicians in contrast to the more computer-driven Internet generation of the 1990's. Thus on one hand if the expansion of professionalism gave new credibility and seriousness to the journalism profession, on the other hand it put the journalist on a similar level to other liberal professionals.

Journalist and academic José Arbex Jr. has evaluated this shift in the profession in the context of the discussion of the *FSP* 1984 reforms: "The 1984 reforms were difficult and hard. They had a lot of importance though because they consolidated the idea that journalism is a profession, and because of this it is subject to norms which must be respected like any other profession. This was very positive because it helped take the ideology out of Brazilian journalism and it created standards of excellence. It was also negative because it apparently transformed the journalism "product" in a product like any other, like a shirt or a shoe, for instance." In Chapter 2, I discussed how journalists like Arbex Jr, who wrote about *Folha* and its reforms, encountered difficulties in continuing to work in mainstream newsrooms with the rise of such values. Some of the things they found most problematic included the excessive marketing pressures placed on news and also the high individualism detected in the younger generation of journalists.

Veteran journalist Ricardo Kostcho, who worked for both periods, has hinted to the possibility of combining the best of the two models: "I think that romantic journalism was much more than a type of behaviour. For example, everyone used to smoke in the newsroom... The meeting to discuss news turned into something more bureaucratic which was held at 9 o'clock, when before it was at night, when each journalist used to go out, find their bosses and agree on something which would be done the next day. There was not much

discipline. In this sense I say that there were extremes. I think it is necessary to have discipline and time, but I think there must be liberty of creation and especially style”.

I endorse Kotscho’s idea of the possibility of combining the best elements of both worlds, a debate which is pursued in the conclusion of this thesis, where I defend the need to promote a complex media system that can attend more to the diverse interests of Brazilian groups, thus functioning with multiple journalism identities. That said, I believe that the objectivity ideal was a crucial journalism culture which mainstream newspapers like *Folha* and *O Globo* needed to incorporate, being elements which contributed to raise quality standards and diminish partisanship, guaranteeing equilibrium in the coverage of the presidential elections of the democratic period.

6.2.3. *Objectivity and information journalism in FSP and O Globo*

As stated before, the national mainstream *Folha* can be seen as standing for the emblem of the shifts between the two forms of journalism discussed above: the romantic/militant one of the 1970’s to the current professional model of contemporary journalism. Critics from a more radical position have attacked *Folha*’s reforms, as well as the objective stance on the grounds that it serves dominant conservative interests, stimulating passivity and conformity amongst journalists (Moretzsohn, 2002; Arbex Jr., 1999; Kucinski, 1998; 17). In her discussion of objectivity, Moretzsohn (2002) opposes professionalism to militancy, implying that the former automatically impedes the functioning of journalistic critique, considered inherent to the latter. Moretzsohn elects the newspaper *Folha* as a good example to discuss

the shifts between these two journalism forms, the militant having had its peak during the *Diretas Já* campaign and the professional standard emerging through the 1984 *FSP* reforms.

Arguably, *Folha* does admit in its 2001 editorial guideline (last version) that “there is no objectivity in journalism”. It also recognizes the existence of a plurality of opinions and interpretations, notes the impact of subjectivity in the various procedures of the news production process but states that the journalist should try to be “the most objective possible.” According to the manual, this means dealing with facts with “a certain distance and coldness”, which does not mean “apathy or indifference.” One could thus say that *Folha*’s reading of objectivity is somewhat in tune with the critical or sophisticated understanding of the term that Schudson referred to in his discussion of its rise and transformation in the US since the 1920’s. It also is defined somewhat along the lines depicted by Lichtenberg’s analysis.

However, in much the same way as the rest of the press in the contemporary phase, *Folha* also encountered difficulties in sticking to the model that it itself advocated because of the political disputes that overwhelmed Brazil in the post-dictatorship phase. Radical critics (i.e. Kucinski, 1998) accused the press of partiality, and of having defended the candidates of the establishment as well as having showed reluctance in engaging with social issues. As this research has shown, this was not exactly the case. Although Otavio Frias Filho, director of *FSP* newsroom and inheritor of the *Folha* group, admitted that owners tended to back the PSDB and journalists the PT, this research has argued that balance contributed to neutralize or diminish partisanship in newsrooms, with not all media vehicles explicitly endorsing the *tucano* agenda, and with critiques being articulated in the media pages on the candidates who represented the status quo. Moreover, dissent and contradiction were high in the media pages, with counter-discourses being legitimized eventually by the mainstream press whilst multiple groups were incorporated into market representations and dynamics.

