

# A lifetime in 20 lines: representation of death in the Brazilian FPS newspaper

DOI 10.1590/1809-584420143

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## Abstract

This paper investigates, in the context of biographical narratives in Literary Journalism, the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S.Paulo* obituary section. The research corpus consists of 62 obituaries published since its implementation on October 30, 2007 to December 31 of the same year. Based on the biographical profile of the dead, this analysis seeks to understand coverage about the death from the perspective this nationwide circulation State of São Paulo newspaper. The results suggest a prevalent male profile, over 64 years, formed by professionals from the cities of Rio/São Paulo who contributed in some way to their communities and, in most cases, were victims of heart or cancer diseases. The death of nonagenarians and centenarians transcends these categories, as if the simple fact of surpassing the Brazilian average life expectancy was a new itself. **Keywords:** Journalism. Contemporary narratives. Biographical narratives. Obituaries. *Folha de S.Paulo*.

Though in death fire be mixed with my dust, yet care I not,  
for with me now all is well.  
*Epitáfio de Denys Finch Hatton (1887-1931)*

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## Introduction

**O**n *Out of Africa*<sup>1</sup>, Danish writer Karen Blixen (1885-1962) records the death of a Kikuyu chief, a Bantu ethnic group still predominantly in Kenya. When Kinanjui is agonizing, a western doctor decides to take him against his will to the Scottish Catholic mission hospital, where the chief died. In the funeral description, Blixen – better known by the Isak Dinesen pen-name – sadly reflects on the decline of the native people death ritual.

The kikuyu, when left to themselves, do not bury their dead, but leave them above ground for the hyenas and vultures do deal with. The custom had always appealed to me, I thought that it would be a pleasant thing to be laid out to the sun and the stars and then have bones quickly and accurately stripped and cleaned<sup>2</sup>. It was a way to merge with nature and become one of the landscape elements. [...]

Kinanjui, they told me, was to be buried, and I thought that Kikuyo would have agreed to make an exception from their habit because the dead had been a chief. Perhaps they would like to make a great Native show and gathering of the occasion. [...]

But Kinanjui's funeral was altogether a European and clerical affair. There were a few government representatives present, the district commissioner and two officials from Nairobi. But the day and the place belonged to the clergy; and the plain, in the afternoon sun, was black with them. [...] If they wished to impress the Kikuyu with the feeling that here they had laid their hand on the dead chief, and that he now belonged to them, they succeeded. They were so obviously in power that one felt it to be out of the question for Kinanjui to get away from them. [...]

They brought Kinanjui from the mission on a lorry, and lifted him down near the grave. I do not think that I have ever in my life been more taken aback and appalled that I was then, at the sight of him. He had been a big man, and I remembered him as I had seen him when he came walking over to the farm amongst his senators, even as he had looked lying on his bed two nights before. But the coffin in which they now brought him was a nearly square box, surely no more than five feet long. [...] But how had they got Kinanjui down there and how was he now lying in it? (BLIXEN, 2001, p.291-292; 2005, p.383-384).

<sup>1</sup> *Out of Africa*, directed by American filmmaker Sydney Pollack in 1985, with Robert Redford and Meryl Streep, was based on Blixen's book.

<sup>2</sup> This habit can be still observed in other cultures as the Indian, where Parsis, ancient Persian Zoroastrians, lay their dead on Towers of Silence to be devoured by birds of prey (MODI, 2003). This sort of funerary ritual, although in decline due to factors such as urbanization process, can also be found in the Parsis communities outside of India, such as in New York (USA).

This funeral analysis is an attempt, on the symbolic level, to understand how the complex traditional African culture, with its ancient mythic and oral bases, was literally being boxed and buried, slowly but steadily. The breakdown unfolded in the 1930s in front of the eyes of the Danish writer was the result not only of the industrialization process, but also the continent allotment made in 1885 by major European powers. In that sense, Kenya, located in the eastern part, was assigned to the United Kingdom.

