



Daily homicides. An analysis of the media discourse on homicides by firearms. Buenos Aires (Argentina) 2001-2002

Homicidios diarios. Análisis del discurso periodístico sobre homicidios por armas de fuego. Buenos Aires (Argentina) 2001-2002

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ABSTRACT During 2001 and 2002, Argentina traversed a serious social and political crisis, reaching unprecedented levels of poverty and exclusion. In this time period all types of urban violence — and especially homicides committed using firearms — increased significantly, turning this cause of death into a social issue with important implications for public health. The present article is the product of a qualitative investigation that uses critical discourse analysis to understand the different ways in which the newspapers La Nación and Clarín reported on the events occurring in the aforementioned period in the city of Buenos Aires. Data was obtained by compiling material from the newspaper archives and was analyzed using a unique technique derived from the French School of Discourse Analysis. Two elements of the results were most notable: the more popular position adopted by Clarín newspaper (declarative logic of likelihood), as opposed to the search for objectivity in La Nación (verification logic); both strategies assume a complementary nature in the social production and reproduction of meaning in accounting for deaths by homicides using firearms.

KEY WORDS Homicide; Communication; Journal; Violence; Public Health.

RESUMEN Durante los años 2001 y 2002, la Argentina atravesó una grave crisis política y social, alcanzando niveles de pobreza y exclusión inauditos. En esos años, los diferentes tipos de violencia urbana mostraron un marcado incremento, en especial los homicidios cometidos mediante el uso de armas de fuego, constituyéndose en una problemática social con importantes repercusiones para la salud pública. El presente artículo es producto de una investigación cualitativa que indagó, mediante un análisis crítico del discurso, las diferentes modalidades con que los diarios La Nación y Clarín dieron cuenta de los hechos acaecidos —durante dicho período— en la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires. Los datos se obtuvieron de la recopilación de material de hemeroteca, y fueron analizados a partir de una técnica propia referenciada en la Escuela Francesa de Análisis del Discurso. En cuanto a los resultados del estudio, se subraya: el posicionamiento más popular adoptado por el diario Clarín (lógica enunciativa de la verosimilitud), en contraposición con la búsqueda de objetividad de La Nación (lógica de la verificación), asumiendo ambos un carácter complementario en la producción y reproducción social de sentido, al dar cuenta de las muertes por homicidios ocasionadas mediante el uso de armas de fuego.

PALABRAS CLAVE Homicidio; Comunicación; Periódicos; Violencia; Salud Pública.

INTRODUCTION

The discourses regarding “violent incidents” in social life have had a recurring presence both in academic circles and within the public opinion, largely due to the consequences these types of violence have on society as a whole.

Specifically within the public health field, there has been growing attention and research centered on violence (1) due to the significant impact it has on a population’s health, representing one of the main causes of death of a considerable number of citizens.

An increasing number of studies have been carried out in order to establish the most effective ways to deal with this complex phenomenon. The research study entitled *Muertes violentas en la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (Una mirada desde el sector salud)* (2) (*Violent Deaths in the City of Buenos Aires, An Interpretation from the Health Sector*), which was carried out in Argentina, represents an example of a study that aims to bring visibility to violence as a public health issue. The study explores the relevance of different types of violent incidents, analyzing their causes (suicides, homicides, accidents, unknown causes), their socio demographic distribution and the circumstances surrounding the violent deaths that occurred in the City of Buenos Aires during the first semester of 1988 and 1991, and in the years 2001 and 2002.

Due to the marked increase in the incidence of deaths caused by homicide (a) observed in Argentina between 2001 and 2002 (2,3) — especially among those committed by “use of firearms” — (b), and considering the serious economic, political, institutional and social crisis the country was undergoing in this period, this article aims to provide a perspective complementary to the abovementioned study by focusing on this partial yet substantial element within the study’s general scope.

Therefore, this article — the synthesis of qualitative research carried out between 2005 and 2008 (d) — focuses on providing a critical discourse analysis of the different modalities with which the feature stories (5,6) of Argentina’s main newspapers (*La Nación* and *Clarín*) reported on

the issue of this type of violent deaths occurring in the City of Buenos Aires during 2001 and 2002.

To this end, the different approaches used by each of the newspapers to inform about similar real incidents are compared, constituting a grammar of recognition of the discursive semantization used in each story. The analysis gives an account of the different ways in which homicide incidents involving firearms are contextualized (7) and also recovers the historical and ideological dimensions of the messages of the graphic media analyzed herein regarding homicide by firearms.