Brazilian journalists who have worked with the objective ideal in contemporary journalism have also detected some limitations in relation to its use or some negative implications. *FSP* journalist Marcelo Coelho compared in Chapter 5 the more even press coverage of the 2002 elections to other forms of engaged political reporting, like *FSP*'s coverage of the *diretas*, considered a positive example of journalism militancy. Coelho thinks that the passion which existed in political reporting before decreased in the coverage of the last presidential elections. This exemplifies the worries of many journalists that excessive preoccupations with objectivity can undermine creativity.

Asked about *Folha*'s objective model, Frias Filho, made a defense of a critical understanding of the concept, pointing also to some of its negative impacts: "I do not believe in absolute objectivity. There are techniques which are disposable for journalism to turn it into something more objective. There are certain stories which are more objective than others. I think that a more opinionated and militant form can exist in parallel, like in the blogs. But I think that, within the practice of journalism, we must search for the ideal objectivity. In the 1980's and 1990's, this objective model is the one that advanced more in Brazil. The Brazilian press today is more objective than it was 15 years ago. But I think that there are negative aspects as well. The consequence is that the newspapers are all very alike, they cease to have identity. But it is very different than what it was in the 1950's, when they were clearly partisan papers linked to political parties...It was a more militant form of journalism with less objectivity, but the vehicles had more personality and were different..."

Journalism cultures of professionalism and objectivity advanced in newsrooms as a result of the professionalization process of the Brazilian media industries, something which was taken up mainly after the dictatorship. As highlighted by Alzira de Abreu (2003), the modernization of the media system was considered a political strategy by the military generals, and was embedded in authoritarian notions of national security. "The press, radio

and TV already depended on publicity to survive and the biggest ads were from public firms and governmental institutions. They (military generals) censored, but they also financed the modernization of most of the newspapers that are still in the market today..” (Alzira de Abreu, 2003; 24-25). Thus after the fall of the dictatorship, newspapers were confronted with a multiplicity of publics and interests, and with the need of adapting to a much more complex reality in contrast to the simplistic black/white dichotomy (i.e. military generals versus civil society) of the dictatorship period. Professionalism was thus a necessity of market liberalism.

Newspapers like *O Globo*, which were seen as closely tied with the military regime, conducted reforms to minimize the paper’s officialdom character, opening it up to a wider public and thus conquering new readers. Like *Folha*, the daily opted to invest in an informational journalism style and has been widely successful because of it. The reforms of *O Globo* were thus carried out in attempts of diminishing the paper’s image as being a mouthpiece of the authoritarian military government, having also had the purpose of adapting the daily to the new demands of the market.

When the director of the newsroom, Evandro Carlos de Andrade, took over *O Globo*’s newsroom in 1972, the paper began to slowly pursue these changes, targeting more a younger public in a strive to make the newspaper compete with the national Rio daily *JB* (Alzira de Abreu, 2003). The reforms however did not really start to take off until the mid-90’s. In terms of editorial content, *O Globo*, like *Folha* before it, attempted to adopt a similar strategy to *The New York Times*, which in 1896 began to climb to its leading position by stressing an ‘information’ model rather than a story telling one (Schudson, 1978).

According to *O Globo* columnist and former director of the newsroom, Merval Perreira, Evandro’s strategy was to focus the newspaper on news. This was a strive to dwindle accusations that the daily was favouring the dictatorship: “*O Globo* was marked during the

dictatorship by two characteristics: it was a newspaper that supported the military government and was accused of manipulating news, and the second characteristic which was done on purpose by Evandro in order to neutralize these critiques was to make a newspaper which was strictly news based. It published everything, was very newsworthy, and so it turned into a newspaper that was indispensable to read. This was the way that Evandro managed to compensate the action of *O Globo*, which was very much an official one.”

The second generation of the Marinho’s started to take on positions of command of the organizations’ newspaper, TV and radio stations mainly in the 1990’s. Shifts in generational ownership gave a new, more refreshing and inclusive dimension to Globo Organisations, elements pointed out by journalists interviewed here. In the mid-90’s, *O Globo* engaged in yet another reform which would definitely have more impact on the paper’s editorial policy. Chiarini (2002, 168) has noted that initially it was intended to be an aesthetic one, but from 1992 to 1995, the project gained editorial backing. The idea of investing in a more interpretative journalism style encountered ground against the former practice of publishing everything.

The current director of *Globo*’s newsroom, Rodolfo Fernandes, emphasised that the professionalization of the newspaper was one of the key motivations for these changes: “The *Globo* reform had another intention, of going more in-depth in the news....The face of a newspaper does not change from one day to the other...But I would like to say that the idea that *O Globo* had to show a new face already existed before 1985 when Merval (Perreira) took over...What I mean by professionalization is that the shareholders of *O Globo* decided to leave the newsroom and hand over the command of the paper to media professionals...”

