

Crossing the Atlantic: Globo's Wager in Portugal

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This paper is the starting point of a two-year research project about the impact of Globo Network in Portugal. The research project will mainly expand on the issues covered in this paper. The aims of this paper are two-fold: firstly, to analyse the relevance of the Portuguese television market to Globo; secondly, to examine the importance of Globo's *telenovelas* in Portugal since the 1970's as well as the consequences of the recent transfer of Globo's capital and know-how to a newly created commercial television channel in Portugal, *Sociedade Independente de Comunicação* (SIC).

1 Supremacy at home

'If we are speaking of television in Brazil, that necessarily means we are speaking of Globo' (Lima, 1990:35).

Brazilian biggest television network, TV Globo, is one of the most interesting cases of so-called reverse cultural imperialism. As Sinclair et al. point out 'the irony is that Latin America, which was practically the cradle of the theorisation of cultural imperialism, is now the region with most spectacular examples undermining that theory' (1996:7). Indeed, Globo - run by the Marinho family - is today one of the most powerful multimedia groups. Though Roberto Marinho (in his 90s) built up a conglomerate of nearly 100 companies, in the communications arena the main enterprises are: Globo's own ten television stations and 68 affiliated stations; Globo's Radio network has 11 own stations and 15 affiliated; *O Globo* newspaper (the second largest paper in the country); Globo News Agency; Globo Publishing; Sigla audio producer; Globo video and Globo films (Lima, 1990:36).

According to João Roberto Marinho, Vice-president of Globo enterprises and the son of Roberto Marinho, 'the Globo network reaches today a potential market of 33 million households with TV, and the network reaches 97% of the Brazilian territory' (interviewed by Mayblin, 1996:8). The TBI Yearbook 96 claims that TV Globo currently attracts 65% of the country's viewing audience. This figure is nevertheless disputed by

João Roberto Marinho who states that the figure is 70% (Ibid.). The remainder 30% is divided between five national, privately run services - São Paulo based SBT, TV Manchete in Rio de Janeiro and the former regional stations TV Record, Bandeirantes, and CNT - and one publicly owned broadcaster.

Literature about Globo often portrays it as being the world's fourth largest network in terms of audience size. The 'fourth largest in the world' which is still taken for granted was established when TV Globo won an international award in the US in 1985. At that time research showed that Globo was the fourth biggest network in the world after the American NBC, ABC and CBS. Since then no research had been conducted to find out if that is still the case. But, in terms of audience size, things might have changed. 'Both India's and China's state TV network monopolies, for instance, now command audiences several times larger than Brazil's Globo network, not only because they are monopolies but also because of the sheer size of their respective population (Mayblin, 1996:9).

Being or not the 'fourth largest in the world', Globo gets most of Brazil's US\$3.9 billion expenditure a year in advertising (Kucinski, 1994:52). The Globo network absorbs about 80% of advertising for television and 60% of the total amount of money spent on advertising in the seventh largest advertising market in the world (Amaral and Guimarães, 1994:29). In the 1992 financial statement, the Roberto Marinho group declared just over US\$2 billion net revenue (Kucinski, 1994:52).

Globo's financial success is far from being the mere result of an entrepreneurial strategy. In fact, as Guimarães and Amaral point out, the broadcasting monopoly was

not constructed on the margins of state, but in its shadow, with the support and protection of the successive military regimes. Its consolidation, however, took place under the patronage of the New Republic and the Collor government was key. After securing the private system with public investment and a technological infrastructure owned by the state, the military governments singled out one of the private systems, the Globo network, as their favoured. The military's choice was confirmed by the next civilian government, even though this meant that the government would refrain from enforcing even the minimal existing regulatory legislation (1994:32).

The relationship between the media business and national politics in Brazil could hardly be more intimate. Indeed, Roberto Marinho makes no excuse for supporting those in power given that without their permission, Globo could not operate in its present form. 'As long as the political power remains strong, we will show solidarity with it; if things change towards public opinion, we will change as well' (Marinho quoted in *Diário de Lisboa*, 30 July 1984).

