

A long present: the role played by the press in the Brazilian redemocratization process – The *Folha de S. Paulo* in 1974

Abstract

This article aims at exploring theoretical possibilities that allow us to discuss the political narrative of Brazilian democratization, a process usually situated from 1974 onwards, when a so-called political distension was announced by the military dictatorship. A narrative constructed by the big press, which emerged as one of the privileged democratization voices, this established the prominence of certain political and social players and sectors. The study focus lies on the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, whose pages provided a prominent place for the negotiations involving the Brazilian political system and the appreciation of elections as a way of institutionalizing the regime.

Keywords: Redemocratization. Dictatorship. Press. Political Relations. Narrative.

Reinaldo Lindolfo Lohn

Professor at the Department of History and the Graduate Program in History of the Santa Catarina State University (UDESC). Ph.D. in History from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS).
Florianópolis – SC - Brazil
reilohn@hotmail.com
orcid.org/0000-0002-7902-2733

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Um longo presente: O papel da imprensa no processo de redemocratização – a Folha de S. Paulo em 1974

Resumo

Este artigo tem por objetivo explorar possibilidades teóricas que permitam discutir a narrativa política da democratização brasileira, um processo geralmente situado a partir de 1974, quando do pretense anúncio da distensão política por parte da ditadura militar. Uma narrativa construída pela grande imprensa, que apareceu como uma das vozes privilegiadas da democratização, estabeleceu a proeminência de determinados agentes e setores políticos e sociais. O foco de estudo é o jornal *Folha de S. Paulo*, em cujas páginas as negociações que envolveram o sistema político brasileiro e a valorização das eleições como forma de institucionalizar o regime ocuparam um lugar de destaque.

Palavras-chave: Redemocratização. Ditadura. Grande Imprensa. Relações Políticas. Narrativa.

The transition time

On October 5, 1988, when Federal Deputy Ulysses Guimarães, as President of the Brazilian National Constituent Assembly, declared the so-called “Citizen Constitution” promulgated, he insisted on affirming: “we hate the dictatorship. We hate and disgust.” On the same day, the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* highlighted: “the new constitution comes into force; the transition to democracy comes to an end.” The headline was accompanied by the information that the Sarney administration had used the last moments before the Constitution came into force to “hire about 160 employees without public tender and create hundreds of trust positions in the federal administration” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 05/10/1988, p. 1). Throughout the 20 months of discussion for the new constitutional text, the Constituent Congress, elected in 1986, would confirm some popular demands that took public space in previous years and it would frustrate many others.

The greatest frustration would be the command of the Constituent Congress by a majority group, the so-called “Big Center,” mainly consisting of parliamentarians belonging to the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), a structure that has lost much of its internal cohesion by receiving countless accessions of politicians little committed to the efforts to establish a democratic political model, along with their counterparts belonging to the Brazilian Liberal Front Party (PFL), made up of former dictatorship supporters (PILATTI, 2008, p. 1-18). The practices of direct negotiation with the Executive became widespread, and this was clear in the definition of a five-year mandate for President Sarney. The rationale of conciliation and postponement of decisions, in order to get better results in the political agreements intended, was behind the works. That was the harbinger of parliamentary practices that would deepen since then in the relations between Executive and Legislative. The agreements and limits imposed by the negotiation that took place during the end of the military regime were maintained: the maintenance of amnesty for those who perpetrated the dictatorship and its violence, the non-submission of the Armed Forces to the broader democratic order, the privileges of categories and institutions within the State apparatus, the difficulties imposed on social reforms, among others.

The object of this article lies on exploring the theoretical possibilities that allow us to approach historically the political narrative of Brazilian redemocratization, a process usually situated from 1974 onwards. By defining, in the 1980s, the period that then ended as a transition, the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* did not resort to a later analysis, from a temporal perspective. The long Brazilian transition had definitional milestones that the very political game played by the authoritarian regime delimited and they were tacitly accepted by those who participated, directly or indirectly, in the negotiations that would result in the end of the authoritarian regime. Moving away any possibility of rupture or that the extinction of the military dictatorship derived from acute social and political conflict, has always been an objective of the agreements that plotted what would be called the New Republic. One of the leading characters in this process was the big press that, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, took an innovative social significance in Brazil, both due to the technological changes that occurred in the communications field and the

configurations of Brazilian society, which underwent an accelerated urbanization process, with emphasis on the middle classes in the population as a whole. The big press business, as chronicler and drafter of political records at that time, contributed to define temporal milestones, besides emphasizing interlocutors and analysts of the process, by means of a narrative agency along with the so-called agreed liberal opposition, and even along with the rulers who, although under an authoritarian regime, sought social legitimacy. That was also a long period in which Brazilian society witnessed transformations in many dimensions, with urbanization and influx of middle classes pursuing lifestyles based on modern consumer goods.

The mediation between political players and the reading audience involved the construction of an interpretative repertoire emphasizing the protagonism of certain social and political agents, in a process of giving rise to a historical memory on Brazilian democratization and overcoming the civil-military dictatorship, self-named as “Revolution,” which had dominated the country since 1964. This repertoire involved the diffusion of a political terminology that reached a symbolic value throughout the period and fed opponents to the regime: democracy, voting, electoral justice, citizenship, rights, freedom of the press, among others. Another type of terminology tended to lose space, both the one associated with the left-wing, like revolution, combative vanguard, direct and armed struggle and that linked to the right-wing: order, hierarchy, authority, or conservation.

The transition, set up like this, sought to limit the Brazilian democratization process to electoral disputes and to institutional mechanisms derived from agreements conducted between the government, politically represented by the Brazilian National Renewal Alliance (ARENA; subsequently, Brazilian Social Democratic Party – PDS) and most of an opposition that was sheltered under the acronym of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB; subsequently, PMDB), in addition to other political parties created after 1979. It is known that the news media presents itself as one of the organizing instances of the social environment and, when narrating and assigning meanings, it gains legitimacy as one of the defining structures of what must be remembered or forgotten.

There is a renewed discussion about the predominant interpretations of the transition to a democratic political system in Brazil, hitherto largely concentrated around three axes: a return to the liberal-democratic values that would be in dispute at the time of the 1964 civil-military coup; a rupture with the authoritarianism that had marked the regime, as a counterpoint to its relative economic successes; and, finally, a pact that would have been signed between the government and the opposition, with a broad set of social forces in action (ABREU; LATTMAN-WELTMAN, 2006, p. 69). It is noteworthy that one of the marks of these interpretations is the blurring of precise dates, although the political debates that took place have brought landmarks that became accepted: one of them is 1974. This study explores the narrative schemes that were articulated that year, within the pages of the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*.

In the set of individual and collective characters who took part in the social process that involved the end of the dictatorship, the prominence of the redemocratization narrative belonged to the press. Throughout the process, such an understanding was shared by the main characters, who came to have a space that virtualized, in the middle of the authoritarian regime, a moment in which government and opposition established a public dialogue. These characters deserved space, investigative reports, behind-the-scenes information, and in-depth analysis. Thus, the rise of a historical explanation came, at the very moment the events were taking place, and this would lead to a consensual interpretation of Brazilian redemocratization. A certain narrative order pointed out the way and virtually established, along with the political interlocutors, a calendar that would organize the acceptance of democratic practices in the country: the elections came to mean democracy itself. Voting became the target to be pursued in order to define a democratic regime. Something that, at first glance, may seem unmistakable. However, it is known there are many definitions of democracy and its practice is an accurate exercise and its complexity is not exhausted by institutional mechanisms.

