

Communication, City and Tourism: A Study on the Representations of Tourist-related Violence in Mega Events held in Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze different types of social representations constructed by the media about urban violence, with conclusions and findings serving as resource material for Tourism and Social Communication programs. The analysis will be based on a corpus consisting of media narratives of violence, prioritizing cases of violence against tourists, reported in printed newspapers during the periods of Carnival festivals and New Year's celebrations in Rio de Janeiro. The city hosts most of the largest scale events in the world. In addition to such events, Rio de Janeiro receives thousands of tourists throughout the year. Nevertheless, the image of a violent and dangerous city is the characteristic most remembered by Brazilian and foreign tourists. Curiously enough, the natural consequent fear does not reduce the importance and splendor of mega events staged in the city. Data for our analysis consists of narratives of violence against tourists featured in two local newspapers, O Globo and Jornal do Brasil, from December 2008 to March 2010. Our goal is to provide a better understanding of the presence of tourism, leisure and violence in the same scenario as well as to make an inventory of the most recurrent elements in media discourse related to such situations. We aim to analyze the differences in the narratives of violence in the above mentioned mega events, at different periods and through the lens of the same media, due to changes in discourse that have been observed since the government of the State of Rio de Janeiro carried out large-scale police interventions in communities where drug dealing sets the local rules. These communities are close to places where large New Year's celebrations take place, such as the one held on Copacabana Beach.

Keywords: Media; Violence; Tourism; Mega Events

Introduction

This reordering/disordering of our spatio/temporal patterning of sounds and images is furthered in the modernist tendency to substitute for a set of ultimate values based on tradition, religion, or reason, a new belief system founded on experience, and sensation. (Lash, 1991, p. 127).

Rio de Janeiro is one of the leading cities in the world to play host to an array of events. From small to mega events, they may be of political, academic, sports, artistic nature, among others. In addition to offering opportunities for socialization, such events represent an important source of capital and business. Since mega events promote sales of all kinds of products, they stand out as significant occasions for media attention.

Rio de Janeiro is renowned worldwide for a series of significant characteristics in the perception of beauty as well as issues related to violence. Recognized as a city for partying with happy smiley people, Rio de Janeiro is commonly associated to events such as New Year's celebrations and Carnival festivals. Nowadays, these constitute the two moments through which the city regains its self-esteem, which is unsettling low over the rest of the year due to poverty, urban violence, housing and traffic problems. During these two moments, when the metropolis receives thousands of visitors, the city rejoices.

In this article we will discuss the role of mega events in the imaginary of *Cariocas* (*i.e.* native residents of Rio de Janeiro) by means of representations in the printed media, more specifically on front pages and in city editorials and supplements of the newspapers *O Globo* and *Jornal do Brasil*. We will start by briefly discussing the vocation of Rio de Janeiro to host large scale events and the representations created by the *Carioca* printed media about the 2009 and 2010 New Year's celebrations and Carnival festivals. The intent is to suggest reasons for the way the press covered mega events in the city, ignoring one of the most recurrent issues on their pages throughout the rest of the year: violence.

We will focus on the shift in focus of narratives of violence in the media ever since the government of the State of Rio de Janeiro implemented large scale police interventions in communities where drug dealing set the local rules. These communities are close to places where large New Year's celebrations take place, such as the one held on Copacabana Beach.

As observed during the 2009/2010 New Year's celebrations, headlines of both newspapers had as their theme the peacemaking of Rio's South Zone slums and the tragedy caused by intense rainfall in Angra dos Reis and other cities in the country, instead of covering violence in Rio. From the information provided by these two media, a possible reading would be that there was no violence at all in the city on New Year's Eve. During Carnival period, another mega event, to be later discussed, drew all the attention. Violence in the city was not front page material and received minimal treatment by the press over the celebration days.

A brief overview of mega events

Mega events are regarded as social gatherings that exert an impact on the media, arousing interest in thousands of people. More than the physical presence proper, we take into consideration whether the event held public outreach through means of mass communication, causing some kind of reaction in important population segments by having them express opinions on the subject. In this perspective, we may claim that gay parades in São Paulo, New Year's celebrations on Copacabana beach and Carnival Parades at the "Sambadrome" (*i.e.*, a purpose-built parade area in downtown Rio de Janeiro where samba schools parade competitively each year during Carnival) are examples of mega events which not only draw

the participation of thousands, sometimes millions, of people, but also promote the occupation of a mediatic space in important ways: prior, during and after the event.

Currently, an entanglement of new technologies inhabits and often constitutes the communication network on which the event is based. In some cases, this network becomes even more important than the event itself. For example, schedules and locations are selected according to the possibility for mediation provided by the event. The city will host more events in proportion to the efficiency of communication infrastructure provided. More often than not, events are regarded by entrepreneurs as well as athletes and artists, as a great opportunity for business visibility, therefore, bringing more significance to the event rather than the activity proper.