2 Going beyond Brazil

Having a strong position in the domestic market, Globo started considering the export of its cultural products, mainly *telenovelas*. In the 1970s, Globo's executives perceived the export of its products as a 'prestige factor' rather than as a revenue source. Given that *telenovelas* were made for the domestic market, its export implied practically no additional costs. Any extra-funds it could generate would be well received but, in the early stages of internationalisation, profits

from the external market were expected to be kept low.

At that time, two external markets stood up as the 'natural' markets for Globo's *telenovelas*: the Latin American market considering that most Latin American countries were at the time strong producers and consumers of the *telenovela* genre, and the Portuguese market due to its cultural and linguistic proximity.

The export to Latin American countries would be more demanding as it would involve promotion, distribution and the dubbing to Spanish. Apart from that, in Latin America, Globo already had a strong competitor in terms of production and distribution of *telenovelas*: the Mexican television network, Televisa. In contrast, Globo would not have any competitor in Portugal and there would be no need to make any linguistic adaptation. Therefore, Portugal became the first external market for Globo's *telenovelas*. In 1976, Globo sold *Gabriela* to the Portuguese Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) company, *Rádiatelevisão Portuguesa* (RTP). Its success was remarkable.

One year later, Globo set up an international division to support the export of *telenovelas* to Latin America. As expected, Globo's penetration in the Latin American market was not easy particularly due to Televisa's competition. But their strategy was very aggressive as an executive from the international division explained. 'To enter and win this market we had to face Televisa which produces 26 hours of Spanish programmes per day(...). Still we have been able to sell our products, adding dubbing costs, 50% cheaper than Televisa's. How? Using what I called 'drugs strategy': first you practically give, wait for success and later you sell for

the best price' (quoted in Graef and Rocha, 1988:143).

The *telenovela*'s popularity in the Portuguese market made Globo's executives consider further expansion into the European market in the early 1980s. Globo started promoting its products in specialised international magazines. Presenting itself as 'Globo TV Network of Brazil', the corporation was prepared to sell not only *telenovelas* but also mini-series, talk shows and sports programmes. Globo became a constant presence in international television festivals and markets (e.g.. Monte Carlo festival, London Multimedia market, NAPTE, organized by the National Associated TV Program Executives, in the US, etc.). Furthermore, Globo became highly competitive in terms of international televisions awards. These awards were important to promote the product (Graef and Rocha, 1988:143-4).

Orders from Latin American countries were dealt with by the International Division in Rio de Janeiro. The New York office distributed Globo's products in the US and Canada while the Roma office received orders from Europe, with the exception of Portugal. RTP negotiated directly at board level in Globo's headquarters in Rio de Janeiro (Graef and Rocha, 1988:144). By the mid-1980's Globo not only retained its leading position in the Brazilian television market but it was exporting its cultural products to 128 countries (Melo, 1988:39). Globo's *telenovelas*, in particular, are galvanising audiences in Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia.

If the export of programmes was relatively risk-free, the same cannot be said about direct investment in a foreign company. In 1985, Globo exported, for the first time, ca-

pital to Europe, buying 90% of Telemontecarlo. The headquarters of the company was in Monte Carlo and its potential audience was in Italy and part of France. The initial investment was of US\$9 million but additional capital was needed, among other things, to improve the reception of the television signal in Italy.

With the acquisition of Telemontecarlo, Globo expected to strengthen its position in the European market and ‘to develop an European television network’ (Louven quoted in Graef and Rocha, 1988:149). This was however a very unsuccessful venture and in 1994 Globo decided to sell its remaining shares. It is believed that Globo suffered huge losses with this undertaking, though the company has never revealed figures. Amongst the reasons to leave Telemontecarlo, Globo mentions the European economic recession and the fall of the Italian lira in relation to the US dollar (*Diário de Notícias*, 16 January 1994). This failed investment had repercussion in Globo’s future investment strategy.