Faced with the task of working under an authoritarian regime and building the acceptance of electoral results favorable to an agreed opposition, whose existence should be limited to assign legitimacy to a political game that did not threaten the order

envisaged, there was a need to reduce to a minimum number the potential demands arising from the democratization process and restricting it to certain moments. Associating democracy only with regular elections for all of the Executive and the Legislative levels was an operation to which government and opposition were devoted and their schemes may be detected on newspaper pages. In the case of this study, the *Folha de S. Paulo* was a press medium that almost came to be confused with certain redemocratization moments, although, in the early years of this process, it was not possible to detect to what extent that would arrive. It is worth referring, here, to the year 1984, when the newspaper came to advocate direct elections for the Presidency of the Republic and it was one of the relevant characters of the campaign named as “Direct Elections Now!” Therefore, taking the *Folha* as a document involves considering that the newspaper itself took on features and attitudes arising from the very transition that it recorded and defined on its pages: this media outlet reinvented itself throughout the process.

The presence of the past

It is necessary to consider the temporal dimension of the Brazilian redemocratization process. Between an initial and a final point, there was an intermediate period in which mutations, discontinuities, and continuities would be observed. The time interval in between was so long, about ten years, that the temporal structure built would constitute a long present and its scheme was initiated, among other agents, by the journalistic narrative. Seeing itself as a part of that extended present meant situating itself at a point in a cycle, something which would guarantee certain homogeneity to what might be defined as a transition during the process. Thus, it is worth looking at the interval not as a mere passage, but as a possibility condition for that historical process as a whole. In the sense proposed by Jörn Rüsen (2001, p. 56-58), historical knowledge presents itself as “a particular mode of a generic and elementary process of human thought.” When developing his consciousness about time and intentional action, man interprets the world. This operation occurs “always in a special

way when men have to account for temporal changes in themselves and in the world through their action and suffering,” thus an “interpretative framework” of changing experiences over time is formed. In their turn, the mass media and the journalistic media operate “fabrics on which past, present, and future are constantly mobilized in attitudes that are outside the field of history and that materialize in a particular type of writing” (SILVA, 2011, p. 13-14). In view of this, we may see that the narrative produced by the press about that long present has led to an agency over time and, by extension, historical knowledge.

Various processes that took place in Latin American countries, where the transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic forms came throughout the 1980s, were qualified as transitions, in an attempt to detect their similarities. A literature devoted to the theme has been very profitable since then, as Adriano Nervo Codato (2005) points out. The same author points out that the players involved in the process were basically divided into three major groups in the evolutionary change process within the period considered: Armed Forces, State, and Society. The construction of a democratic liberal institutional standard in Brazil was based on the characteristics of a long negotiation, in which the military personnel did not transfer all power to its civil supporters, nor did it submit to moderate opponents. The Liberal Front creation, in 1984, which brought together former civil members of the regime to support the candidacy of opposition leader Tancredo Neves at the Electoral College, illustrates the extent to which it was possible that time interval did not constitute only an intermediate point: it was the very object of negotiation, which should be as long as necessary to arrange the political game in such a way as to prevent ruptures. This meant that in the course of the process a final moment was not established in advance, i.e. ‘democracy,’ but it was hoped that the passage itself would be the end of the regime, according to the accommodations considered indispensable so that there were no traumas and ruptures: “there was not an actual rupture with authoritarianism, but a transformation – slow, safe, and gradual – in the government form.” Thus, the later and final moment does not correspond to a closure of what was started earlier, nor does it fundamentally differ from what it was at the beginning of the process.

The compatibility of different variables and elements that have been combined for the acceptance of a power organization model, in which political representation is rather a defense of the State against popular initiatives, in the form of a protected democracy where society finds restricted channels of participation, relied on the participation of sectors that acquired social legitimacy throughout the process. As the political system pointed out a relative democratization of its procedures and components, the press showed up as a sort of spokesperson for society in relation to the State, politicians, and the Armed Forces themselves. In spite of the diversity and the large number of press media, Flávia Biroli (2009, p. 269-291) indicates that, before the 1964 coup, throughout the 1946 constitutional regime, there was a tendency towards a certain homogeneity of positions by mainstream Brazilian newspapers, generally anti-Getúlio Vargas and opposed to the nationalist social reform projects in the early 1960s. Despite support for the coup and ambiguities in relation to the authoritarian regime, the most prominent and influential bodies tried to build a homogeneous representation on the redemocratization process and to ensure a central role for journalists as indispensable players in refusing censorship. The defense of freedom of the press as a more important dimension of freedom of expression filled the gaps and omissions of periods of explicit support for the authoritarian regime as mere misunderstandings, in order to accentuate the leading role played by the press in the construction of democracy. Thus, it was up to the press punctuating the final transition moment, when it gave way to a new framework that would mean overcoming the past. In this case, there is an effort to identify “the existence of a rupture between past and present.” The mistakes, the misunderstandings might have remained in a “closed past.” In this sense we find “the possibility of taking on mistakes, exposing involvement with the regime: today, as the discourses implicitly or explicitly propose, we are all democrats and the press takes its role.”

This operation made it possible for the big press, which for most of the period supported and sustained the military regime, to emerge as one of the privileged voices of democratization and builder of a historical narrative that consecrated the victory of political and social agents and sectors. On newspaper pages, throughout the second half of the 1970s, politics occupied a prominent space again and the vertical relations of a

dictatorial regime, which hierarchized the Armed Forces, State, and Society, could be horizontally expressed in the debate between government and opposition. Thus, it is worth grasping how redemocratization came to be depicted as a linear structure that set the past, present, and future as different moments, closed in themselves. If it is possible to see politics as a nodal place, a congruence point in which the interconnection between the social environment and its representations can be perceived, by allowing the tasks that involve both the understanding of the past and the interrogation about the present to be faced in the same endeavor (ROSANVALLON, 1995, p. 12-19), so there is a need to follow some of the threads of these possibility knots that have tended to constitute an unlikely arena for public discussion, albeit limited to the party system, within newspapers that kept being committed to the existing power structure.