Perreira pointed out how *O Globo*’s political coverage changed in the last few years through a reinforcement of professional standards. He added that the paper opened up more

to new voices after the second generation of owners took over: “I started to work here (in *O Globo*) in 1968. It was a newspaper very much linked with the official discourse, and to the government in many ways. You did not have a very professional scheme and people were badly paid. The newspaper started to become more professional when Evandro entered the paper in 1971.... With Collor’s impeachment, the media began to be more independent in relation to the state. But there still was a lot of influence of the government and of political pressures. As I told you, the process was gradual and slow...We gained space little by little. It was a work of patience. ...and Jõao Roberto (son of Roberto Marinho) had an important role here.He was always a present figure, interceding in the sense of opening spaces... Even during the time of the dictatorship, with the opening that began in Geisel’s government, *O Globo* started to advance more in the political coverage. We published many factual important stories ahead of others. One example was the amnesty decree. It was published on the day that the amnesty project was signed..”

Thus the inclusion of liberal journalism principles such as balance and the focus on facts permitted the daily to expand the representation of voices in its pages, with discourses articulated by NGOs, liberal professionals and centre-left wing representatives beginning to be considered as newsworthy in the same way as big business and traditional political elite sources also were. The columnist of *O Globo* and creator of the opinion pages, Luiz Garcia, stressed concerns of the daily with balance: “We had in the beginning of the 1970’s the transference of Globo Organisations to the second generation. Jõao Roberto Marinho took over *O Globo*. I believe there is a change in mentality. The opinion page was something that had a lot to do with me. When I entered *O Globo*, there were four columnists writing on Sundays: Andre Melchoir, Otto Lara Rezende, Roberto Campos and another, all of more or less conservative tendencies, with the exception of Otto. The editorial part was born out of the idea of the open page....In the same scheme that you have in the *NY Times* and in other

American newspapers.....We made an enormous effort to attract left-wing thinking to *O Globo*. And we managed to such an extent that today we had to look for a right-winger who writes well and who could write for the paper....and so we stayed with Olavo de Carvalho, and we regret that a bit...All the left have access to *O Globo*: Elio Gaspari, Zuenir Ventura, Verissimo...And also the activists...the NGOs. We are doing something balanced.”

FSP columnist Janio de Freitas, who participated in the graphic reforms of the daily *JB* in the 1960's, has argued that the changes in *O Globo*'s content happened as a competitive response to *Folha*'s success: “I think that it has not been valued yet the role that *Folha* played in the scenario of Brazilian journalism. As I told you, the newspapers (during the dictatorship) were in a situation of compromise and...*Folha* ...mostly after the launch of the page 3, which published different tendencies of debate, starts to publish articles with contradictory lines.Besides all the qualities of this initiative there is the courage to start to practice them during the dictatorship...*Folha* published an article of Luis Carlos Prestes, of people notoriously from the left.... But I think this was important because it contaminated other newspapers. *O Globo*, for instance, is a newspaper that has opened. ...This was the notorious influence of the perception that the new generation of Marinhos brought to the paper, also as a result of *Folha*'s success. There was a moment in which what *Folha* was doing was innovative and courageous...Because of the institutional scenario in which we live since 1985', this does not demand political courage anymore...”

Freitas has signalled out correctly how Brazilian newspapers began to look alike in the post-dictatorship phase, a point that was emphasized by many journalists interviewed here. This can be seen also, to a certain extent, as being a negative consequence of the rise of the informational and objective journalism model, with papers having lost in creativity and positive militancy precisely because of this. Such contradictions thus oblige us to reassess the

relevance or not of the objectivity regime and of professionalism still to contemporary journalism.

6.2.4. *The importance of objectivity and professionalism to journalism*

In what way then is objectivity still important to journalism and why should we defend it if we recognize that it has limitations? Do such values actually contribute to disengage readers? I believe not. The current journalism crisis has been less related to the favouring of objectivity in journalism, and more to a series of political and economic constraints which include increases in media concentration and the lowering of certain standards to reach wider audiences. As stated by Lichtenberg, objectivity should still be a guiding line for journalism if one aims to try and portray a complex world without restoring to ideological biases and personal prejudices.