Good literature can register, retrieve, and encourage reflections on socio-historical transformations in a profound and vivid way. Could the study of news on death reach the same depth? This is the premise of this research on the Obit section launched in 2007 by the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S.Paulo*. Its corpus consists of the first 62 obituaries published from October 30 to December 31, 2007. Based on the biographical profile of the deceased individuals, this analysis seeks to understand the coverage of death from the perspective of the Brazilian largest circulation national newspaper's section<sup>3</sup>.

### Death: a unique and universal theme

This article obviously does not aim to be conclusive, or to exhaust the death theme. After all, death has been discussed since mankind's dawn without anyone coming to a conclusion about it so far. Being inevitable, however, death is one of the few certainties of life, especially in post-modern times.

Hippocrates (460-377 BC), for example, has claimed almost 2 500 years ago: "Brief is life and long is art", distinguishing the individual biological being — life is short — from the cultural, collective sphere, which assigns connections and senses to human productions in the hope that they survive the body ephemerality — long is art (BAITELLO JUNIOR, 1997, p.17-18).

This second reality includes narratives, which organizes relations in what is seemingly chaotic and meaningless, as said by

<sup>3</sup> In 2014, IVC (Brazilian Circulation Verification Institute) modified the survey criteria to reflect the growth of digital editions and the São Paulo newspaper regained the lead.

Medina (2003, p 47.): “With the ability to produce meanings, to narrate the world, human intelligence organizes chaos into a cosmos.”<sup>4</sup>

For Czech-Brazilian philosopher Vilém Flusser (1920-1991), there is no line between life and death, as they are inextricably linked: “Living is doing something despite the apparent futility of it all. Living is therefore trying to deny death. To live is to pretend that there is no death. But there is. Is not this amazing? I suggest to the reader that death is the unique and universal theme of life. It is therefore a whispered theme” (FLUSSER, 2002, p.97). He continues his argument:

It is clear that everything I do is an attempt to deny death. If I get up from bed, if I dress, if I have breakfast and if I go to work, I`m denying that I`ll die and I pretend that I am eternal. If it was not by this denial, I would stay in bed. Since I`m going to die, no matter to die today, tomorrow or in a hundred years, and I would be in bed. Death denial, therefore, not only gives meaning to life in general, but to every individual experience, every act of mine. However death denial gives this meaning only because it knows itself to be a liar. If this denial was honest, if we were really convinced that there is no death, we would not leave bed, exactly how we might do if we did not try to deny it. If there is really no death, if my future is unlimited, then nothing is urgent, nothing needs to be done now, which is to say that nothing ever needs to be done. We can therefore conclude that this first consideration of the moment urgency (which is the very essence of life) is a result of dishonesty: since nothing is really urgent if I sincerely accept death, and since nothing is urgent if I sincerely deny it, I pretend to deny it and everything is urgent. In other words: urge to write this article, and urges to read it since writing it and reading it makes us even more immortals that we are, since we could die before I write it and read it. (FLUSSER, 2002, p.99-100).

For Baitello Junior, PUC-SP Graduate Communication Program professor, this symbolization process causes a biological cycle reversal, with its beginning-growth-maturity-end: “(...) in the world of symbols (...) every ending tends inevitably to a start or a new beginning” (BAITELLO JUNIOR, 1997, p.105). That is why, according to him:

“Symbols live longer than men” writes media scientist Harry Pross in

<sup>4</sup>Free author translation based on the original: “Dotado da capacidade de produzir sentidos, ao narrar o mundo, a inteligência humana organiza o caos em um cosmos” (MEDINA, 2003, p.47).

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his memoirs (Pross, 1993:15). Symbols enact even a solution to death problems; placate fears and traumas caused by the death of loved ones. However, this happens only when death is surrounded by procedures and indications of survival, eternity, duration and, temporality. Only when is conferred an ambivalent character to death, only then it means an end and its continuation, mortality and immortality simultaneously (BAITELLO JUNIOR, 1997, p.106-107).