The *Folha*, until then, had not been a major player in Brazilian press as a whole. Founded in 1921, the newspaper company debuted with the *Folha da Noite* and, four years later, it introduced the *Folha da Manhã*. The *Folha da Tarde* was created in 1949. The unification of these newspapers under the title *Folha de S. Paulo* occurred in the beginning of 1960. After several different phases and configurations of owners and directors, the company passed to the definitive command of Octávio Frias de Oliveira, in 1962. In 1967, the *Folha da Tarde* would return to circulation and, after a period of relative diversity in coverage, it would soon become one of the main press media contributing to the repressive apparatus of the military dictatorship (KUSHNIR, 2005, p. 315). In parallel, administrative and technological innovations increased the *Folha de S. Paulo's* market share, which would soon result in a greater editorial influence among the audience, especially in the 1970s, under the command of Cláudio Abramo in the newsroom. From then on, the newspaper gained prestige and ability to participate in the ongoing political process. The ambiguities of a newspaper that was supposed to be liberal, but which practiced self-censorship in the newsroom, play a role in the history of the big Brazilian press and its privileged relations with political power and corporate networks. In the most common account of its history, the *Folha* registers that it “did not please the Greeks or the Trojans,” when two vehicles of its fleet burned by militants of clandestine groups resisting the dictatorship (MOTA; CAPELATO, 1981, p. 200-208).

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So, the press played an indispensable role in the narrative scheme that organized temporality and allowed the construction of a periodization that showed up as self-evident, with a calendar and a script of the political theater. The trajectory of a narrative cycle does not assume only a linear chain of successions and transformations, nor is it composed of a stable initial situation from which a final equilibrium arises, as if affirming the completeness of a unified time, according to the perspective of Tzvetan Todorov (1970, p. 137, 179) about the literary narrative. Neither a perpetual present or an eternal return, but a combination of temporalities through the “agency of facts,” to which, according to Paul Ricoeur (1994, p. 25-26, 63), the intentions of players who weave the narrative scheme and bring together incidents and fragments, sometimes discordant, in a chain of ordered and discernible events, with which they are enabled to perceive themselves in this narrative cycle and even predict future movements. Through this fabric of historical time, “we narrate the things we believe to be true and predict events that occur as we anticipated.”

The written press appeared not only as a spectator, but as an interlocutor in political issues that involved the so-called ‘distension,’ a nodal point in the relations that would be the articulators of the later ‘New Republic.’ Newspaper pages gradually became a medium for the social and political representations of the country as a whole, up to the point that press sectors stand as indispensable pieces in the Brazilian democratic construction. According to Alzira Alves de Abreu e Fernando Lattman-Weltman (2006, p. 76), the growing rejection of censorship would create “conditions for taking the media away from the military personnel and to bring it closer to journalists struggling for freedom of the press.” A political knot that would be tackled by means of the alleged announcement of distension, in 1974, by a part of the Geisel administration on the pages of the *Folha de S. Paulo*.

1974: slow and gradual

The *Folha de S. Paulo* published on January 26, 1984, featured on its front page: “300,000 on the streets for direct elections.” The panoramic photo of a crowd in the See

Square, under the São Paulo Cathedral tower, in downtown São Paulo, the largest urban center in the country, illustrated a text that, after mentioning the political leaders involved in the movement “Direct Elections Now!”, like Luís Inácio Lula da Silva and Ulysses Guimarães, pointed out that “the real hero was another: the crowd, the 300,000 people who proved it possible (and desirable) to make politics with love, courage, and joy” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 26/01/1984, p. 1). The January 1984 rally was the largest so far in a series of similar events that have taken place since the previous year, with combined efforts by parties opposing the so-called military regime. The Brazilian political system redemocratization seemed to be very close in those months. The direct elections campaign is both a symbol and the pinnacle of a broader process to constitute new political cultures and public languages created at the time of the military dictatorship crisis. According to Serge Bernstein (1998, p. 352-353), “political culture, like culture itself, enters the set of standards and values that determine a society’s representation of itself, its past, its future.” It is within this framework that people grasp the possibility of locating the beacons that have enabled the consensus on what should be regarded as a part of the so-called democratic transition and what should be left behind, in the past.

There was not much doubt about what to forget. The same newspaper, on March 20, 1964, welcomed the demonstration that took place in the same See Square to celebrate the so-called “March of the Family with God for Freedom.” The title of the main piece of news, superimposed on photos of the crowd, announced: “São Paulo stopped yesterday to advocate for the regime.” The main text addressed with enthusiasm “the willingness of São Paulo and Brazilians from all corners of the country to advocate for the Constitution and the democratic principles,” inspired the “spirit” of the 1932 Revolution. In a caption, the demonstration’s purpose: “The multitude that filled the See Square openly manifested against the government.” Posters called for the impeachment of João Goulart and denounced the “homeland traitors.” In response to the March 13 rally, in Rio de Janeiro, supporting the João Goulart administration, the *Folha de S. Paulo* opined that the Paulista demonstration had been a spontaneous meeting of “the very population, not a suspicious gathering” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 20/03/1964, p. 1).

Among the 1964 and 1984 multitudes, in downtown São Paulo and other Brazilian capital cities, as well as among the headlines of newspapers and magazines separated by twenty years, social processes of various orders marked the Brazilian population and constituted threads of a social fabric with which the political meanings were constructed. New phenomena related to the emergence of mass culture and the increasing importance of the middle classes as consumers of symbolic goods, as well as those interested in reading newspapers and magazines, have contributed to shape new expectations regarding political participation. The increased number of university students and the mass media expansion, phenomena mainly associated with urbanization, imposed inflections on a changing Brazilian society. The media underwent major technological, professional, and coverage scale changes during the dictatorial regime. The professionalization process, noticeable from the 1950s onwards, was added, in the 1970s, with an intense business and political power concentration in some media outlets. The progressive shift of advertising funds towards TV has led the newspaper and magazine market not viable for numerous companies. Single copy sale no longer guaranteed the survival of many titles and the advertising revenue became indispensable. The industrialization of production processes favored large business groups, the only ones able to afford the necessary investments. Thus, there is the consolidation of a market with big newspapers and magazines around a few titles, concentrated along the Rio-São Paulo axis. While those who were close to the regime made impressive gains, such as the Globo group, those rather recalcitrant became not viable, just as in the case of the *Última Hora*. Shielded using the new techniques that standardized the journalistic language, the big media outlets managed to start offering a commodity that stood out for the technical quality of the layout and its content aimed to avoid any problems with the market and, above all, with the government (RIBEIRO, 2006, p. 428-430).

Through the means of communication, in contemporary societies, “the event marks its presence.” According to Pierre Nora (1988, p. 181-188), “the affinities between such an event and such a means of communication are so intense that they seem inseparable to us.” In addition, redundancy intrinsic to mass media may tend to “produce outstanding things,” to manufacture “new things on a permanent basis,” and to feed “a

hunger for events,” and this imposes “what is experienced as History on an immediate basis.” The promotion from “immediate to historical” has derived from changes in the very statute of the event: “regarding any event in the modern sense of the term, the mass imagery wants to manage adding anything related to daily fact.” On the other hand, traditional political events have become endowed with such characteristics and combined to a “theatricality” imposed by the new forms of apprehending what is experienced and immediate, endowed with a historical condition. For deciphering them, it is worth noticing what is less arbitrary in their unfolding, i.e. “their appearance, their volume, their rhythm, their chaining, their relative place, their sequels, and their jumps obey regularities.” An ordering agency of events occurs through the constant rise of narrative discourses that produce real effects and they are generators of meaning. One of their distinguishing factors lies on the “predictive” status they have managed to achieve, when dealing with contemporary narratives. According to Roland Barthes (1972 p. 35-44), the narrative discourse predicts: “if you act in such a way, if you choose such an alternative, that is what you get.” So, there is a set of prescriptions implicit in instructions and standards that serve as guides to assign meaning to the social experiences of collectivities and individuals.