In this work violence is considered a problem that implicates the public health field (8), insofar as it is a dynamic process that has serious consequences on the material and socio-cultural reproduction of the community due to its close connection with its different material conditions of existence, its culture and its language (9-11). It is for this reason that the media is regarded as an inescapable field of study (12-14), not just in its role of informer but also, and most importantly, for the system of values it represents (related to the role of the media as a subject of enunciation), exerting significant influence on social representations.

Some of the initial hypotheses formulated at the beginning of this study were as follows: The newspapers use different terminology to refer to the deaths of police officers in relation to the death of “criminals,” and in relation to differences of “social class.” In general, a significant stigmatizing character is observed in this sense. There are more stories about “crime waves” connected to cases of greater social impact, without there being any direct correlation with an increase in the absolute number of stories reporting on violent incidents. The socio-political crisis in December 2001 modified the enunciation modalities used in the feature stories. *Clarín* frequently uses, as part of its enunciative strategy, the expression “Misterioso caso...” (“Mysterious case...”) followed by a thorough account and follow-up of the incident. *La Nación* makes greater use of enunciative strategies to produce an “objectivity effect” and to categorize the protagonists “morally,” mainly by describing them as “criminals” with the stigmatizing character

mentioned above. Clarín adopts a more “popular” or “sensationalist” style in reporting crime incidents while La Nación appears to focus on the need to solve the crimes and the circumstances surrounding the solving of the crime. The deaths by homicide are never referred to (conceived as) as a public health-related issue, nor are information sources from the health sector consulted in the construction of the stories. Finally, the likely social representation of the areas at higher risk of death by homicide resulting from the reading of these stories does not correlate with the results of the georeferenced epidemiological analysis carried out in the study of reference.

METHODOLOGY

In order to meet the objectives of this research study, which are related to an in-depth analysis of the various meanings the different discourses attribute to this issue, the research was carried out using the two most influential newspapers in Argentina (15,16) in terms of their circulation (17). Each of these newspapers represents different ideological positions; nonetheless, both newspapers define themselves as representatives of a “serious” (“white” style) journalism that attempts to be objective, as opposed to newspapers that assume a more sensationalist (“yellow” style) position or newspapers that may be described as belonging to the “New Journalism” style (18), which were excluded from the analysis.

The primary methodology used was a discourse analysis technique centered on the “narrative” component of the stories, and excluded other enunciative components, for example such paratextual elements as the size of the headlines, the selected typographies, informative graphics, photographs, the sections in which the stories were included, etc.

The concept of “discourse analysis” has multiple meanings and theoretical traditions and perspectives (19). Consequently, it is worth clarifying that the definition of discourse analysis used herein, as opposed to a linguistic analysis of the text itself, or a psychological or sociological

analysis of the context in which the text was produced, refers to the discipline which articulates the enunciation of a text with a specific social place (20,21).

To this purpose, we based our analysis in the theoretical methodological developments of authors affiliated with the French School of Discourse Analysis (22-29) and others associated with the Critical Discourse Analysis movement, which aims to study the relationship between discourse and society (30,31). It is worth mentioning that, although the French School differs from the Critical Discourse Analysis school regarding methodology and terminology, this study focuses on some fundamental propositions shared by both schools regarding the definition of the object “discourse” as the complex articulation between the linguistic or textual surface and the extra-linguistic conditions that made it possible.

In accordance with this theoretical framework, the analysis of the corpus was approached simultaneously at three levels: the discourse as a text; the discourse as a discursive practice immersed in a specific social practice; and the discourse as an example of social practice that not only expresses or reflects identities, practices and relationships, but also constitutes and shapes them (that is, taking into account the power relationships in a specific situation) (30).

Data sources

The articles were obtained from the newspaper archives of the Argentine National Congress Library (Biblioteca del Congreso de la Nación Argentina) and City of Buenos Aires Library of Legislature (Biblioteca del Concejo Deliberante de la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires) (e). The search consisted in reviewing all the print editions of La Nación and Clarín published within the analyzed period, taking note of reference data from the articles found (date published, page number and title), and finally collecting those stories either by photocopying the originals or procuring digital copies from the newspapers’ respective websites (32,33).

Analysis

During the first “exploratory” stage of the analysis, each text (out of a total of 475 stories about “homicides caused by use of firearms” published by both newspapers within the two year period established) was read — and questioned — thoroughly to attempt to understand them as an object of reflection and analysis, delimiting and enunciating the specific issue at hand.

As a result of this exploration of the corpus and the observation of regularities therein, the categories for the classification of the stories were established conceptually and operatively. This categorization allowed us to later focus more closely on the discourse analysis itself, contrasting the two media sources.