Lippmann (1922) has been, according to critics like Schudson (1978), one of the most forceful spokesmen for the principle of objectivity. “As our minds become more deeply aware of their own subjectivism, we find zest in objective method that is not otherwise there”, wrote Lippmann. For him, virtue was the refusal to credit one’s own tastes and desires as the basis for understanding the world, and detachment, disinterestedness and maturity were some of the marks of morality (quoted in Schudson, 1978; 155). Lippmann (1922; 126) also pointed out how one tends to belief in the absolutism of ones own views. “For while men are willing to admit that there are two sides to a “question”, they do not believe that there are two sides to what they regard as a “fact.””

Admittedly, a slightly naïve reading of objectivity, or a blind understanding of what a fact is, has marked some journalists’ comprehension of what journalism should be in

Brazilian society. Some have stuck to an overly detached understanding of objectivity (i.e. “I am objective, can’t you see?”). It is as if this is what they (un) consciously believe is demanded of them by current market-oriented journalism. Such positioning has prompted radicals to criticize liberal journalism values, considering them as flawed and inefficient. Journalists that engage in such detached readings of objectivity do not see that the concept should not mean cool indifference or an overemphasis on technical approaches to news. There should be no need to stick only to official sources and to a rigid use of language, or either to fall into the trap of believing that every argument must have an immediate counter-argument. This inevitably results in lack of creativity, personality and dynamism, as Coelho, Frias Filho and Kotscho have pointed out.

In this way a critical commitment to social responsibility ideals and a progressive reading of professionalism is fundamental to impede a mechanic and even hypocritical endorsement of objectivity. For it is the system as a whole that must strive to represent the conflicting views of the society that they are immersed in. In spite of the ambiguities in relation to journalism identities, the case studies of this thesis have shown that a widely mechanic reading of objectivity was present but did not prevail in the last two decades.

Given the recognition that total objectivity is unattainable, and that subjectivity plays a high part in the values and judgments that are made by journalists on a daily basis, one should aim at securing some sort of equilibrium by looking at the facts from different points of view and multiple angles in order to achieve the most accurate interpretation possible. Objectivity then should not mean a lack of questioning of authority figures, but commitments to engage in serious attempts of portraying the whole complexity of the situation. The case studies of this research have pointed out how both left-wing and centre-right-wing projects for the country have suffered from excesses, with the administrations of Cardoso and Lula producing positive aspects as well as causing disappointments. In this sense a more thorough and non-

partisan journalistic analysis of these administrations is, in my view, considered “better” for an understanding of the complexity of the Brazilian reality under such governments than a partisanship stance, which would tend to downplay their errors.

Classic liberal thought already raised the importance of the continuous questioning of assumptions and ideas that are taken for granted. For as J. S. Mill argued (in Keane: 1991;19), even if an opinion is the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, it will soon degenerate into prejudice, so mankind should still continue thinking over what is that it has started to take as a fact. This is difficult to do if one insists on partisan or militant arguments, which rarely take into consideration the complex nature of problems. This does not mean to say that objectivity cannot co-exist with forms of militant journalism. Evidently, a complex media system requires the existence of multiple journalistic identities to attend to different publics, with group identity politics being stimulated to struggle to overcome their oppression and limitations (Baker, 2002) through civic and alternative media sectors that are partisan.

A strong mainstream media which promotes public debate thus should not work with partisanship. It must favour balance and professionalism as the wider public must have access to as many sides of the problem as possible. Arguably, the clientelistic relationships that still exist in Brazilian society both in the private and public sectors are factors which inhibit the further strengthening of professionalism. Journalists tend to be integrated to clientele networks, and their ties to parties, owners or other patrons weaken professional solidarity. That said, the issue of how journalists nonetheless managed to contribute to advance democracy in the contemporary years through commitments to these liberal journalism values is a crucial debate to engage with in any discussion on the relationship between the Brazilian media and the democratization project.

6.3. Journalism and democracy: the contribution of journalists to the democratization process

How then have journalists contributed to the advancement of democracy amid the growth of instrumental and professional concerns in comparison to idealistic ones? In the section above, I highlighted the shift from the militant journalism style more associated to the alternative press of the dictatorship years to professionalism and commercialisation. One can say that the alternative and the mainstream press performed two different roles in different periods: the former functioned during the dictatorship period more as a vehicle of resistance, whilst the commercial press in the free market era performed a double function of attending to the public interest and endorsing also the view of news as a commodity. This does not mean to say that journalists and mainstream journalism did not have a role in the collapse of the military regime and the return to civil democracy.

Cases like the *FSP* coverage of the 1984 direct elections campaign, the publication of stories of human rights abuse by *Veja* during the 1970's and the role played by some economic journalists of *O Globo* (Alzira de Abreu, 2003) are examples of mainstream press contributions to the process of acceleration of the downfall of the regime. Waisbord (2000) has also talked about press contributions from the contemporary phase, mainly the media's watchdog function and the increase in investigative journalism, underlining as some examples Caco Barcellos' *TV Globo* stories on police violence and Gilberto Dimenstein's *Folha* pieces on child prostitution in the Amazon.