However, one must remember that the idea of death underwent a significant change with the industrialization process in the nineteenth century and the technological advances of the twentieth century, especially after World War II. German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) points out that this change is one of the bases for the contemporary art of narrating challenge, since narration would be based on the exchange of experiences:

[...] in the course of the nineteenth century bourgeois society has, by means of hygienic and social, private and public institutions, realized a secondary effect which may have been its subconscious main purpose: to make it possible for people to avoid the sight of the dying. Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one; think of the medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne toward which the people press through the wide-open doors of the death house. In the course of modern times dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. There used to be no house, hardly a room, in which someone had not once died. [...] Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death, dry dwellers of eternity, and when their end approaches they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs. It is, however, characteristic that not only a man's knowledge or wisdom, but above all his real life—and this is the stuff that stories are made of—first assumes transmissible form at the moment of his death. Just as a sequence of images is set in motion inside a man as his life comes to an end—unfolding the views of himself under which he has encountered himself without being aware of it—suddenly in his expressions and looks the unforgettable emerges and imparts to everything that concerned him that authority which even the poorest wretch in dying possesses for the living around him. This authority is at the very source of the story (BENJAMIN, 1994, p.207-208).

So death, life unique and universal theme, whispered as Flusser suggests, emptied of body contact since the act of dying have been banished from everyday life and restricted to hospitals

aseptic rooms as Benjamin points out, has a prominent role in the social construction performed by media.

This phenomenon is well explained by German media scientist Harry Pross (1923-2010). He advocates three media process levels — transcending common sense that communication processes are limited only to those carried out by media. For Pross, though, there is a primary media based on the potential of the body to communicate when two or more individuals are located. More enduring, secondary media consists of the signals produced by the body, including from caves representations to newspapers, magazines and books. Tertiary media emerges within electricity era, since it demands devices that code and decode the transmitted messages, including telegraph and telephone as well as computer networks (apud BAITELLO JUNIOR, 2005, p.31-35).

In this sense, it is possible to notice the dead exclusion of the body and the dying process of public and everyday life, i.e., as a primary media. In fact, patient's confinement to hospitals increases the use of electronic devices to mediate the dying process and their associated rituals, such as virtual funerals apparatus (MIKLOS, 2012). The growth of these mediation forms in a contemporary world reinforces the importance of journalistic mediation to validate and give importance to the deceased process. Hence we can say that:

[...] most of the news is mortal. Rather we would have to say that most news establishes direct or indirect links with death (with the fear of death). The reports on disasters, political and economic crises, notables and personalities, living or dead people, ultimately deal with limits and boundaries transposed or to be transposed, reflecting the remote or imminent possibilities of an end, either temporary or definitive, of a unit, a part, or the whole. The ambivalent character leaves its mark there, attenuating the inexorable vision of time, reversing its one direction flow, thus allowing retrospection. Therefore, death awareness means, simultaneously, both fear and rejection, attraction and curiosity (BAITELLO JUNIOR, 1997, p.109).

It is this human life fragility realization, always hanging by a thread, synthesized and immortalized by the media, which perhaps make obituaries reading so appealing. And demand from the jour-

nalist expertise and sensitivity to be successful in the challenge of condensing so many lifetime years in such a few lines.

### Obituaries: dead biographical profile

According to the Communication Dictionary, a necrology, an obituary or, in the newsrooms jargon, funereal, means “news in newspaper, magazine etc., on the death of a person” (RABAÇA; BARBOSA, 2001, p.506).

It is necessary to distinguish the two obituaries types most commonly found in the press. “The first type frames their story (of the deceased individuals) in tissue thin, chronological and standardized” (MAROCCO, 2011, p.2). They are, therefore, notes or news about deaths. The other type releases journalist from the “Siberia of journalism” (idem) and, more concretely, appears in the *New York Times* obituaries (MELO, 1985). Would be framed in this category the more elaborate texts, such as the *Folha de S.Paulo Deaths* section. This second type of obituary, more elaborate, would be associated with a “greatly renowned person, (when) it is published as a feature and includes a fairly extensive biography, with analysis on the deceased life and work” (RABAÇA; BARBOSA, 2001, p.506).