The categorization, according to different types of violent incidents, was as follows:

- Robberies-Assaults (Robos-Asaltos): RA
- Crime of Passion (Crimen Pasional): CP
- Urban Violence (Violencia Urbana): VU
- Mysterious Murder (Asesinato Misterioso): AM
- Mafia Crime (Crimen Mafioso): CM
- Kidnapping (Secuestro): S
- Trigger-happy incidents-Taking the law into one’s own hands (Gatillo fácil - Justicia por mano propia): GF-JMP
- December 19 and 20, 2001 (Días 19 y 20 de diciembre de 2001): D 2001

The stories included in these categories were then regrouped according to the circumstances surrounding the incident and/or to specific enunciative aspects highlighted by the two newspapers. Each story, once classified by the categories listed above, was then marked with an epithet that described those aspects for the sake of a better identification and analysis:

- Confrontation with the police (Enfrentamiento con la Policía): EP
- Ordinary case (Caso Ordinario): O
- Case with social resonance (Caso Resonante): R
- Crime wave (Ola de Inseguridad): OI

- Case with political repercussions (Caso con Repercusiones Políticas): RP
- Case under investigation (Investigación en Proceso): IP
- Trigger-happy incidents-Taking the law into one’s own hands (Gatillo fácil - Justicia por mano propia): GF-JMP
- December 19 and 20, 2001 (Días 19 y 20 de diciembre de 2001): D 2001

According to this classification, a story that gave an account of a “homicide by firearm” during an ordinary robbery followed by an exchange of gunfire with the police was categorized RA O EP. This type of classification and regrouping of the stories based on the “exploratory” reading of the corpus facilitated the subsequent operationalizing of the analysis.

Each of the subgroups into which the stories were classified was then “descriptively” analyzed, organizing the gathered material according to selected analytical characteristics that will be later described. In this way, the hypotheses were reformulated, issues of relevance were detected, the corpus was reorganized according to the objectives of the research, and the modalities of enunciation adopted by each of the newspapers were analyzed in depth, exploring the differences (comparatively) between the discourses of each of the newspapers (“intertextual disparities”) in relation to the social production of meaning.

The sources used by the media as references for obtaining information (anonymous, police, judicial, print media, health system, etc.) were also taken into consideration.

A double-entry matrix that crosses the variables of content and form was used as a guide for the descriptive analysis (Table 1). In the matrix were included all the elements that — on the discursive surface — exposed the semantic operations generated by the conditions of production, therefore becoming revealing indicators of significant regularities in the discourse (18).

Finally, as a consequence of the discussion of the results obtained throughout this process, an interpretative “synthesis” of the data in alignment with the theoretical framework adopted, the objectives specified and hypotheses articulated was sought.

Table 1. CRITERIA USED IN THE DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

	CONTENT	FORM
CONTENT	<p>THE INFORMATION COMMUNICATED</p> <p>Modality of enunciation: <i>declarative</i>.</p> <p>Modality of enunciated statements: <i>indicative mood</i>.</p> <p>Narration: <i>singulative</i>.</p> <p>Verb tense: <i>third person (non-deictic)</i>.*</p>	<p>DISCURSIVE GENRE = FEATURE STORY (SUPERSTRUCTURE)</p> <p>Framework of the story and its relationship with the events: <i>correspondence, anachronism</i>.</p> <p>Frequency of the story: <i>singulative, repetitive, iterative</i>.</p> <p>Segments of the story: <i>descriptive, commentative, the scenes</i>.</p> <p>Person: <i>predominance of third person (non-deictic)</i>.</p> <p>Interdiscursivity with the typical features of the crime genre.</p>
FORM	<p>CONTEST SUGGESTED, CONNOTATED</p> <p>Semantic fields:</p> <p>Frequent use of objective terms (terms of general reference).</p> <p>Reiterations.</p> <p>Antinomies.</p> <p>Lexemes used to refer to the police, the "criminals," the actions, characteristics of the events, etc. **</p>	<p>ONE RHETORIC, ONE STYLE</p> <p>Modalities of enunciation: <i>declarative, interrogative, imperative, exclamatory</i>.</p> <p>Modalities of the enunciated statements: <i>logical (certainty, probability, necessity, possibility, obligation, prohibition, permission), appreciative (value judgements)</i>.</p> <p>Modalities of the message: <i>thematization, passivization, nominalization</i>.</p>

Source: Own elaboration based in Fernandez Pedemonte (7), Atorresi (18), Kebrat Orecchioni (24).

*Less referential value of the spatio-temporal context where the crimes occurred.

**They constitute "lexical choices" making up "semantic networks" in that they play a decisive role in revealing the ideational structure of the text/ discourse. The lexical choice in a particular context is not arbitrary but it depends on specific contextual and ideological variables in relation to the valuation conferred upon it by the speaker.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is no discourse or system of categories through which the "real" speaks without mediations. (34 p. 27)

The description of the situation proposed by both newspapers from January 2001 through December 2002 was marked by the beginning of what both called an "ola de inseguridad" ("crime wave") (OI).