Journalists thus performed different roles in the different phases of the country's history. In the last two decades, journalists contributed to the advancement of democracy

through professional journalism standards. They also performed the Fourth Estate role and the watchdog function, endorsing social responsibility values, investing in professionalism and applying balance in the coverage of politics. Contributions however had their limits. These have their roots mainly in the dependency still of the mainstream media on state advertising and on other forms of subsidies, as well as the promiscuous relations that still exist between some journalists and politicians, a fact which contributed for the weakening of the watchdog function thesis (Waisbord, 2002, Janio de Freitas, 2004). Prejudices in relation to left-wing politics also occurred. However, it was the dependency on the structures of the state that produced wider political constraints. We have seen also how the press were reluctant to criticise the Collor government, a similar accusation which was made of the media in general in relation to the denunciations of cases of corruption in the eight-year government of Cardoso, and further more in the corruption schemes conducted during Lula's administration.

As we have seen, the contemporary phase has seen opposing debates in relation to the role that journalists played in promoting political change. As stated in Chapter 1 and discussed in the arguments made against objectivity, radical critiques (i.e. Kucinski, 1998; Moretzsohn, 2002) have lamented the decline of romantic journalism, placing the blame for the lack of public engagement with politics of the younger generation of journalists on the rise of professionalism. Influenced by Althusserian readings of the media and grounded in a-historical views which see media industries as static enterprises functioning to reproduce the dominant ideology, these critiques have played down the contributions made in the contemporary years. They are pessimistic about contemporary journalism, stating that this more market-driven model of the current era leaves no room for change.

This is a simplistic reading of the media which does not acknowledge that media systems change as a result of external historical, political, social and economic influences. It

also ignores the generational differences of the “old” journalists in relation to the “new” ones, assuming too quickly that the latter are totally alienated and deprived of any sense or understanding of politics or capable of applying progressive readings of professionalism to news. Thus these radical critiques ignore a series of influences, such as the double functioning of market forces, which served at different times both to liberate and to oppress, the authoritarian tendencies of the state as well as its liberating function and the fact that contemporary contributions in political reporting were later possible precisely *because* of liberal journalism values.

Waisbord (2000; 185) has stated that news organizations and journalists do harbour political goals, but journalists rarely spend considerable time thinking about them. According to him, they tend to care about professional matters, such as accuracy and beating headlines, rather than the grand democratic ideals that analysts assign to the press. According to this argument, journalists tend to be more concerned with the newsworthiness of a story and the opinion of editors than with its outcome. This is, however, only a partial way of looking at the functioning of journalism in contemporary societies. Arguably, journalism instrumental values *do* work to favour newsworthiness and standard routines that can diminish creativity and limit debates. However, this is not a reason to dismiss efforts to continue to pursue the ideal of objectivity, which must not be seen as an opposite element to interpretative and analytical journalism, but rather as the other side of the same coin.

I have argued here that many journalists do harbour critical readings of these values. Furthermore, such liberal journalism ideals can function *indirectly* to serve democracy, in contrast to the explicitness of militant practices. My research has shown that these journalism principles were essential for the improvement of political reporting in the mainstream press. In this sense I defend that it was precisely *because* of the rise of fairness in political coverage and wider attentions given to balance and accuracy that journalists managed to contribute to

represent in a more mature and critical light the Brazilian experience, being able to see beyond ideological biases and repudiating whenever possible political and/or economic constraints.

Thus the contemporary years saw journalists assume a role of facilitator and *promoter* of public debate in spite of the ambiguities around journalistic identity and the pressures of market journalism to de-politicise political discussions. The case studies conducted here have shown positive conquests as well as regressive tendencies in the press' coverage of the presidential elections (see appendices of Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5). Advancements thus included promotion of dialogue in the media pages with left-wing voices and other social movements; the rise of the watchdog function and professionalism, and the critique of the structures of the state and of political candidates who represented the status quo. Regressions included some of the market sensationalist tendencies and *denuncismo* practices emphasized by journalists (Nassif, 2003; Dines, 2003) in the media coverage of the 1992 Collor impeachment, as discussed in Chapter 3, as well as political-ideological (left-wing) biases, class prejudices and misrepresentations detected in the news coverage throughout the period (see appendices).