The event of interest for this study consists in what might have been the announcement, by General Ernesto Geisel, then President of the Republic and in charge of leading the dictatorial regime, of the so-called distension, in 1974. In a meeting with ARENA leaders, on August 29, in the midst of the campaign for parliamentary elections that year, Geisel delivered what would be regarded as a mark of the political opening process. It is worth noticing that, as a so-called announcement of what might be a softening of the regime, the presidential speech seemed barely open to negotiation. After emphasizing the official party’s need to promote an “effective political motivation of the Brazilian people” and to praise the qualities of the bipartisan system, the tone sound as a warning: the president stressed that he would not accept “undue pressures” from those who thought to “be able to push” regime changes by means of a “game of manipulated pressure on public opinion and, through it, against the government.” Such pressures would only serve to “trigger counterpressure maneuvers of equal or greater

intensity, reversing the process of slow, gradual, and safe distension, as required,” something which might generate an atmosphere of “increasing polarization and intransigent radicalization, opening room to emotional irrationality and destructive violence.” The president also emphasized that he was delivering an “enlightening official pronouncement” before the various demonstrations “about the Brazilian political moment, widely disseminated and commented by the press.” The government accepted debates and discussions on the “political issue” for “institutionalizing the ideals of the 1964 Revolution,” but rejected “claiming campaigns” that sought to “force inconvenient, premature, or reckless changes and revisions of the national political framework.” He warned that the regime remained attentive to “subversive minorities,” against whom the “security services” would remain active, strict, and tough, “but without reprehensible excesses” and “useless violence” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 30/08/1974, p. 1).

In this manifestation by Geisel, we highlight at least two issues relevant to this study: the definition of a temporality for the process that would consist in the institutionalization of the regime (and not that of a democratic transition) and the recognition of dialogue with political sectors through the media and public opinion. Called to negotiate, the government posed its conditions, and, as several later analyses have shown, it would not give up on much of them. The rhythm would be set by the regime, as well as the mode: the institutionalization would involve accepted interlocutors among those with access to a public space having the press as a beacon. The *Folha* thought that Geisel’s pronouncement put the “development of the Brazilian political situation on a gradualistic scale,” something which had been observed by two scholarly analysts, Samuel Huntington and Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos. According to both political scientists, “institutional normality” might be achieved “progressively, step by step.” The ARENA took the General-President’s invectives as “a voice of command” of its leader, according to Senator Jarbas Passarinho, while the MDB, through Deputy Tales Ramalho, refused to comment on specific points of the speech, but it stressed that the “Brazilian Bonapartist system” was artificial, because it restricted the number of political associations, and this would make the “revolution move away from its original ideals,

exposed by Marechal Castelo Branco: the search for institutional normality” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 30/08/1974, p. 3).

In the following days, the political interlocutors kept evaluating the pronouncement, and the ARENA leaders drew attention to party unity, with a view to the elections that year. Senator Nelson Carneiro, a MDB member, pointed out that the very official party, divided into sub-acronyms, opposed the bipartisanship advocated by Geisel and that the distension seemed “cautiously remote.” Belonging to the same party, Deputy Lisâneas Maciel thought that, despite encouraging popular political participation, such a caution prevented “democratic normality” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 31/08/1974, p. 3). Some other ARENA members believed it was a step “towards the country’s full redemocratization,” while others stressed the definition of “prudent parameters for going through the whole situation,” maintaining the “Revolution” and enforcing the “rules of the game” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 01/09/1974, p. 3).

In these entangled speeches by government supporters and oppositionists, as well as in contributions from analysts, we notice an agency on newspaper pages, in the sense of organizing a narrative that could interpret the fact and demarcate it by means of its characteristics as a political event whose unfolding managed to be intelligible. In the positioning game, we can see the construction of a delimited political space. In this restricted arena, the negotiation possibilities began to be experienced. According to Leonardo Avritzer, political negotiation constituted, in countries like Brazil, a learning process, which could even be “rejected by players who, due to the fact that negotiation had never practiced, would not have to believe in it.” One of the negotiation objects would be precisely the “meaning assigned by political players to democracy,” and this might result in “various ideas about publicity, tolerance, the significance of negotiation strategies, and the relevance of democratic normativity.” The author points out that, in the negotiation process, “a non-democratic political culture” may intertwine with “democratic institutionalism,” i.e. “dominant practices in this case are not purely democratic or purely authoritarian” (AVRITZER, 1995). In the set of elements that took a part in the process, the press was among the providers of a social repertoire capable of making the terms of negotiation intelligible, something which turned it into a part of

ongoing learning. Negotiation would be seen as a process of accepting the rules to institutionalize the regime, by means of regular elections.

In the exercise of the Presidency, according to his very testimony, Geisel “received a summary of the main issues dealt with by the press. He read it, looked at some newspaper, and went to the Palace.” He avoided interviews and said that he “did not give much importance to the press.” His remarks about newspapers are enlightening: “building with ideas or cooperating is very rare. The newspaper needs to have this news to be read and sold, to have circulation, to receive advertisement revenue, and thus make money” (D’ARAÚJO; CASTRO, 1997, p. 276-286). The organizers of the “Geisel Dossier,” with a part of the documentary archive left by the General-President, thought that, despite his relation to the political opening process, “the image of the Geisel administration arising from these pages is that which emphasizes political control, repression to the left-wing and the opposition, and censorship to the press,” and this differed from the image that was set by the press media, which “shows a rather open Brazil.” There was a clear concern to control the press in the center of the country, the press might have “communist infiltration,” in addition to the “dilemma of journalistic companies in wishing to make their business profitable without displeasing the government” (CASTRO; D’ARAÚJO, 2002, p. 23-30).

In early 1974, when evaluating the possible effects of the oil crisis on the Brazilian economy, in an editorial, the *Folha de S. Paulo* pointed out that “the Revolution implanted a process that, slowly evolving, only entails gradual changes, incapable of producing short-term effects.” The newspaper bet that the “political-institutional framework” would not undergo changes with “immediate repercussions.” At that point, what could be expected was only the “democracy of opportunities,” in order to lay “the foundations of a new and adequate institutional structure, which has nothing to do with the regimes of the pre-revolutionary past” and see that “the effort of each one in the construction of the future will anticipate the result of the due reward” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 01/01/1974, p. 3). It was clear that the gradualism of measures conducive to change was not restricted to government intents. The slow and gradual passage corresponded to the narrative agencies that might drive the political relations, both of the government and the

opposition and the press itself. The present is evaluated in the light of a certain historical consciousness that has as a negative beacon the past before 1964 and it launches into the future, more or less indeterminate, the fruits of a parsimonious change in the institutional framework. There is the definition of a temporal structure that mobilizes a social memory and this is inscribed in the political horizon.