As communication phenomena, mega events inhabit the urban imaginary, enhance the memory of the place, redesign a city and become inscribed in everyday life, creating and feeding an important urban network. The city, the population, the traffic, the architecture, health and public safety – all aspects of urban life are affected by the hosting of mega events. Tourism is boosted and new opportunities for permanent and temporary jobs are offered. In the corporative and academic realms, congresses, seminars and fairs propose new products and new discussions that may change the whole current picture, becoming a determining factor for the area of knowledge involved.

Michel Maffesoli (2004) attributes special importance to the observation of large gatherings and the excesses typical of social commotions. In such events, a type of sociability is developed by which one has no wish to either understand or get to know the other deeply, or learn about personal or financial attributes. For a few hours or days, everyday problems are relegated to a second plan, since the priority is to meet friends, bond with strangers and dance together, rooting together or even complaining together. Everything else is irrelevant since what really matters is being together. Thus, a daring but very interesting path for the study of contemporary society is revealed to the author.

Festivals, celebrations and rituals have always been present in different cultures, since the very early days. The designation "mega" linked to events is justified by Malena Segura Contrera and Marcela Moro as an advertising strategy that seduces the public and draws people to massive concentrations in particular spaces. The structure and intensity of festivals and celebrations have changed in modern days, according to the context of mass culture and the aesthetics imposed by modernity. The 20th century consolidated a new perception of the world resulting from a daily life full of urgent commitments. The contemporary man receives nervous stimulation and plunges into a profusion of images and texts, "*hyperstimulation of the new dynamics of urban human life, permeated by the speed associated to the uncontrolled multiplication of mediated exposure*" (translated from 2009, p. 2).

In this discussion, we have selected New Year's celebrations and Carnival festivals in Rio de Janeiro for our analysis. Our goal is to demonstrate the change of mediatic discourse, in special the one related to violence, during these two events, held in 2010, as compared to previous years. Since the city was chosen to host the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, the media has been much more generous with prospects for the metropolis. On New Year's Eve, for example, the headlines of printed newspapers exalted the virtues of the Peacemaking Units established on the South Zone Hills of Rio de Janeiro to guarantee safety and tranquility during the event. In the previous year, the same newspapers denounced lost bullet cases on the coastline, violence in Copacabana and drug dealers celebrating on New Year's Eve. The very same imaginary of reliability was observed in relation to the 2010 Carnival. The city was depicted as having more safety and organization, thus showing positive conditions to host the 2014 and 2016 international mega events.

Urban violence, social representations and the media

Uncertainty, fear and violence constitute some of the most prominent issues or values of the Brazilian press. As elements that boost sales of newspapers and increase readership, these feelings are widely explored either in sensationalist journalism or in news in its strict sense.

Our proposal in this brief work is to identify and analyze meanings that are attributed to violence in New Year's celebrations and during Carnival festivals from the perspective of journalistic mediation. Our focus shifts from forms of narrative structures, that is, from the act, to the analysis of relationships established by the production of senses deriving from the act of narrating since discourse, due to its great visibility, guides social practices. Following this perspective, we seek support in the thoughts of Michel de Certeau (1994) who discusses the importance of shifting our view from linguistic systems and in so doing prioritize significant practices.

Our research belongs to this "second" moment of the analysis, which shifts from structures to actions. But in this vast set, I will only consider narrative actions. They will allow for the need of some elementary forms of space-organizing practices: the bipolarity "map and itinerary", delimitation or "limitation" processes and "enunciative focalizations" (that is, the index of the body of discourse). (Translated from Certeau, 1994: 201).

In this context, our proposal is to return to the academic scene of Émile Durkheim and his notion of collective representation, which suggests an efficient articulation for the ordination of the social structure. Durkheim was a pioneer in studies on this theme. His initial work stemmed from observation of Australian

primitive tribes that displayed interesting religious manifestations. The study of their rites facilitated the comprehension of how other types of society were structured. The sociologist realized that these tribes organized their social life beyond the notion of the individual, acknowledging the fact that society is organized through the association of men: "*as the individual takes part in society, he spontaneously goes beyond himself, either in thought or in action*" (1989, p.46). Thus, the concept of collective representations arises and, according to its central ideas, religion, myths, science, among other areas, already constitute a body of knowledge pertaining to a society. Although the analysis of such representations is carried out with the aid of symbols, one must be cautious toward its comprehension since, according to Émile Durkheim's assertion: "*one must know how to achieve the reality the symbol represents and that consequently assigns to it its true meaning*" (1989, p. 206). Therefore, while engaging into an analysis, we are (re)appropriating representations that are already configured by means of perceptions of the author's social group, and thus creating new ones.