Although there is no reference to obituaries in his studies, obituaries as practiced in the *Folha de S.Paulo Death's* section can be understood in the context of biographical narratives proposed by Brazilian researcher Edvaldo Pereira Lima. As a matter of fact, it could be categorized within the profile gender: “text that portrays individuals as a psychological archeology that goes digging and bringing up their values, their motivations, their fears, their bright and dark sides” (LIMA, 2009, p.427). This occurs because this kind of biographical narrative consists of a selection of facts of one's life, even if the character portrayed by gender profile is alive and the obituary, obviously dead. What both genders have in common, however, is the fact that both could be defined as life stories.

In any case, of course, an obituary is not to be considered a biography. Sergio Vilas Boas, indeed, emphasizes the differences

between these genders, “long and short biographical narrative profiles usually published in newspapers and magazines” (VILAS BOAS, 2003, p.9), which “portray the present and some remarkable facts of life” (idem).

There is, in the case of prominent personalities, the tradition of preparing the obituaries prior to the death, as pointed out by Rabaça and Barbosa:

Biography, which underlies the necrology of prominent personalities in the national and international scene, often is prepared months or years in advance, in newspaper: it is kept in the research archives and regularly updated, to be readily used when necessary (RABAÇA; BARBOSA, 2001, p.506).

This trend can be observed in *The New York Times* obit writer Alden Whitman (1913-1990) profile, *Mr. Bad News*, written in the 1960s by American journalist Gay Talese (2004). The profile was published at *Esquire* magazine in February, 1966, when Whitman was 52 years old:

Death is on Whitman’s mind as he sits in the subway that now races downtown toward Times Square<sup>5</sup>. In the morning paper he has read that Henry Wallace is not well, that Billy Graham has visited the Mayo Clinic. Whitman plans, when he arrives at the Times in ten minutes, to go directly to the newspaper’s morgue, the room where all news clippings and advance obituaries are filed, and examine the “conditions” of the advance obituaries on Reverend Graham and former vice president Wallace (Wallace died a few months later). There are 2,000 advance obituaries in the Times’s morgue, Whitman knows, but many of them, such as the ones on J. Edgar Hoover and Charles Lindbergh and Walter Winchell, were written long ago and now require updating. Recently, when President Johnson was in the hospital for gallbladder surgery, his advance obituary was brought up-to-the-minute; so was Pope Paul’s before his trip to New York; so was Joseph P. Kennedy’s. For an obituary writer there is nothing worse than to have a world figure die before his obituary is up-to-date; it can be a harrowing experience, Whitman knows, requiring that the writer become an instant historian, assessing in a few hours the dead man’s life with lucidity, accuracy, and objectivity (TALESE, 2014; TALESE, 2004, p.481-482).

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<sup>5</sup> *New York Times* newspaper headquarters office address until now a day.



Talese calls “occupational astigmatism that afflicts many obituary writers” who, “after they have written or read an advance obituary about someone, they come to think of that person as being dead in advance.” (TALESE, 2014; TALESE, 2004, p.484). He systematizes the three obits types Whitman worked on. The first one is a list of living people to whom Whitman gives priority:

These individuals are included because he thinks their days are numbered, or because he believes their life’s work is finished and sees no reason to delay the inevitable writing task, or because he merely finds the individual “interesting” and wishes to write the obituary in advance for his own enjoyment (TALESE, 2014; TALESE, 2004, p.486).

Whitman also has what he calls a “deferred list”:

[...] which is composed of aging but durable world leaders, monster sacrés, who are still in power or still making news in other ways, and to attempt a “final” obituary on such individuals not only would be difficult but would require continuous alterations or insertions in the future; so even if these “deferred” people may have out-of-date obituaries in the Times morgue—people like de Gaulle, Franco—Whitman chooses to let them wait awhile for a final polishing. (TALESE, 2014; TALESE, 2004, p.486).