Between the 1964 coup and the 1984 direct elections campaign, the year 1974 constituted a passage in time, joining the wires that take from one end to another of the period. In January, a note by the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* drew attention to the MDB's difficulties: "opposition at the decisive hour." The elections that year might mean a question about "the actual party's power, which will be revealed, inexorably, at the polls" (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 10/01/1974, p. 4). The framework, in fact, did not seem encouraging to a limited and agreed opposition, which tried to make counter-arguments to an authoritarian government that had in its favor a period of accelerated economic growth. The General-President, Emílio Garrastazu Médici, who commanded the period of greater activity of the repression forces during the dictatorship, could claim that his term in office was marked by the efficiency of an economic policy that, "conducted with objectivity and firmness, transformed the economic status of the country, whose prosperity between 1969 and 1973 reached the highest indexes of our history" (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 02/03/1974, p. 3).

From 1974 on, the perspective of what might become the re-democratization showed up as an experience of Brazilian society and a collective narrative that organized the actions of political players. The journalistic discourse has taken, in contemporary societies, "the institutional role of producing meanings that can be inscribed in social memory," hence the need to examine "how the effects of truth and consensus that often end up driving our actions and our thinking are instituted and produced" (FERREIRA, 2007, p. 58). That year would be regarded as the initial demarcation mark of the so-called transition. As an objective element, it is worth considering that, despite the authoritarian regime and the repression of public mobilizations, there was a renewed importance for electoral processes since 1974, when the MDB won a flagship victory (LAMOUNIER, 1988). In a way, in response to the regime and the suppression of rights inherent to

citizenship (civil, political, and social), the electoral processes emerged not only as formal mechanisms of a façade democracy, but as means of conscious expression for the population and means of developing a democratic political culture. The mass politics and the popular vote were rehabilitated, since even the official party of the military regime, the ARENA, saw itself in need of shaping its work due to electoral pressures (GRINBERG, 2009).

The narratives of the Brazilian political process in those years, operated through the press, marked the beginning of a cycle that would correspond to redemocratization, although it was not clear which form. The predominance of the Armed Forces in the organization of the regime continually appeared as the limit of feasibility. The Chief of the Army Staff, General Dale Coutinho, stated that the country was experiencing “a revolutionary war, stimulated by the international communist movement in urban and rural areas” and that the “March 1964 Revolution” should be guaranteed “at any price” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 04/01/1974, p. 4). In the hierarchy of dictatorship, there was no doubt how far the political system could go. The military personnel made a point of determining its prominence in State administration and in society management. As for civilians, the expectation was related to General Geisel’s pronouncement in the act of his “election” by means of an Electoral College. Senator Petrônio Portela, then president of the ARENA, when asked about a possible “very hard” speech by the president of the MDB at the time, commented: “it matters little whether Ulysses’s speech is hard or soft, because it refers to issues of their own, the MDB” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 09/01/1974, p. 3). When dividing the regime powers, so that the military personnel assumed command of the State, a horizontal space for discussion between governing and opposition civilians seemed virtually possible in the political chronicle by the press. In the official rhetoric, the ritual involving an election of absolutely foreseeable outcome in the Electoral College meant “the appreciation of the Legislative Power” and the demonstration of “greatness of the political class, in the present time” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 10/01/1974, p. 3).

The MDB’s leader, Ulysses Guimarães, who had launched his so-called “anti-candidacy” to the Presidency the previous year with the “purpose of contesting the succession process,” having journalist Barbosa Lima Sobrinho as his teammate,

considered that his “campaign” was successful in promoting “the movement of ideas around the resumption of democratic fullness” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 12/01/1974, p. 4). Participation in the indirect election caused a series of controversies in the opposition and generated a crisis in the party, because the so-called “authentic” group of the MDB, which rejected conciliatory practices towards the regime, threatened not to vote in Ulysses Guimarães. While the ARENA sought to legitimize the process, because it reconciled the “revolutionary order with the democracy principles,” the opposition candidate was concerned with persuading his colleagues to take part in the vote and leaned on parliamentarians like Frederico Trota, who claimed that indirect elections were also “democratic” and believed that it was more important “to fight for a constitutional reform, in order to restore in the country the rule of law and the principle of freedom with responsibility” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 14/01/1974, p. 4). Thus, while the government party referred to the “revolutionary order,” the opposition mentioned “responsibility.” A narrative approach that suggested compliance with minimum negotiation parameters. According to the *Folha*, “in spite of the contestation by the authentic ones,” Ulysses Guimarães might establish an image “that history will register,” like that of a “sympathetic Don Quixote” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 15/01/1974, p. 4). While his critics estimated that he wanted nothing more than establishing his name for a future Senate race, the newspaper began to take part in the making of the narrative that would turn that Deputy into the most expressive name of the redemocratization process. In his speech to support his candidacy, Ulysses advocated the various flags of the opposition program, including that of amnesty to those “pre-condemned by disqualification of mandates and suspension of political rights” and the one claiming that the only legitimate power comes from the “popular vote” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 16/01/1974, p. 6).

Months later, the opposition leader recalled that the 1930 Revolution had been “triggered to overthrow the oligarchy” that altered the electoral results that removed from parliament those “who could disturb the governors’ policy,” something which was also put into practice through prisons and “political murders.” For this reason, he claimed that conditions were created so that the opposition could exist, because an “unopposed administration goes to the dustbin of History” and compared the political process to the

economic market rationale, where “competition is an opposition between companies, so that there is economic health and consumer protection.” His manifestations were a response to what might have been a statement by President Geisel recommending the need for a “virile opposition.” To do so, he stated that electoral legislation should limit the number of candidates belonging to parties, whose increased number only benefited the ARENA, since the latter had to accommodate various local political currents in the states, as well as to reject that null and void votes were taken into account to calculate the election quotient, which reduced the chances of the MDB reaching the right to occupy legislative seats (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 27/04/1974, p. 5).

It is known that the narrative provides the necessary scheme where the configuration of historical time operates, in its various manifestations and appropriations, between the time of lived experience and physical time, up to the point of confusing them. The calendar, the generations, and the documents are used and experienced in a temporality that gathers past, present, and future. According to this understanding of the characteristics of historical time, we may build a History of the present time, which Paul Ricoeur (2007, p. 456) claims to be “that [history] where the still living word of testimonies and the written word through which the documentary traces of events under analysis bump into each other.” Herein, it is understood that this historical time that we name as present encompasses simultaneity relations, with juxtaposition of rhythms, by populations that constitute and participate in the mass culture phenomena and their wider social implications. Therefore, moving between the various manifestations in the written press about the composition of a new political system opens room for the perspective of the horizon of expectations of political groups working within the period and the construction of a widely accepted historical memory.

A *Folha* columnist, Francisco Barreira, highlighted that the institutional political model that was emerging did not have “clearly defined” contours, but he pointed out that it “supported some characteristics of formal democracy,” by preserving a “decision center with instruments and authority enough to prevent unforeseen, untimely, or exaggerated changes of route.” He thought that the government base had “a lack of political culture” and that the “smartest” politicians should seek in the libraries the

“dusty books of History of Brazil” to know the Second Empire, because it would not be “totally absurd that terms like moderating power” could “re-enter the political vocabulary.” He suggested that the conformation of a new power structure depended on the participation of civil politicians, so that the process took place “without major trauma or regression” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 29/10/1974, p. 3). Months earlier, the newspaper stated that the election of Ernesto Geisel, as it happened, showed that the “system derived from the 1964 Movement” had given a “proof of cohesion and vigor,” given the “stable and austere political environment” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 17/01/1974, p. 5).