Some radical critics have thus tended to see the dictatorship period as the only moment when journalists exercised real influence and political criticism, be it in the alternative press or in parts of the mainstream media. During the 1960's and 1970's, many journalists were listed as 'subversive', with influential journalists being removed from their journalistic positions because of pressures from the military forces due to their left-wing sympathies or democratic ideals (i.e. Abramo from *FSP* in 1979; Dines from *JB* in 1978 and Carta from *Veja* in 1976). The case of the deceased media-magnate Roberto Marinho concerning this issue has become notorious in academic (Abreu, 2003) and media circles, with unnamed sources affirming that the entrepreneur was pressured to fire 'communist journalists' from his staff. He is said to have responded angrily by saying that he was 'capable of taking care of his

own communists'. Marinho made this remark because *O Globo* is said to have protected journalists from persecution (Dines, 1993, quoted in Waisbord, 2000; 182).

Nonetheless, many journalists feared being censored or imprisoned for futile or unclear reasons, or more plainly for being left-wing. Zuenir Ventura for instance spent three months in prison. He found out recently that his name had been included in a governmental document dating from 1975 as being the person who had coordinated the "communism scheme" in the press.³ "This was a totally absurd accusation, I was never member of the Communist Party", said Zuenir.

The contemporary years were thus quite different from the dictatorship period. Journalists of different ideologies populated the newspapers, with the growth in professionalism permitting the entry of a younger generation of journalists who contributed to reduce ideological engagements with news. Political pressures were diminished in the post-dictatorship phase, with the removal of direct censorship from newspapers and the decrease of self-censorship practices. Thus market liberalism has permitted the professionalization and modernization of newsrooms, bringing general improvements to journalism's work with the expansion of objectivity dictums and culminating also in a wider engagement of readers with the media. The new found freedom of the press, however, has been relative, with both political and economic restrictions still persisting. The latter force, for instance, has impeded wider critiques of the structures of power, wealth concentration and social inequality in Brazil. Journalists have also felt compelled by market pressures to simplify or "depoliticise" public debates to appeal to wider audiences and not to alienate or scare advertisers.

Thus journalists in Brazil have managed to contribute in the last two decades by mainly jiggling journalism values of social responsibility and public service commitments with commercial principles, or through a militant democratic stance in contrast to the strictly partisan position more associated with the dictatorship years. That said, we have seen how the

strengthening of a genuine free press in Brazil is still an ongoing process which goes hand in hand with the full consolidation of democracy. In this way it goes beyond the power that journalists can have in their arena of work. Thus improvements in Brazilian society, in economic equality levels and the continuous expansion of the political public sphere are essential if journalism is to become more democratic. Nonetheless, the question of how journalists can increase their contributions to such a process is still a vital debate to pursue.

6.4. Professionalism and journalism autonomy: the future role of the journalist

How can journalists contribute more in the future and strengthen press liberty in Brazil? If the romantic period is over, how can journalism still continue to promote the values of democracy in our current “pragmatic” era? These are questions which are difficult to answer. As examined in Chapter 1, the financial crisis of the Brazilian media culminated in staff cuts and in the increase of job instability in the newsroom. This had an evident impact on journalism practices. The result was a general growth in conformity amongst journalists and a fear of taking risks in reporting. Many have argued that the problems that the Brazilian media have been facing since the mid-90’s onwards are a result of a combination of factors, which include the influence of the current international journalism crisis; the specific process of the ongoing democratization of Brazilian society and the financial difficulties faced by the media industries due to the economic instability of the country. Naturally, the redundancy of journalists and their decline in prestige as well as the fall in quality standards of some national dailies places the endorsement of professionalism and the pursuit of media independency in a tight spot. In the context of international debates (i.e. Bardoel, 1996) concerning the redundancy of journalism activity due to the rise of new technologies and the

wider access of citizens to journalists' sources without the intermediation of journalists, I argue that journalists still have a key role to play in the ongoing democratisation of Brazil.

In articles where he expressed concerns over journalists becoming redundant amid the impact of new technologies on traditional jobs and the changing work environment, Bardoel (1996; 386-387) sees journalists as continuing to play a part in recruiting and processing relevant issues. "Journalism will not, as in the era of the mass media, control public debate, but it will take the lead in directing and defining it" (Bardoel, 1996; 387). Due to the social and economic inequalities that still exist in Brazilian society, which is also not yet as media-saturated as perhaps the US and the UK are, the individualization of communications has not occurred there yet. In recent years, however, there has been a wide increase in Internet sites and political blogs of elite journalists in mainstream newspapers. However, the role of the Brazilian press as a promoter of public debate, and the relevance that a strong mainstream media still has in the forging of Brazil's common civic culture, has not diminished.