Last but not least, third kind of obituary is the one where “the name dies before the man”:

[...] There are, naturally, some people that Whitman may think will soon die, and for whom he has already tucked away a final tribute in the Time’s morgue, that may not die for years and years; they may diminish in importance or influence in the world, perhaps, but they keep right on living. If this be the case (...) Whitman reserves the right to cut the obituary down (TALESE, 2014; TALESE, 2004, p.486-487).

In 2008, Matinas Suzuki, now a day Companhia das Letras Publisher chief executive, wrote an afterword to *The Book of Lives*, in which he addresses the interviewee right to present his/her own story version, “since, after the obituary publication, he/she will never have the chance to send a letter to the editor to redress any injustice” (SUZUKI, 2008, p.296):

Whitman developed a specific interview technique. Having reached the conclusion that the best he could draw was a “series of impressions about the person”, before the meeting he dedicated himself to do his homework, researching all the available biographical material. So, during the interview, he could “focus on the observation and recording of manners, attitudes, points of view, personality and, in certain moments, bringing out themes that he wanted to clarify.” He notes in *Come to the judgment* preface, an obituaries anthology: “I have always been amazed at how much a person reveals himself/herself without realizing, in a semi-structured conversation.” Thanks to interviews to the obits page, Whitman boasted of having traveled more and have talked with more personalities than any other *Time*’s reporter (SUZUKI, 2008, p.296).

In this study, as will be shown below, it is observed that *Folha de S.Paulo* chose not to dedicate *Deaths* section to celebrities. Selected individuals can be considered anonymous, at least in the sense of not being targeted by national or global media, although in most cases the obituaries are of prominent people in their own community or expertise field. Likewise, the study reveals a difference in relation to the entry defined by Rabaça and Barbosa, since the *Folha de S.Paulo* profiles are made posthumously to death and not in advance.

*Deaths* section attracted interest from the beginning of its publication, as suggested by the reader’s letter below, published in *Folha de S.Paulo Readers’ Panel* on December 12, 2007, about two months after the column launching:

#### Necrology

I congratulate *Folha de S.Paulo* for the column that has been presented under the heading *Deaths*.

William Vieira’s text, always sensitive and sometimes poetic, has become one of my mandatory daily readings. The column adds a final and necessary human touch to the newspaper, that we, tired of the day-to-day political contends readers, needed so much (SANCHES, 2007, p.A8).

This study focus on the publication first two months, precisely from October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007 to December 31<sup>th</sup>, 2007. It initially consisted of the collection and reading of the texts, followed by the analysis, interpretation and writing of the article. This process was carried out in 2012.

## The research

*Death* section has been published regularly since its implementation – in the analyzed period it was not printed only on December 10, 2007. The physical space given to it was also quite regular, with an average of 19.5 lines in the period (1 525 characters with spaces or 234 words per day). The smaller obituary, published on November 5, 2007, was of the public relations Regina Sion, 54, Intermeio founder. The largest, published on December 6, 2007, was about Vera Silvia Magalhães, 59, the only woman in MR-8 Revolutionary Movement that, in 1969, kidnapped U.S. Ambassador Charles Burke Elbrick. It was written by the Rio de Janeiro branch newspaper. It was one out of only two obits not written by then collaborator William Vieira<sup>6</sup>, responsible for investigating and writing 95% of the obituaries in that period<sup>7</sup>.

### *Place of death*

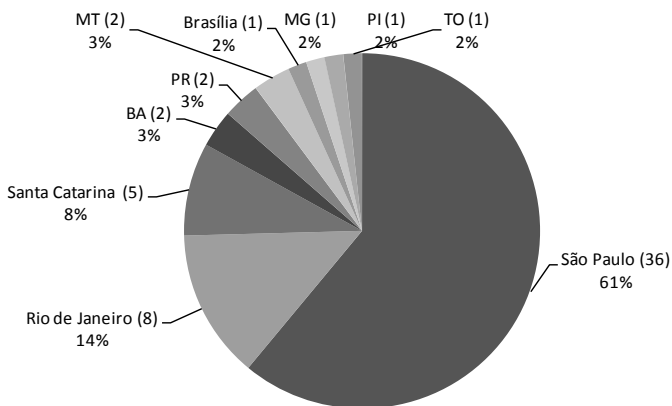
Despite being the first Brazilian newspaper in circulation, *Folha de S.Paulo* highlights deaths in the São Paulo state itself (61% of total), as suggested by Figure 1. Together, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, both in the Southeast region, are the two states with the largest concentration of registered deaths, totaling 75% of obituaries of the period.