3 Gabriela: the onset of ‘reverse’ dependency

Portugal was indeed a ‘natural’ export market for Globo’s products. Apart from the non-existence of a linguistic barrier, there has always been a strong cultural affinity between both countries. This means that popular television products in Brazil generally become popular in Portugal. ‘The audience patterns in Brazil coincide with the audience patterns in Portugal. Furthermore, the preferences of the Portuguese people are getting closer and closer to those of the Brazilian

people’, says Geraldo Casé, artistic director of Globo’s International Division (quoted in *O Jornal, Suplemento*, 20 May 1988). In both Lusophone countries, *telenovelas* are the most widely watched television programmes.¹

In the beginning however *telenovelas* were a truly difference product for the Portuguese public. *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela*, an adaptation of a Jorge Amado’s novel, was the first *telenovela* to be broadcast in Portugal by the PSB company, RTP. The first episode went on the air on the 16th of May 1977 and soon became highly successful. People were actually changing their life style so they could watch the programme. This massive popularity was not foreseen and surprised the people involved in the process. ‘RTP was very conservative. With the exception of the BBC, no European channel was programming serials. So, I was hesitant in terms of introducing changes in prime time’, states Carlos Cruz, RTP’s Programme Director at the time (in *Expresso*, 17 May 1997).

Indeed, it was Globo itself that first approached RTP with a proposal to acquire its products. Carlos Cruz says that he ended up doing the very first negotiation with Globo by mere accident. He happened to be in that position when Globo tried to sell *Gabriela* to RTP. Still, Carlos Cruz believes that the development of this relation was ‘inevitable’ (in *Expresso*, 17 May 1997). Once the floodgate had been opened, Globo substantially intensified the export of *telenovelas* to RTP. *O Casarão*, *Astro*, *Escrava Isaura* and *Dancin’ Days* followed *Gabriela*, all beating au-

¹*Telenovelas* are also the most widely watched television programmes in Portuguese speaking African countries.

dience records, with no competition either from other Brazilian TV networks or from Portuguese producers.

From 1977 up until 1987, Globo sold 19 telenovelas to RTP.² After one decade of monopoly, Globo had to face competition from other Brazilian television networks. *Manchete* and *Bandeirantes* started exporting telenovelas and mini-series, though the vast majority of *novelas* continued to be Globo's products. Globo's *telenovelas* were perceived as being those with higher quality and the network had already strong links with RTP.

On a comparatively smaller scale, Portuguese companies also started to produce *telenovelas*: in 1982, Edipim produced the first one, *Vila Faia*; in 1985 RTP produced *Chuva na Areia*; in 1987, *Estúdios Atlântida* produced *Palavras Cruzadas*. Overall, less than a dozen *telenovelas* were produced by Portuguese companies. Still, these 'domestic' products represent an effort to 'fight the ultra-dependency on Brazilian *telenovelas*', as Carneiro³ puts it (quoted in Sousa, 1996:210). Indeed, soon after the first Brazilian *novelas* were on the air, fears of 'reverse colonisation' have been expressed by the Portuguese cultural elites. The Portuguese *telenovelas* - in itself a repercussion of Brazilian *telenovelas* - were an attempt to counter-balance the Brazilian predominance.

²*Gabriela, Casarão, Astro, Escrava Isaura, Dancin' Days, Sinhazinha Flô, Dona Xepa, Água Viva, Olhai os Lírios do Campo, Baila Comigo, Cabocla, Pai Herói, O Bem Amado, Guerra dos Sexos, Rabo de Saia, A Sucessora, Louco Amor, Corpo a Corpo, Vereda Tropical.*

³Roberto Carneiro is a former chairman of the private national TV channel, *Televisão Independente de Comunicação*, TVI.