In the view of Elton Antunes and Paulo Bernardo Vaz (2006), media studies must go beyond studies of the means and their effects, aiming at the understanding of their intersection since, by adopting a mediacentric view, the approach to communicative processes is undermined. Mediatic products establish interactive forms of representations that are shared and that contribute to the structuring of daily life. This process considers the media as a bridge that links the individual to his process, calling upon all citizens to the sharing of different experiences.

In order to work with mediatic representations, adopting this methodological framework, we have chosen the city of Rio de Janeiro since it holds various events of different magnitudes, hosting people from around the world. Generally associated abroad to Carnival and New Year's celebrations, Rio de Janeiro receives thousands of tourists throughout the year. However, the image of a violent and dangerous city constitutes one of the first characteristics the city is remembered by Brazilian and foreign tourists. Curiously enough, this fear does not diminish the importance and splendor of mega events hosted by the city, as can be illustrated by the Rolling Stones' show, in February 2006, on Copacabana Beach. The beach received over a million people to watch the show with no significant incidents related to aggression or violence. The media, however, painted in advance a horrific picture and several articles were published with the intent to instill fear and prepare the audience for the worst. Nevertheless, the worst never happened.

It is quite true that the situation in some Brazilian cities is not that comfortable with regard to safety. It is also true that Crime Journalism, which has improved immensely over the past years (Ramos and Paiva, 2007), still overemphasizes crime-related occurrences to the detriment of other news. Nowadays, sensationalist news involving cases of bloodshed on newspaper pages have been replaced by those related to drug dealing, massacres, globalized crime organizations and police corruption. Currently, there are better

investigatory processes, but we still have not advanced in terms of achieving the correct appraisal of crime as news in relation to other events happening in society. The newspaper *O Globo*, for instance, uses up many more pages on this theme as compared to what was done in 1990.

In this article, we will focus specifically on narratives of New Year's celebrations and Carnival festivals, due to the overwhelming number of tourists that take part in the events and also the expectation, on the part of the media, in relation to the occurrence of violence in such celebrations. The selection of the two events is justified by the significant change in the approach to violence as compared to previous years. Although both newspapers still criticize state and municipal administrations, it may be observed that Brazil, more specifically Rio de Janeiro, due to the fact that it will stage mega events of international standing such as the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, receives a positive evaluation such as "the city that succeeds", instead of daily life representations we are used to seeing and reading on newspapers in Rio de Janeiro.

Representations of urban violence during the 2009 and 2010 New Year's and Carnival celebrations

It is pointless to insist on restoring the image of Rio de Janeiro as a Tropical Paradise. Any urban center has violence; it is impossible to reach "zero violence", even with model institutions. Rio is violent. In Rio, there is hunger, social exclusion and unemployment... (Lessa, 2000, p. 414)

Rio de Janeiro is known worldwide for yearly hosting mega events that draw crowds of tourists searching not only for socialization but also for the opportunity to appreciate the city's cultural and natural beauties. The preference among tourists for New Year's celebrations and Carnival in the city, which receives millions of visitors yearly, dynamizes the local economy on multiple levels. For this reason, they become highlights in the mediatic agenda, which seems to have downplayed the theme of violence over the first months of 2010.

Due to the importance of these gatherings in the imaginary of Rio de Janeiro residents and their representations in the printed media, a shift in focus in the press discourse has been noticed in the current year. The positive approach attributed to news reports and articles was first observed when the Government of the State of Rio de Janeiro implemented a public policy of Police intervention in the slums, establishing as starting points, communities near Copacabana, where the city's largest New Year's celebration takes place. Another factor to be taken into consideration is the political and economic interests resulting from the choice of Rio de Janeiro as the host city for the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics.

As we compare newspaper articles in *O Globo* and *Jornal do Brasil* about the 2008/2009 New Year's Eve parties with those related to the same events in the years 2009/2010, we clearly observe the difference in

tone and contents of the narratives. The same applies to the 2009/2010 Carnival festivals. Instead of headlines such as “*More violence against tourists*” (*O Globo*, February 20, 2009) or “*Samba is overrun by Violence*”¹ (JB, February 20, 2009), we now find coverage with different approaches: “*Samba mini-parade*² sets participation record” and “*Position of the Band’s Queen for sale – we are open to negotiations*” (*O Globo*, February 14, 2010). While analyzing the newspaper clippings of both newspapers during both periods, the research team clearly detected a drastic difference in approach: in one year, urban violence was emphasized, while in the following year, joy and cheerfulness in the streets of a less violent city constituted the main focus.