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<sup>6</sup> Until the closing of this article, in June 2014, William Vieira is Carta Capital magazine's reporter, headquartered in São Paulo.

<sup>7</sup> The second obituary not written by Viera was authored by Sergio Dávila. It was on *Kafka*, an IMF counselor director, and it was published on December 2, 2007. At that time Dávila was *Folha de S Paulo* Washington correspondent, U.S. capital where death occurred. In June 2014, Dávila is currently FSP executive editor.

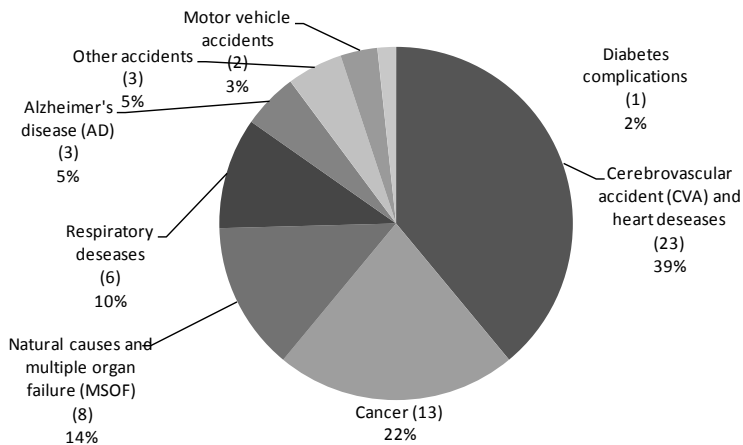
Figure 1 - Death place



**Cause of death**

The cause of death is always highlighted, either at the beginning or the end of the obituary. Of the total, only two obits do not list it:

Figure 2 - Cause of death

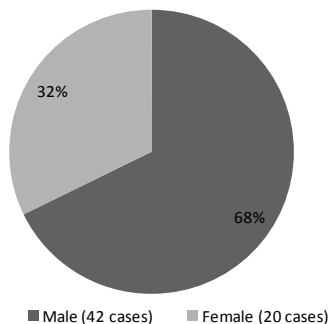


Heart disease and cancer are responsible for 61% of deaths<sup>8</sup>, data aligned with the statistics of mortality incidence in Brazil. As this is a group with a high number of elderly people, the incidence of natural causes and/or multiple organ failure is significant (14%), although all of these sort of deaths occur in the hospital and not homes anymore, as Benjamin (1994) suggests. It was observed, however, the low incidence of violence-related causes (one in 60), motor vehicle accidents (2), infectious diseases (1), drowning (1), and deaths due to burning (1).

### Genders

It was observed predominance of male deaths (68%), not being implicitly or explicitly evidenced any homosexuals death.

Figure 3 - Genders



### Age range

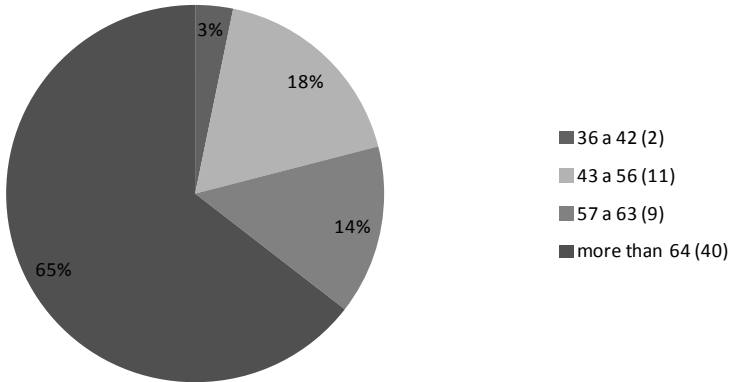
Age revealed by the study ranged from 37 to 105 years, with a significant concentration in the segment above 64 years (65%)<sup>9</sup>. There is not, therefore, the statement of children or adolescents deaths. Even the two cases below 40 years were probably not cho-

<sup>8</sup> Figure 2 data refer to 60 obituaries, since two of them have no reference to the cause of death.