But, neither Portuguese *telenovelas* nor other Brazilian networks *telenovelas* could effectively compete with Globo (*Pantanal* from *Manchete* being an exception). Globo increased considerably the export of *novelas* to RTP throughout the years. During the first decade, Globo was exporting an average of three per year while by 1986/87 this figure had duplicated. Guaranteeing audiences, Globo's *telenovelas* became, in the 1990's, a trump card fiercely disputed between the traditional PSB company, RTP, and the newly created private TV channels, *Sociedade Independente de Comunicação* (SIC) and *Televisão Independente* (TVI).⁴

With the break up of RTP's monopoly in 1992 and the subsequent ferocious battle for audiences, *telenovelas* became even more dominant in television programming. The demand was so intense that companies had to look for other content providers rather than Globo. TVI acquired *novelas* from *Bandeirantes*, *Serviço Brasileiro de Televisão*, *TV Cultura* (all Brazilian networks), *Televisa* (Mexico) and *Venevision* (Venezuela). In January 1995, for instance, TVI was programming three Venezuelan *telenovelas* (dubbed into Brazilian-Portuguese) per day and one Brazilian in prime time. Lacking financial⁵ and human resources, TVI could not compete with RTP and SIC in terms of getting Globo's products and/or technical support.

Being more resourceful than TVI, RTP

⁴RTP operated in monopoly until the 6th of October 1996, when the first national private channel, SIC, started broadcasting. On the 20th of February 1993, a second national TV channel, TVI went on the air. So, presently there are four national terrestrial TV channels: RTP 1, RTP 2, SIC and TVI.

⁵TVI has only 10% of the television advertising cake.

has been able to afford Brazilian *telenovelas* which are perceived as having more quality. In RTP's generalist channel, RTP 1, *telenovelas* are indeed a constant presence. In January 1995, this channel was broadcasting two *telenovelas* in the morning, one in the afternoon and the most popular one (usually the most recent) around 8.30 pm.

For SIC too, Brazilian *telenovelas* are the most important programming aspect of its highly competitive strategy. It was mainly with *telenovelas* that SIC managed to overtake RTP 1 in terms of audiences, being today the most watched TV channel in the country. Considering also January 1995, as we did for the other channels, SIC broadcast two *novelas* in the morning, one in the afternoon and two in the evening. Great importance is given to the selection of the last two *telenovelas* (before and after the main news bulletin of the day).

In contrast with a number of Latin American countries, Portugal produces a very small number of series or movies, being therefore dependent on foreign products. Brazilian *telenovelas* in general, and those of Globo in particular, are crucial to the sustenance of bulky audiences. Watching *telenovelas* clearly became an ingrained habit of the Portuguese people.

The cultural and social consequences of 20 years of *telenovelas* in Portuguese TV have not yet been thoroughly studied. Nevertheless, a number of signals are already observable. Brazilian expressions entered into people's vocabulary, Brazilian first names are quite popular, *novela's* actors and actresses fashion accessories are imitated, 'Brazilian-style' Carnival is 'reproduced' in a substantial number of towns. There is also a common perception that *telenovelas* had an

important role in terms of liberalising social behaviour.

4 A new strategy for a new system

In the 1990's, the influence of Globo in Portugal has spread to other spheres beyond the export of *telenovelas*. The opening up of the television market in the early 1990's provided Globo with opportunity to acquire a solid position in Portugal and, indeed, its strategy adapted to the new competitive environment.

Once the Television Act (law nº58/90) was passed and the bidding regulations approved, on the 2nd April 1991, three Portuguese candidates applied for the two available national TV channels: the *Sociedade Independente de Comunicação* (SIC) led by former prime-minister, Pinto Balsemão; TV1 *Rede Independente*, chaired by Proença de Carvalho with the support of the Carlos Barbosa media group (Presslivre), and *Televisão Independente* (TVI), close to the Catholic Church. Even before the results were publicly announced, *Globo* had invested in SIC the very maximum allowed by law to a foreign participation (15%). At that time, 15% of SIC's capital represented US\$34m. Currently, as the companies capital increased, 15% represents US\$74m.