During the 2009/2010 New Year’s Eve celebrations, *O Globo* and *Jornal do Brasil* selected as theme the peacemaking on Rio’s South Zone hills and the tragedy caused by intense rainfall in Angra dos Reis and other cities in the country, instead of focusing on violence. From the reports of these media vehicles, a possible reading would be that there was no violence in the city at all on New Year’s Eve.

Both newspapers published during the 2010 Carnival Festival two special supplements about the event, intended to cover the full program, explain the themes of Samba Schools and offer suggestions on how to arrive at places. No reference to violence was made. It was also observed that the theme of violence, so recurrent in Rio de Janeiro’s printed media, was not appropriately covered in other sections of both newspapers, even in special spaces usually devoted to issues of various natures like, for example, the front pages and the City Supplement (JB) or Rio Editorial (*O Globo*). It is plausible that, due to the status of a mega event, with festivals lasting several days, Carnival was elected as the main theme. However, the shift in focus of narratives with reference to violence was quite obvious.

Further considerations

In this article, events are regarded as special occasions that promote the socialization of information and experiences of technical or emotional nature, thus representing processes of social mediation. In relation to mega events, a case in point, this is exponentially multiplied as we take into account sponsorship, target-audience, infrastructure, specialized human resources, among many other economical factors. In addition, unparalleled opportunities are offered to experience new sociabilities.

¹ The expression in Brazilian Portuguese “*atravessar o samba*”, translated above from its literal sense, may also be used metaphorically with the meaning of “ruining samba music due to lack of harmony among instruments”.

² The Brazilian Portuguese designation is “*bloco*”, which refers to a Carnival minor parade.

We engaged in theoretical studies in the areas of communication, sociology, anthropology and political sciences, and also in the clipping process of articles from the newspapers *O Globo* and *Jornal do Brasil*, from 2009 to 2010. The comparison of this material clearly indicated a major shift in treatment of journalistic discourse to approach violence during New Year's celebrations and Carnival festivals in Rio de Janeiro. With the future prospects of hosting the World Cup and the Olympics, the newspapers under analysis emphasized, in relation to events held in 2010, safety quality and improvements in the city as a result of actions by the Peacemaking Units. It is easily perceived that there were distinctive changes of political and economic nature in the narratives under analysis.

Mega events are social facts that may ultimately become a part of the history of a city – either for better or worse. For better, if the legacy is effectively useful to the population or if, at least, it brings no urban harm but rather contributes to an increase in local economic activity. For the worse, when public money is wasted as a result of more concern over the mediatic spectacle rather than over the well being of the population that will continue living in that location. In both situations, it is important for the sciences of humanities to be on alert not only to move beyond theoretical constructs to enrich practice but, above all, to contribute with effective social responsibility strategies for governments and enterprises.

As we selected New Year's celebrations and Carnival festivals in Rio de Janeiro, our intent was to analyze the change of mediatic discourse in relation to the city and the assessment of improvements resulting from the World Cup and the Olympics. The blending of the events is intentional since this brief analysis seems to indicate the adoption of a paradigmatic discourse, sustaining that the city is ready to receive large crowds of people. A discourse constructed by both public authorities and the media. The social yeast provided by crowds from different origins creates the environment for a new conception of community and of public sphere that prevails in mega events. Carnival, for instance, privileges an impressive plurality of images, motivating the construction of communication networks in which each actor represents various characters at the same time. One might even try to speak of a certain "collective narcissism" - "*recognizing ourselves in the other, by projecting from the other*" (Maffesoli, 1990, p. 35) – which becomes pervasive in the public gatherings of New Year's celebrations and Carnival festivals in Rio de Janeiro, but above all, through masks and all the "*aparatus aestheticus*" of post-modernity. In the 1980s, Baudrillard argued that society was heading for a disinvestment of the system of objects in favor of a hyperreality where objects and people are readily mixed in terminals of multiple networks: "*Today the scene and the mirror have given way to a screen and a network. There is no longer any transcendence or depth, but only the immanent surface of operations unfolding, the smooth and functional surface of communication.*" (Baudrillard, 1987, p.12). The scene, twenty years later, is not so different from what Baudrillard had suggested. Objects are increasingly short-lived; although they are, more than ever, embedded in the imaginary of urban everyday life, which,

without communication, makes no sense at all. Simultaneously, we realize that the mega events under discussion were inscribed in an imaginary of tradition that expands year after year, suggesting the return to the scene and mirror.

Although contemporary man has gotten used to perceiving the other through machines (telephone, television, Internet) and inside new spaces (shopping centers, gated communities, entrepreneurial centers), he still craves for or needs to live in direct contact with different people, even over a short period of time, since the event itself becomes one of the few possible environments that ultimately unites them in heart, mind and soul.

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