It is noticed that the organization of contemporary temporality through journalistic narratives reveals how the present is not a place of passage, but a gap and an unfinished possibility between the past and the future (PEREIRA, 2009, p. 230). The readers of the *Folha de S. Paulo* began to access and share representations regarding various processes that unfolded in Brazilian society, situated within the political opening period. The frequency and distribution of news about the contradictions of the political scene, aspirations and mobilizations, express the constitution of common reading agendas, in order to build an understanding of what was taking place and the plurality of texts seemed to point out the horizon of expectations marked by the news and opinion columns. According to Reinhart Koselleck (2006, p. 305), “there is no expectation without experience, there is no experience without expectation” and the historical time is constituted by such dimensions, which “intertwine past and future” and “drive concrete actions in the social and political movement” that are expressed in asymmetrical relations and configurations. It would not take long until some keywords of redemocratization were frequently mentioned on newspaper pages. The assertion that the country was beginning to experience an “opening” of the political system, or even a “reopening.” Evidence of this may be the governors’ succession procedure applied by the political system, under the responsibility of Senator Petrônio Portela, and not by means of appointments made by the Presidential Office, besides the affirmation of the then Deputy Tancredo Neves that a “political dialogue” was under way for the “national understanding, aimed at the resumption of democratic fullness,” as well as at the “prerogatives of civil power” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 13/02/1974, p. 3).

Nevertheless, according to the *Folha*, the new government revealed the future: “now, the major political and administrative lines of a finally settled Nation and a State that advances to effectiveness are drawn.” The newspaper claimed the government knew how to “predict” it and, hence, “manage” it. So, it was not possible to deceive oneself with what the newspaper named, in an Editorial, as “party-crazy,” because the “future ideal” would be that of “a society whose hierarchy coexists with democracy.” The newspaper reaffirmed the authoritarian mechanisms of State management imposed by the military dictatorship, which corresponded to the power of a technocracy that claimed to be modernizing and legitimized by a so-called administrative efficacy (PRADO; EARP, 2003, p. 207-242). On the other hand, it sought to provide the “common man” with a voice, through interviews with humble people, inhabiting the outskirts of Brasília, having the new President as a theme. One of them, João de Souza, said: “they say he’s good, but I do not know if he’s going to be any better than Médici, who helped the working man a lot.” At the University of Brasília (UnB), on the other hand, a female student would have asked the reporting team: “is my opinion worth anything?” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 15/03/1974, p. 3).

In order to understand the correlations between the expectations about the redemocratization process found on the pages of the *Folha de S. Paulo*, it is necessary to work on the hermeneutics of the texts analyzed that presupposes the dialogue between the researcher and his testimonies, suggesting that the reports of lived experiences respond to the doubts of the present, without depriving the past of its unique and historically dated dimension. This commitment is inherent to historical knowledge, when it does not to get rid of the numerous cultural mediations that interpose between the historian and its object and the interactions and influences involved. So, this approach consists in apprehending meanings and building a narrative framework that combines the horizon of expectations: “we must fight against the tendency to think of the past from the viewpoint of what is finished, immutable, and irreproachable” (RICOEUR, 1997, p. 372). Through the *Folha de S. Paulo*, we can access the threads to build a historical memory, at the time of its production, something which played a major role in order to support the dictatorial regime, but also to construct the routes linked to what would be

named as transition. The newspaper shows traces of the rise of a political horizon for the country in the midst of power relations and electoral disputes. Every piece of news, column, chronicle, ad, or note “does not constitute a single isolated object” (LUCA, 2005, p. 113), but it makes sense as a part of a narrative cycle.

Achieving a diachronic view of the process to construct several social representations that managed to drive and legitimize social practices and political projects, as well as to define the interlocutors of the redemocratization process and its scope and limits, depends on interpretative acts as key elements of the historiographical operation to carry out the work “of understanding the whole through the individual and the individual through the whole” in a “circular movement,” as Hans-Georg Gadamer (1997, p. 436-444) points out. Interpretation presupposes an anticipation of meaning, insofar as the interpreter seeks to share the meanings of a text with its author: “whoever wants to grasp it is bound up with the thing at stake that is expressed in the transmission,” although there is no continuous and direct link to the text, as an “unquestionable unity.” This implies “there really is a polarity between familiarity and strangeness” and it is in this intermediation that “the conditions under which understanding comes” emerge. In the case of a historical interpretation, understanding is not limited by temporal distance, on the contrary: it assures “a positive and productive possibility of understanding,” by allowing the constant emergence of “new sources of understanding that make unsuspected meaning relations clear.”

Throughout the period that began with the imposition of dictatorship, in 1964, the country experienced an intense urbanization process, the constitution of large contingents of urban middle classes, and the structuring of modern mass communication structures had long-lasting and profound political effects on the organization of society. The press took a role in the process to constitute memories and it was an outstanding political player in contemporary Brazil. The technical modernization that accelerated precisely in the military dictatorship years comprised a rather intense influence on the mass politics and the power games of that time. The building of a historical memory at the period, found on newspaper pages, raises another indispensable element for discussion: the reading audience and the buyers of newspapers and magazines, which

consist in the urban middle classes, a major social segment supporting the regime, above all during the so-called “economic miracle,” which guaranteed the creation of a large consumer market.

Throughout the period, mainly the middle-class audience was reached by the political propaganda of the regime, which was supported by the affirmation of optimism as a characteristic inherent to the Brazilian people (FICO, 1997, p. 137). The official language has associated the country’s unity with a supposed position of the Brazilian population characterized by hope and belief in the future, something which would be inscribed in the national culture. The “economic miracle” and the conquest of the 1970 World Cup would confirm the country’s “destiny of greatness” and the certainties regarding the future of each Brazilian. Concerned with the public image of the regime, the communication policy established in the Medici administration would remain in the Geisel administration, including the maintenance of the character “Sujismundo” [Dirty and Filthy], regarded as an educational campaign, using the motto “a developed people is a clean people,” besides “short films addressing the themes security and development, elections, global celebration, and also a campaign against waste” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 01/06/1974, p. 1). Thus, it is observed that the electoral theme entered the concerns of those who worked in the government’s communication area.

The socioeconomic environment was beginning to undermine the regime and to decrease optimistic expectations about the country's performance: the oil crisis suggested cautious expectations. Despite this, in early 1974, the Minister of Finance, Delfim Netto, guaranteed a group of bankers that, contrary to what “the prophets of the Apocalypse” claimed, the oil issue would be “transient” and the country would begin to generate conditions to distribution income, because the “labor force shortage” might have an impact on the increased wages, something which neither trade unions or the government could achieve, in a process that would provide Brazil with conditions to become “a politically open society,” compatible with the “decentralization of economic power” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 30/01/1974, p. 1). At the end of the year, the Getulio Vargas Foundation estimated that the growth of the economy would have been around 10%, and this led the Planning Minister, João Paulo dos Reis Veloso, to ensure the “viability of the II

National Development Plan” and the maintenance of “high rates of growth” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 27/12/1974, p. 1).