The special correspondent of *FSP*, Sérgio Davila, who won the Esso journalism prize for his coverage of the Iraq war, emphasised that journalism analysis will be the future role for the Brazilian journalist: "Yes, in the current situation, I think that I am part of a species in danger of extinction (the special reporter). But I agree with you when you say that the (new) function of a newspaper will be to do analysis, to engage in the historical context of the stories and the memory of what the reader has seen during 24 hours on television and on the Internet. And here the special correspondent is going to have a crucial role....".

Arguably, the adoption of a more analytical journalism model by the quality dailies depends on a wider intellectual training of contemporary journalists. The ambiguities that still exist in relation to journalism identities evidently oblige us to define better the position of the contemporary journalist. Academic studies from diverse positions (Lins da Silva, 1990;

Kucinski, 1998; Arbex Jr., 2001) have depicted some of the vices of the new generation of journalists who embraced uncritically market journalism dictums. Among some of the major vices of journalists has been the excessive corporatism; the reluctance to accept criticism and the tendency towards anti-intellectualism; the arrogant approach towards objectivity and the resistance to engage in ethical discussions and in new professional ideas (Lins da Silva, 1990; Bucci, 2000). Critics have highlighted also how contemporary journalists have been more preoccupied with personal prestige than anything else, without a desire to improve their own professional conduct with the aim of influencing and acting upon reality.

Thus concerns arise as to possible limitations and regressions in the journalism field in the light of the progresses that have occurred in the last years. The capacity of the individual journalist to make a difference, for instance, is becoming more and more difficult and perhaps a distant dream to many in the face of excessive pressures from various spheres. Former director of *Veja* newsroom, Mario Sergio Conti considers that the Brazilian media regressed because of the financial crisis: “Unemployment is the big problem in Brazil. ...the regressive aspect of capitalism there, the dynamic of capitalism there is...financial capitalism. From the press’ point-of-view, I think there was a regression. The magazines that were launched during the period, like *Epoca* (by Globo Organizations to compete with *Veja*), did not contribute in anything. The newspapers are losing relevance in terms of social identification. In this way, the journalist does not risk himself for fear of losing his job...”

Former director of *JB* newsroom and architect of the *ESP* reforms, Augusto Nunes, also expressed similar worries: “I did not see improvement in the press in the last few years, I saw it get worse. If you look at *Veja* when I started, in 1973, 1974 (I was there until ’86)...For instance in the international segment...only big names worked with me. They were established writers. Now you have a very low standard of quality which has been provoked by the low salaries, by the reduction of demands and by the financial crisis...I think the

newspaper of the future will be more solid. The readers will be more faithful. They will be readers which are very similar to...the readers of books, which are a small number in Brazil. But the tendency is for this to expand..”

Nassif (2003) has also stated that the Brazilian journalist of the future will need to be more sophisticated and professional, mastering better both analytical and critical skills and running away from the tendency to endorse “common sense” ideas in their urge to identify themselves with the average reader. Critical of what he classifies as “fast-food” journalism, Nassif’s arguments are along the lines of the ones articulated by Bardoel (1996). This view is also in line with my defence of the importance of objectivity to journalism and the centrality of the increase of professional standards, for it is such values, when used correctly, which guarantee an engagement with the complexity of the problems of our current confusing reality. Baker (2002) has also advocated assigning more power to journalists, for it is these “people in control that can be crucial in an industry that struggles with a tension between profit maximization and ...creative professional and public values” (Baker, 100). I endorse this view of the need to maximise journalistic autonomy, but see this mainly as linked to the expansion of professionalism in newsrooms, with wider editorial independence being afforded to journalists as a means of permitting them to react against various forms of control.

The last years have also seen improvements in the intellectual skills of journalists, a fact which is not only related to university training courses. Journalists, especially from the younger generation, have from the decade of the mid-90’s onwards become more interested in studying and discussing journalism issues and ethics, feeling also less constrained to do so. Media websites like *Comunique-se* and *Observatório da Imprensa* have contributed to stimulate debates amongst journalists and society on press activities. Dines (2003) emphasised how media websites like *Observatório da Imprensa*

(www.observatoriodaimprensa.com.br), launched by him in the 1990's, contributed to train the population and journalists to observe better the media. Such media websites also opened up a tradition amongst journalists of informal and chatty criticism on issues related to journalism practice, ethics and politics.

Thus the positive achievements of the contemporary years, such as the improvements in political reporting and the wider media awareness amongst journalists, have been somewhat shaken by the financial crisis of the media sectors in the last years, but they are not at risk. Brazilian journalism and journalists have managed to maintain relative professional standards of quality in spite of crises. Evidently, journalists still have a crucial role to play in the strengthening of the ongoing democratisation process, and can continue to contribute more through commitments to public service ideals, combining these with liberal journalism cultures in the reporting of political and current affairs. Journalists however should avoid blind endorsements of objectivity, and the implied safety or easiness of clinging to “fast food” journalism formats and excessive market-driven journalism maxims (Nassif, 2003).

