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## Crossing the Atlantic: Globo's Wager in Portugal\*

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**Abstract:**

This paper is the starting point of a two-year research project about the impact of Globo Television 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).

## Crossing the Atlantic: Globo's Wager in Portugal

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**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 multi-media 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).

### 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, capital 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.

### **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<sup>1</sup>.

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

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

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 audience 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<sup>2</sup>. 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 Carneiro<sup>3</sup> 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.

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)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>*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*.

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

<sup>4</sup>RTP 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.

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, for example, acquired novelas from Bandeirantes, Serviço Brasileiro de Televisão, TV Cultura (all Brazilian networks), Televisa (Mexico) and Venevision (Venezuela). In January 1995, TVI was programming three Venezuelan *telenovelas* (dubbed into Brazilian-Portuguese) per day and a Brazilian in prime time. Lacking financial<sup>5</sup> 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 can afford Brazilian *telenovelas* which are perceived as having more quality. In RTP 1, RTP's generalist channel, *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 important *telenovela* (usually the most recent) around 8.30 pm.

Brazilian *telenovelas* are the most important element of SIC's highly competitive strategy. It was due to *telenovelas* that SIC managed to overtake RTP 1 in terms of audiences, being today the most watched TV channel in the country. In January 1995, for example, SIC started week days broadcasting at 11am with two Brazilian *telenovelas*. A third one was broadcasted in the afternoon continues. Another Brazilian *telenovela* went on the air before the main news programme at 8pm whilst the fifth Brazilian *telenovela* of the day was shown at 8.50. Great importance is given to the selection of the last *telenovela*.

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. *Telenovelas* are the most watched television programmes. Watching *telenovelas* became clearly an ingrained habit of the Portuguese people.

The cultural and social consequences of 20 years of *telenovelas* in Portuguese TV have not yet been studied. Nevertheless, a number of consequences are observable. A number of Brazilian expressions entered into people's vocabulary, Brazilian first names are widely used, novela's actors and actresses fashion accessories are imitated, Carnival is 'reproduced' in every town. There is also a common perception that Brazilian

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<sup>5</sup>TVI has only 10% of the television advertising cake.

telenovelas had an important role in terms of liberalising behaviour, though there is no evidence to support that.

### **A New Strategy for a New System**

In the 1990's, the influence of Globo in Portugal has spread to other spheres rather than the export of telenovelas. The opening up of the television market in the early 1990's provided Globo with an opportunity to gain 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 the 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 for 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. 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) (in Sousa, 1996: introduction). The Portuguese television market was not a resourceful one. 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 by early 1990's. Telemontecarlos had been, in fact, a poorly judged investment and investing capital in the Portuguese market was not in Roberto Marinho's plans. Not prepared to waist financial resources, Roberto Marinho (father) resisted to the idea for quite sometime.

Still, Roberto Marinho's son, Roberto Irineu Marinho, responsible for the Audiovisual and new markets, and Pinto Balsemão himself, end up convincing Globo's

chairman that SIC would be a solid investment. Having failed with the first European market (Italy), Roberto Ireneu might have wanted to prove his father that successful investment in Europe was possible.

Pinto Balsemão took this 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 in my honour a dinner in his home. Amongst the 30 guests were the most important Globo executives. I had meeting with these executives during two days and I discussed issues such as equipment, commercial difficulties and the profile of Globo's administrator 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, only when they were middle-aged is that their first television experience was developed; furthermore, although in different forms, both have been involved in politics' (interview with author, 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 has 'the' perfect products in terms of audiences, *telenovelas*; secondly, Globo has managerial and technical experience; thirdly, any help they could provide to SIC would not be impaired by linguistic barriers. In fact, following initial unsteady talks, the Marinho family reached a consensus and decided to invest financially 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 was attributed a national TV channel. From then up until the beginning of SIC's regular broadcasts, eight months later, Globo's expertise was crucial. Neither Balsemão nor, his right hand, Emídio Rangel, had any previous experience in television. Two thirds of newly recruited journalists have ever faced a camera and, in a country where RTP operated in monopoly, there were not too many places where SIC could recruit its technicians.

Being Globo - in SIC's executives eyes - a model commercial television, SIC's highest ranks travelled to Brazil in order to understand how Globo was organised and how it performed. Pinto Balsemão, President of the board, and Emídio Rangel, Programmes and Information Director, made their working trips to Globo. The Marketing Director and Commercial Director had also made professional internships in Globo. Moreover, Globo has a senior executive, Pedro Carvalho, in SIC's 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, right below Pinto Balsemão. Directly and indirectly, SIC's management strategy has been influenced by the Brazilians. SIC has very aggressive Marketing and Commercial 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 in 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 logotype and image was developed by Globo's operative, Hans Donner.

Pinto Balsemão says 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). 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 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 in having 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 has 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

actors were over-exposed (often same actors were on the air simultaneously in two channels interpreting different roles). Basically, SIC high ranks argued that fragmenting audiences with Globo's own products was not sustainable in the long term. Firstly because telenovelas' image would suffer and, secondly, because Globo produces an average of nine novelas per annum, and - at present levels - that would not be enough for two channels (RTP 1<sup>6</sup> and SIC). Naturally, if Globo had to contribute to the commercial success of one channel only, this would be one where its investment was.

In September 1994, after initial resistance, Globo signs a contract of exclusivity with SIC. This contract, which became effective in 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 easily anticipated by RTP's Programme Direction. Indeed, by mid-1995, 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 all Portuguese terrestrial channels, were four Globo's telenovelas exhibited by SIC (see annex 2). Clearly Globo's products have been key to SIC's success.

## Conclusions

Portugal was a 'natural' market for Globo's television products and in the 1970's the export of *telenovelas* has started, 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 PSB company's generalist channel, RTP 1, combined in prime-time news with a *telenovela*. As there were no competing companies at the time, telenovelas were very popular but broadcasted in 'moderate' quantities. After 1992, both public and commercial channels counted with 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. The product was not developed taking the Portuguese market into considerations and once investment had been recouped in the home market, selling telenovelas to RTP could

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<sup>6</sup>Although RTP has two channels, only RTP 1 (the generalist channel) broadcasts Brazilian telenovelas.

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.

Apart from the direct consequences of Globo in Portugal, a working hypothesis will be developed in ulterior research. It is quite possible that Globo's strategy might have had a considerable indirect consequence in the overall Portuguese television scenario. Having followed Globo's managerial 'advice', SIC became the number one in terms of audiences and the channel with minor financial losses. In these circumstances, the other channels, fiercely fighting for audiences and advertising revenues, believed that their best alternative would be to imitate SIC's model.

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