At the international level, in mid-1974 the news also brought up the issue of democracy. The “Carnation Revolution” brought Salazar’s dictatorship to an end in Portugal and the “democratic wind” from Lisbon was blowing on the pages of the Brazilian newspaper. The news about the fall of Marcelo Caetano and the role played by the Portuguese Armed Forces in the process referred to the political police, political prisoners, and outlawed parties, subjects that did not occupy the national news (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 27/04/1974, p. 1).

Meanwhile, the MDB was preparing for the November elections in a situation announced as fragile, because of the “lack of party structure.” The party had been experiencing problems, even of a generational nature: the most significant leaders were in the age group of 60 years and they came from the old Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSD), i.e. “in the old days they were government and not opposition,” which made them unable to deal with the time they were living in. This “uniformity of origin” was mourned by the so-called “authentic” group. “Moderate” MDB members planned that the party leadership would be exerted by Tancredo Neves, and this did not please the younger and combative sectors (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 02/06/1974, p. 3). On the newspaper pages, the political debate found space and the issues surrounding the electoral process gained importance, both for the government, which was eager to gain legitimacy for the dictatorship, and for the opposition itself, which came to see in the mechanisms made available by the regime one of the few alternatives to speak for popular opinion. Federal Deputy Alceu Colares even suggested that both parties officially open the electoral campaign with “a joint presentation on the TV” in order to “motivate the electorate” and openly discuss the “Brazilian economic model and its social implications” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 14/08/1974, p. 4).

In the November 15 elections, the opposition party would obtain “a surprising and expressive vote” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 17/11/1974, p. 1). Soon the government did not stop threatening: it accepted the result, but did not admit that “the free manifestation of popular will” was “distorted for purposes of contestation to the regime.” The

A long present: The role played by the press in the Brazilian redemocratization process – The Folha de S. Paulo in 1974
Reinaldo Lindolfo Lohn

authoritarian bases of the dictatorship should not be put into question. When quoting a palace source, the newspaper reproduced the following statement: “do not say that the people voted against the institutional act, because this is not true; it did vote against the cost of living, the high price of foodstuffs, and other consequences of the inflationary process” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 19/11/1974, p. 3).

It is also known that a good number of those who became directly involved in opposition to the military regime, both due to family ties and occupational ties, may be positioned as members of the Brazilian urban middle class. If between the decree of Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5), in 1968, and the early signs of a crack in the authoritarian apparatus, in 1974, the political discussion was limited and restricted to the private sphere, from then on the public criticism of the regime has expanded, but not from a revolutionary or insurrectional viewpoint: “democracy comes to be appreciated as an object in itself and, along with it, the organization of society and participation in the electoral game, even under limitations” (ALMEIDA; WEISS, 1998, p. 336).

This perception was largely due to the defeats suffered by the left-wing, which was devoted to direct action mainly through armed struggle. If the 1964 coup overturned popular awareness-raising strategies and popular engagement in national-democratic movements, the collapse of clandestine organizations involved in the armed revolution triggered a reassessment of the political action needed to defeat the regime and this put on the scene participation in the electoral disputes. The crisis of ideas around a certain vanguardism of the militants was evidenced by the organizations’ social and political isolation, and this facilitated the repression employed by the dictatorship. In the early 1970s, “enclosed by the cities, and, within the cities, besieged, the revolutionary organizations agonized.” Marcelo Ayres Camurça and Daniel Aarão Reis (2007, p. 137-138) focus on the case of the Brazilian Revolutionary Movement October 8 (MR-8) and demonstrate that self-criticism has led a large part of its members to “end the struggle and armed actions and initiate in Brazil a popular work in labor unions and in popular associations.” In 1974, there was active participation in the electoral process, along with the MDB, which deepened from then on, turning the organization into a mobilizing entity

linked to the party and some of its prominent leaderships, mainly during electoral periods.

The narrative of democratization

The elections and appreciation of vote introduced new elements in the Brazilian political culture, hitherto marked by disqualification of institutional mechanisms of popular participation and resentful images forged in the elitist belief about a so-called population's unpreparedness for voting (BENEVIDES, 1994). In 1976, the *Folha de S. Paulo* opined: "it was preached for a long time that the Country's development was one of the preconditions to deploy a full democracy in Brazilian lands," but due to the unfeasibility of economic growth without "advances in the political and social sectors as well," the State's behavior should change. This might imply noticing that the Country "was mature for political openings, i.e. above all, more power for civilians in national decisions" (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 03/01/1976, p. 2).

The elections channeled various social mobilization forms into formal partisan disputes and the press emerged as a mediator of the various voices and, as a privileged witness, it took the role of builder of the historical memory of democratization. Journalistic companies that, until then, had had an ambiguous participation in the Brazilian political process, like the *Folha de S. Paulo* itself, which even has registered support for the implementation and enforcement of the regime, claimed a prominent position in the schemes and conflicts involving the Brazilian political system democratization and they appointed the interlocutors who should lead the country to political democracy. Support for the direct elections campaign would guarantee the *Folha de S. Paulo* "the possibility of developing by itself another narrative of its participation in the recent history of the country; in a short time, these episodes become the main focus in the fabric of memory, leading a part of the past to lose significance in the rise of the new social role that it proposes to play" (SILVA, 2011, p. 190).

Given the above, from the mid-1970s on, much of the written press appears not only as a spectator, but as a major interlocutor on the political issues that involved the so-

called “distension,” the subsequent “slow, gradual, and safe” opening, and the constitution of the “New Republic.” These three historical moments, set up in the administrations of Ernesto Geisel, João Figueiredo, and José Sarney, were largely covered, initially with the difficulties due to information control and prior censorship (as well as self-censorship, as it is worth recalling), by Brazilian newspapers, which went through an era of paradoxical technological and editorial modernization in the midst of an authoritarian regime. The newspaper pages gradually became a medium for social and political representations of the country as a whole, up to the point that press sectors assumed the role of indispensable pieces of the Brazilian democratic construction. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the 1964 coup, an Editorial in the *Folha de S. Paulo* took stock of that historical cycle, at a time requiring “the search for new paths that really lead to a modern and solid democracy, and an economy capable of bringing to an end the poverty concentration zones and the extreme regional and social imbalances,” which might imply “a definitive detachment from the authoritarian rules that governed this phase of the national political process.” As the pinnacle of the redemocratization cycle, the newspaper pointed out “mass adherence of the most diverse sectors of society to the idea of the immediate direct presidential election” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 31/03/1984, p. 2).