Amid increases in media concentration, formation of international conglomerates and dependencies on governmental advertising or loans, journalists' contributions might continue to be made within certain constraints. In order however for this situation to change, other transformations must occur in the country. Thus journalists' contributions are in many ways related both to the improvements in the performance of media systems as a whole inasmuch as they are interlinked with the strengthening of core democratic principles in Brazilian society, in other words, they are dependent on the wider democratisation of the political and socio-economic context of the whole country.

6.5. Conclusion

This research has shown how the press' performance in the coverage of presidential elections campaigns developed throughout the years. Conflicts and contradictions nonetheless prevailed in the last years in relation to different understandings of journalism cultures and identities. The case studies of this research have indicated that professionalism and objectivity played an important role in the establishment of standards of quality for political reporting. Liberal journalistic principles were thus used by journalists as a means of portraying a more complex and contradictory picture of Brazilian society, giving legitimacy to counter-discourses and to the incorporation of different identities and political players in the media arena. This, as we have seen, was a process which was also very much a natural consequence of the expansion of representative democracy in the country and of the proliferation of markets in the post-dictatorship years.

This chapter discussed the opposing debates (Nassif, 2003; Bucci, 2000; Kucinski, 1998; Lins da Silva, 1990) in relation to the contributions that journalists and journalism made to the general enhancement of the media and the democratic political system. It examined the shifts from the romantic style of journalism to the consolidation of the current commercial and professional model, highlighting the clashes between the radical and liberal debates in relation to the contributions made by journalists in the dictatorship and contemporary years. Liberals have also varied their understandings of the current problems of the Brazilian press and the future role reserved for journalists. Conti (2004) and Nunes (2004) have underscored regressions because of the impact of the financial media crisis on journalism productivity; Nassif has pointed to market excesses of the so-called journalism of the 1990's whilst Bucci

has underlined the strengthening of democratic ideals in the media as well as the growth in maturity of journalists.

In the context of external pressures from the state or from shareholders, of increasing mergers and fusions between national and transnational groups, such elements of the journalism culture should not be considered flawed, but rather essential for the continuity of a minimum good quality standard of journalism which endorses public interest rationales. Professionalism thus works in political reporting as a weapon against forms of political and economic control.

I have also examined briefly some of the debates in relation to the impact that the financial media crisis and the changing international and national media scenario are having on the journalism profession as a whole. Market excesses have tended to lower journalism standards, promoting the emergence of “marketing” journalists with their uncritical understandings of objectivity. Other problems of the last years have been increases in journalism redundancies and cuts in staff, facts which have stimulated worries over the maintenance of quality standards and of the capacity of the media and the press to continue to serve as a vehicle of the Fourth Estate. Nonetheless, the Brazilian press in the last years has recovered slightly and has managed to maintain certain standards, such as professionalism in political reporting, balance and political critique. These elements are not at risk.

Furthermore, market competition has permitted the proliferation of media websites on journalism and other related topics, stimulating debates on journalism practices and ethics by media professionals. Journalists have also stated their interests in developing their own intellectual and practical skills, a factor which could also contribute to strengthen in the future the media system in Brazil, issues articulated in the coming conclusion of this research.

Notes

1 Titles of the alternative press included *O Pasquim*, *Opinião*, *Movimento*, *Politika*, *Resistência* and *Critica*.

2 The market for professional journalists is highly regulated. The constitution demands that only those with a journalism diploma, registered in the Labour Ministry, can be journalists. There is a minimum wage for the profession and hourly paid extra hours, although recently there has been some flexibility, with firms not paying them or offering other advantages. The increase of remuneration for journalists nonetheless has not meant a rise in employment. The financial crisis that has hit the media industries in the mid-90's has seen an expansion in job instability and unemployment.

3 Tales of assassination of journalists were scarce, but not of imprisonment and repression. TV Cultura's journalist Wladimir Herzog was found dead in his cell in 1975 after having been arrested by military forces. Veteran journalist Alberto Dines, pioneer of media criticism in Brazil, remembers clearly the start of the censorship in *JB*'s newsroom: "I was hired in 1962 to give continuity to the reform, but until 1968, I had no political action in the newspaper. In 1968, with the imposition of the AI-5 law, I already saw the censors come into my room, and from then on I decided to make it clear that we were under censorship. Afterwards, there was a negotiation with the censors that censorship would be dropped and self-censorship would be put in its place..".