<sup>9</sup> Age groups used here do not follow the IBGE standard, but the method of human biography, adopted by the author in her research because of the broader interpretation of data possibility from medical and psychological perspectives.

sen due to age issue, but by the nature of the story (respectively a teacher and an actor).

Figure 4 - Age range (in years)



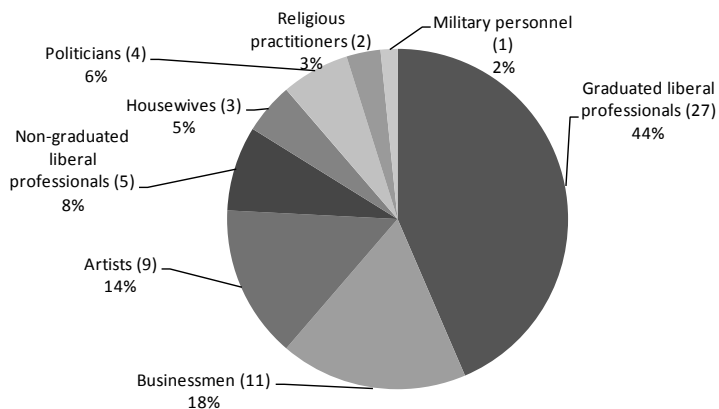
**Professional activities**

To investigate the deceased’s profession, were created eight categories, listed alphabetically below:

- 1) Artists in general (includes profiles of actors, artists, musicians and poets).
- 2) Housewives.
- 3) Businessmen.
- 4) Military personnel.
- 5) Politicians.
- 6) Liberal graduated professionals (lawyers, public relations, bank clerks, teachers, economists, engineers, physicists, doctors, nutritionists, publicists, proofreaders and translators).
- 7) Liberals professionals not necessarily graduated (dressmakers, local market workers, gas station workers, drivers and porters).
- 8) Religious practitioners.

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Figure 5 - Professional activities



Even retirees are identified by the professional activity they used to perform, which probable is a signal of the high valuation contemporary society attributes to this aspect of life. From the eight categories investigated, three stand out, accounting for 78% of the incidence. Firstly, liberal professions, especially traditional careers such as doctors and lawyers (five cases each). In both cases, it was observed the selection of exemplary stories of individuals who have contributed significantly to their community. The non-degreed liberal professionals are selected on the basis of long-lived age (dressmaker, local market worker and porter) and atypical stories (like the explosion that killed the gas station worker who was using his cell phone when the fuel was being unloaded).

In this category, draws attention the high incidence of teachers (11%). While daily newspapers covers demonstrations against low wages, poor working facilities and the verbal and sometimes physical violence faced by teachers in the classroom, *Deaths* section pays tribute to these professionals. In the analyzed period, seven obituaries were dedicated to teachers, four of them to higher education professors, i.e. scientists in their respective fields of knowledge, such as mariculture, physics, linguistics and human

nutrition. In this case, in particular, it was observed that the relevance of the profession transcends the locality issue, since only two of the deceased teachers were State of São Paulo residents (the list includes Bahia, Piauí and two Santa Catarina habitants). The same detachment from the State is noted in relation to religious practitioners (a Piauí priest and a Rio de Janeiro Catholic) and also a retired military of Rio de Janeiro).

Businessmen arise in second place (18%). Except for two cases out of 11, all obituaries in this category belong to State of São Paulo economy leaders. All of them have more than 64 years, revealing the newspaper tendency to immortalize in words the individuals who helped to consolidate the State economy. The only exception to this uplifting image is the biggest Brazil Bank debtor, in a profile written in a very acid tone.