Though SIC was an expected winner in the bidding process, investing capital in a Portuguese broadcasting company was not an easy decision for Globo's executives to make. For Globo, it has always been safer to export cultural products because, once investment had been recouped in the home market, selling *telenovelas*, mini-series and other shows

could only mean extra-funds. Investing capital in a Portuguese broadcaster was inevitably a risky business. The licence-fee had been abolished and four national TV channels (RTP 1, RTP 2, SIC and TVI) were preparing themselves to fight for a small advertising cake (£160m) (Sousa, 1996: 4). Additionally, in the early 1990's, the first (and by then only) European Globo's experience in terms of capital investment, Telemontecarlo, was already in serious trouble. Telemontecarlo had been, in fact, a poorly judged manouvre and investing capital in the Portuguese market was therefore not in Roberto Marinho's plans. Not prepared to waist anymore financial resources, Roberto Marinho (father) resisted to the idea for quite some-time.

Still, Roberto Marinho's son, Roberto Irineu Marinho, responsible for the Audiovisual and New Markets, and Pinto Balsemão himself, ended up convincing Globo's chairman that SIC would be a solid investment. Having failed with the first European market (Italy), Roberto Irineu might have also wanted to prove his father that successful investment in Europe was possible.

Pinto Balsemão took the task of convincing the Brazilians personally and travelled to Rio de Janeiro to secure the investment and the technical/human support that SIC so badly needed. 'I was recently in Brazil and dr. Roberto Marinho offered a dinner in my honour at his home. Amongst the 30 guests were the most important Globo's executives. I had meetings with these executives for two days and I discussed issues such as equipment, commercial difficulties and the profile of Globo's representative in SIC's board' (interview to *O Independente*, 24 May 1991).

The personal relationship between Pinto

Balsemão and Roberto Marinho was a determining factor in terms of Globo's investment in SIC. According to SIC's Marketing Director, Correia Pires, there are affinities between both which probably made their talks easier: 'both started their careers as journalists and both worked in newspapers; both developed multi-media strategies and, coincidentally, their first television experiences were developed when they were middle-aged men; apart from that and, although in different forms, both have been involved in politics' (interview, 26 May 1997).

All efforts were made to convince Roberto Marinho because Globo was perceived by SIC's executives as an ideal strategic partner. Firstly, Globo had 'the' perfect products in terms of audiences, *telenovelas*; secondly, Globo had managerial and technical experience; thirdly, any help they could provide would not be impaired by linguistic barriers. Following initial unsteady talks, the Marinho family finally reached a consensus and decided to invest financially in SIC and to provide technical help.

Globo's backing was particularly important right after the disclosure of the winners of the television channels bidding process. On the 6th of February 1992, after a Cabinet meeting, the *ministro* Marques Mendes, announced that SIC had won the concession for a national TV channel. From that moment up until the beginning of SIC's regular broadcasts, on the 6th of October 1992, Globo's expertise was crucial. Neither Balsemão nor his most trusted collaborator, Emídio Rangel, had any previous experience in television. Two thirds of newly recruited journalists had never faced a camera and, in a country where RTP operated in a monopoly, there

were not too many places where SIC could recruit its technicians from.

Being Globo - in SIC's executives eyes - a model commercial television, SIC's managers travelled to Brazil in order to understand how the Brazilians were organized and how the company performed. Pinto Balsemão, President of the board, and Emídio Rangel, Programmes and Information Director, made working trips to Globo. The Marketing Director and Comercial Director had also professional internships at Globo. Moreover, Globo has a senior executive, Pedro Carvalho, in SIC's administrative board. Pedro Carvalho is a man of confidence of Roberto Marinho and has a strong position in SIC. He is the Vice-President of the board and the Vice-President of the executive commission. Directly and indirectly, SIC's management strategy has been influenced by the Brazilians. SIC has very aggressive Marketing and Comercial departments, and, like Globo, its programming strategy is unconditionally designed to maximise audiences.

Globo's technical department has also provided crucial know-how to the newly created TV station. It has provided expertise in terms of selection of equipment and human resources. There has been a Trans-Atlantic movement: SIC's technicians have travelled to Brazil to develop their expertise and Globo's experts have come to Lisbon to provide their services at SIC's studios. Apart from engineering and the selection of human resources, Globo has also been very important in terms of defining SIC's image. SIC's logo and image was developed by Globo's designer, Hans Donner.