Time is a social experience that presides over individual and collective trajectories. According to Krysztof Pomian (1993), linear time coexists with cyclical temporality through practices such as divination, plans, and prognostics, in which social coordinates are identified to inscribe the future in the present. Assigning the present as the starting point of an ascending period, as a progression, turns the future into the “object of hope, whereas the past is conceived not as what provides examples to follow, but as an elapsed period.” On the contrary, when the present is taken as regression, the future becomes the bearer of anguish and “we turn to the past in order to imitate it as much as possible.” Throughout the 20th century, historical time has ceased to be taken as a “uniform flow,” preestablished, and this has given relevance to the observation of social processes, in order to grasp their very singularities, variations, and rhythms, within short or long

periods, in the form of models that establish a “succession of cycles, periods of development, decline, stagnation, resumption” (POMIAN, 1993, p. 154-160).

One of the characteristics of the role taken by the newspaper in this process was its decisive contribution to establish narrative frameworks that concerted actions and ordered interpretations of the historical cycle that began in 1974. From then on, we may identify the constitution of an ascending phase within a temporal and narrative cycle that would organize the movements of political players towards the widespread redemocratization. Government and opposition reached some consensus and sought a slow consensus on the future to be traced, by means of the legitimacy assured by the press, introduced as a carrier of elements considered key to a democratic political culture, such as freedom of expression and safeguard of public opinion. In 1978, Ulysses Guimarães pointed out the need for amnesty, again: “it is not enough to crawl shyly, follow the direction of events; there is a need to anticipate them. Bringing the amnesty into force is enough for the country to resume dialogue” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 01/07/1978, p. 4). In the constitution of these reference frameworks of the narrative cycle, the press work was crucial, as a necessary interface in the political field and as a mobilizer of a collection of images and speeches that guided much of the discussions and negotiations between government, political parties, social movements, and citizens. The issue of the relation to the State was pointed out, as well as the authoritarianism, the censorship, the rise of cultural representations that become predominant, and the power practices put into action in the political disputes and agreements. In the case of the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, we notice its presentation as a shield for the rise of a historical memory in the democratization process that tended to legitimize positions and sublimate possibilities. In 1979, when assessing the need for amnesty, an Editorial established the guiding principles of the process. After the exiles returned, the country came back “to the atmosphere that precedes the reconciliation it needs to heal all the wounds of discretion, such as the wounds of political violence” and to go on with the “directed distension” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 04/01/1979, p. 2) to which government, opposition, and the press were committed.

In August 1979, the Brazilian Amnesty Law was enacted, introduced as “broad, general, and unrestricted,” through which the government sought to control and empty the national campaign launched as the Brazilian Committee for Amnesty, created a year earlier, which brought together entities that had been active for years in the struggle for human rights and in the defense of political prisoners. The legislation might guarantee impunity for the perpetrators of dictatorship, particularly for those more directly committed to the repressive apparatus. According to Carlos Fico (2010), “the ‘opening’ process stages were planned to keep up with the cautious pace established by Ernesto Geisel.” With the advent of this law, politicians and activists who went into exile returned because they did not see a way how to survive under the dictatorship conditions, among them the labor activist Leonel Brizola and the communist Luís Carlos Prestes.

Social expectations and the dispersion of proposals would find a privileged condensation moment during the discussions that led to the establishment of the so-called New Republic. According to Marcos Napolitano (2002, p. 145-162), “the ‘language of rights’ seems to have guided the journalistic discourse within the period, in spite of the various ideological nuances.” Engagement in the “democratic issue,” which circulated with an emphasis on public space and journalistic texts since the previous decade, contributed so that the press gained social legitimacy, since “what was really at stake was the consolidation of liberal hegemony in the immediate transition process, something which has been fully achieved.”

In spite of the plurality of political cultures and meanings assigned to redemocratization, in the narrative that the *Folha de S. Paulo* helped to build, the historical process should lead to a democracy based on the delegation of popular power to the formal political and partisan nuclei that have been consolidating since 1974, which had the legitimacy to speak out on behalf of the population and ensure a steady course towards the opening process. It is worth recalling that, since the end of the Ernesto Geisel administration, in 1979, the authoritarian regime leadership began to show signs that the return to democracy was something brighter on the horizon. For this process to take place it would be necessary to remove the authoritarian rubbish from the political system, however, as the rulers advocated, slowly and gradually. It took around 10 years

until democracy could come true in the various spheres of Brazilian society, and these relations were mainly based on the 1988 Constitution. It was hoped at the time that the so-called complementary legislation was generated from the same prism.

The *Folha* was one of the big press media that set the narrative which endowed with historical meaning the events and the outstanding characters of the political opening process, while at the same time assuring the status of indispensable element in the Brazilian democratic game. The press takes a role in the political field, as one of the players that influence positions, because it introduces strategic possibilities submitted “to the choice of players.” So, it is understood that “the parties, as well as tendencies within the parties, have only a relational existence” and depend on the structure of negotiations and transactions established between opponents and allies, based on a common repertoire made visible on the pages of newspapers and magazines in the democratization process (BOURDIEU, 1989, p.178). The impossibility of direct elections to the Presidency of the Republic has led to the agreements that would allow the election of a civilian according to the rules and conditions negotiated with the authoritarian regime. Tancredo Neves’ election through the Electoral College was then introduced as an end to the authoritarian cycle, but at the same time an indispensable part in the redemocratization cycle: “this electoral college meeting [...] has a great symbolic meaning, since it marks the end of a whole period of the country’s history. Its significance lies, just as the Nation longs for, precisely on the fact of being the last one” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 15/01/1985, p. 2). So, the day after the victory, the newspaper predicted: “Tancredo’s election as President of the Republic marked the end of a cycle in the Brazilian political life.” And it went further in defining the meanings of that milestone: authoritarianism had consisted in “a constant disrespect for public opinion, for the citizens’ memory, the disengagement with any idea from which one cannot take immediate personal advantage, the systematic use of disinformation and disrespect” (FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 16/01/1985, p. 2), practices condemned and replaced by hope in democracy.

The press is an indispensable source for grasping a present past, not as something stable and frozen, but as the supports of an intentionally produced memory, by

establishing meanings and legitimizing certain political processes. In this case, a newspaper such as the *Folha de S. Paulo* was among the mediators of memories, since, to a certain extent, “it is through the discourse of third parties that the subjects are informed about the rest of the facts contemporary to them,” by means of constructs based on “increasingly media-driven” sources (SARLO, 2007, p. 90-92), which have influenced the perceptions and memories of a recent period of time, impacting both individual trajectories and collective experiences. According to Jacques Le Goff (1994, p. 142-143), the intelligibility of the schemes and fabrics that involved the unfolding of events and facts elevated to the status of “historical episodes” involved the intervention of mass communication outlets. Social memory becomes a fruit of the “information discourse,” which introduces the succession of events narrated by the press as a part of an experienced, immediately memorized, and written history. It is not just about recording, but about participating in the social construction of events. Then, the political narrative emerges in the form of journalistic texts built as knots linking media outlets, movements, and social players. Through their intervention, meanings were assigned and explanations were established concerning the political cultures, understood as networks of perceptions and social experiences. These social reading agendas have been present both in the sphere of capillary and micro-social relations and in comprehensive historical phenomena, by constituting sets of beliefs and symbols, rules, and practices that, in combination, foreshadowed the political negotiations involved in Brazilian redemocratization.

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Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina – UDESC
Programa de Pós-Graduação em História – PPGH

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tempoeargumento@gmail.com