Thirdly it is noteworthy the occurrence of subjects related to Arts: actors, artists, musicians and poets. It is noticed here the single repetition of an obituary, the actor Borges de Barros, 84, first published in the 2007 Christmas (45 lines), and three days later, in a condensed (22 lines) version.

Whatever the category, there is no rush to register the death at this early stage of FSP obituaries. In fact it was William Vieira's precondition to be the column responsible journalist. During the period, news were published 1-19 days after the death, with one week in average between death and the publication<sup>10</sup>.

### Final considerations

Thus, from the *Folha de S.Paulo Deaths* section perspective, which death deserves to be highlighted? The results of this study suggest that, at least in 2007, the basic profile would be a male individual (68%), over 64 years (65%), resident in Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo States (75%), victim of a population prevalent illness, such as heart disease or cancer (61%).

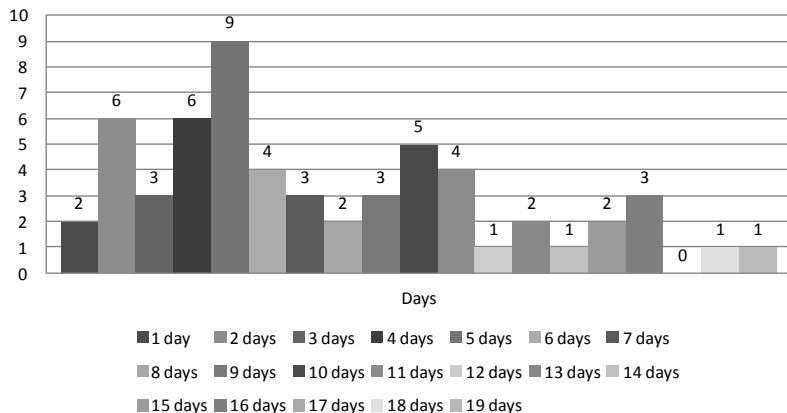
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10 The precise number is 7.34 days. This data refers to 58 out of 62 obituaries recorded in the period, since in four of them the exact date of death was not published.



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Figure 6 - Days for the publication



In order to have the obituary published the deceased should be a State of São Paulo inhabitant. However, this condition would be more relevant to a businessman than to a poet, since some professional categories benefit from certain detachment in relation to the State image, such as professors, artists and scientists. Anyway, the obit writer stories selection is fully concentrated in Brazil. There was, in the analyzed period, no death reports from abroad. In addition, the section is not devoted to media celebrities.

Also on the professional issue, there is no room for socio-economic system excluded individuals, as homeless or professional activities considered illegal, as bookies and prostitutes. Rather, emphasis is placed on publishing the death of individuals who have contributed in some way to their community – even retirees are identified by their collaboration in the so called productive phase of a person’s life. In this sense, obituaries are aligned with the newspaper self image, once *Folha de S.Paulo* sees itself as an independent and liberal publication – 44% of obituaries refer to senior professionals such as doctors, engineers and lawyers.

This feature is not an obstacle, however, for nonagenarians and centenarians. In this case, it was also noticed nostalgic account of social aspects that are no longer covered by mainstream media, as the doctor’s wife who abdicated the opera singer and professional swimmer careers to devote herself to family.

Average time between the death and the obituary publication is seven days. It was observed that this longer term seems to benefit narrative construction, allowing the pursuit of touching cases and the column careful wording.

Above all, it was observed an emphasis in the long-lived people obituaries. This phenomenon seems to be due to the fact that living twenty or thirty years longer than the average lifespan makes the individual a winner. Not a material world winner, because obituaries published refers to representatives of professions such as porters and dressmakers. In a certain sense, however, it is as if the person – regardless of place of birth and personal and professional achievements made throughout life – had succeeded in the most challenging deed of all: to negotiate with Death itself.

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Received: 11.08. 2013

Accepted: 05. 22. 2014