In these circumstances, it comes as no surprise Pinto Balsemão's admission that there is an 'intimate' relationship between *Globo*

and SIC: 'They have given us plenty of advice, we tried to follow them and it has been very fruitful' (quoted in Sousa, 1996:207). To SIC's chairman, this privileged relationship is only natural since *Globo* is a share holder and it has a member sitting on SIC's administrative board.

Globo's management strategy and technical expertise has, in fact, been essential to the setting up of SIC and to the development of so far winning tactics. But, it is still as a 'content provider' that Globo is most desired. Since the beginning of Globo's co-operation with SIC, its executives have always expressed their aspiration to have the exclusive of *Globo's* telenovelas. This was not an easy option for Globo because RTP had been, for many years, one of Globo's best clients and there had always been a courteous and professional relation between both companies.

For two years, Globo sold *telenovelas* to both RTP and SIC. So, Globo's products were actually competing with each other during prime time and dividing audiences. SIC argued that this was not the best strategy for Globo itself as *telenovelas's* actors were over-exposed (often same actors were on the air simultaneously in two channels interpreting different roles). Basically, SIC's management argued that fragmenting audiences with Globo's own products was not sustainable in the long term. Firstly because *telenovelas'* image would deteriorate and, secondly, because currently Globo produces an average of nine *novelas* per annum, and - at present levels - that would not be enough for two channels (RTP 1⁶ and SIC). It followed

⁶Although RTP has two channels, only RTP 1 (the generalist channel) broadcasts Brazilian *telenovelas*.

the 'natural' conclusion that if Globo had to contribute to the commercial success of one channel only, that would be the one where its money was.

In September 1994, after initial resistance, Globo signs an exclusivity contract with SIC. This contract, which became effective from January 1995, was a very serious blow to RTP. RTP's generalist channel (RTP 1) was already having problems to keep its audiences and the consequences of this contract were predictable. By mid-1995, mainly due to Globo's *telenovelas*, SIC became the most watched TV channel in the country (see Annex 1). In 1996, the four most watched TV programmes amongst terrestrial channels, were four Globo's *telenovelas* exhibited by SIC (see annex 2). Clearly Globo's products have been key to SIC's success.

5 Conclusions

Portugal was a 'natural' market for Globo's television products and the export of *telenovelas* started in the 1970's, though the dramatic increase of Brazilian fiction in Portugal took place right after the opening up of the Portuguese television market in 1992. For two decades, the PBS company's generalist channel, RTP 1, combined news with a *telenovela* in its prime-time. As there were no competing companies at the time, *telenovelas* were very popular but broadcast in 'moderate' quantities. After 1992, both public and commercial channels relied heavily on *telenovelas* to develop their programming strategies. Globo's products, in particular, became essential in the audience battle.

Exporting *telenovelas* to Portugal did not imply any financial risks for the Brazilian empire. The product was not developed ta-

king the Portuguese market into considerations and once investment had been recouped in the home market, selling *telenovelas* to RTP could only mean extra-funds. Still, in a competitive environment, Globo had to adapt its strategy and, more than selling cultural products, Globo got involved in a private television station. Globo has had a crucial role in the setting up of SIC and in the development of its managerial and programming strategies.

From our initial prospection about Globo's presence in Portugal, a working hypothesis - which will be substantiated in ulterior research - has developed. It is quite possible that Globo's strategy might have had an indirect impact in the overall Portuguese television scenario. Having followed Globo's managerial 'advice', SIC became the number one in terms of audiences and also the most financially balanced TV channel. In these circumstances, the other channels, fiercely fighting for audiences and advertising revenues, might have believed that their best alternative would be to imitate SIC's model. This being the case, Globo's presence in the Portuguese television market has to be evaluated in a broader sense, beyond the analysis of product listings and financial/technical input.

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