During the first months of 2001, Clarín published more stories about "robberies-assaults" (RA) than La Nación, a pattern that would continue throughout all the analyzed period (most of these incidents ending up in

confrontations between the police and the criminals) and began making references to the aforementioned crime wave. In contrast, La Nación followed closely a "case with social resonance" (R) (known as "the double crime in Cariló" in which a financier and his wife were killed by dubious means on the morning of February 4th, 2001) and only began making references to the existence of a crime wave in April. However, as the year progressed and the number of murdered policemen increased, it was La Nación that systematically connected the two: the greater the number of murdered policemen, the greater the "crime wave" (OI).

This pattern held until October 2001, when Clarín adhered to La Nación's tendency to follow closely a "case with social resonance" (R)

because of its well-known victim: an owner of nightclubs located in the City of Buenos Aires. During that month, *La Nación* made several references to the “crime wave” (OI), which *Clarín* did not.

During November, both newspapers followed closely another “case with social resonance” (R), involving as victim the husband of a very popular actress and revealing what was later called “the taxi mafia” (these stories were not included in the corpus because the homicide was not caused by the use of a firearm). During that month, *Clarín* was once again the newspaper to publish more stories on “robberies assaults” (RA), following one in detail because it had occurred in a hospital, and also published one of its characteristic “mysterious murder” (AM) stories.

In December 2001, there were fewer stories on ordinary (O) “robberies-assaults” (RA), since both newspapers focused on the violent incidents that occurred on “December 19 and 20, 2001” (D 2001) — and their immediate consequences — as well as on a “trigger-happy” (GF-JMP) (f) incident in which a retired policeman killed three youths in a bar, a case which had major public impact.

During the first half of 2002, other causes of homicide appeared in both newspapers: “mafia crimes” (CM), “mysterious murders” (AM), “revenge” (GF-JMP), and incidents which were classified under the “urban violence” (VU) category. However, the majority of stories published during this time were about policemen’s deaths and their connection with the “crime wave” (OI), even though the number of incidents of “robberies-assaults” (RA) followed by the death of one of the people involved was notably less than what had been published the previous year.

In July 2002, the first express “kidnapping” (S) incident followed by death occurred and captured the attention of both newspapers, though *Clarín* followed the incident more closely.

During the second half of 2002, the main stories published by both newspapers were on “crimes of passion” (CP). During the last months of the year, *Clarín* in particular published more stories on “robberies-assaults” (RA)

followed by “confrontations with the police” (EP), in addition to some incidents classified under the “urban violence” (UV) category.

On the different geographical locations of the homicides

The research of reference (2) showed that the spatial distribution of the homicides analyzed presented a disperse pattern with a tendency towards the northeastern and southern parts of the city. The analysis of homicide rates by neighborhood identified Nueva Pompeya, Villa Riachuelo, Constitución and Villa Soldati as the areas at high risk of death homicide, that is, the southern part of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, which has the highest levels of structural poverty.

However, a georeferential analysis of the crime incidents published by *La Nación* and *Clarín* would show a different pattern of distribution, given that there were more stories on homicides by firearms occurring in Palermo, Belgrano, Recoleta, Nuñez, Flores, Caballito and Floresta, followed by Retiro, Villa Lugano, Constitución, La Paternal, Villa del Parque, Once, Almagro, Balvanera and Pompeya, as well as a number of isolated cases in the rest of the neighborhoods of the city, including Villa Soldati and Villa Riachuelo.

Interpretative Analysis.

General Aspects

In order to give an account of “the facts” of the incidents their stories strove to cover (what is herein referred to as the content of the content), both newspapers utilized the declarative — affirmative — modality of enunciation in the simple preterit perfect tense, using the — non-deictic — third person and, generally, singulative narration, that is to say, the singular incident is referred to, precisely, in a singular narration. It is interesting to notice that, by using this typical enunciative level “the facts seem to narrate themselves,” imbuing the stories with a supposed “objectivist” neutrality, which hides and subsumes the rest of the aspects considered in this analysis, such as the form adopted by the

content, the form of the form in terms of the characteristic rhetoric, as well as the content connoted by the form.

We think this last point is of transcendental importance, because while the feature story differs from the news story in the richness and freedom the former has to transmit information, applying such varied writing techniques as narrative, descriptive, and literary, the central focus within the features on the “facts in question” is a way of limiting that potentiality by appealing to a certain anchoring in the most factual level in order to guarantee objectivity. In this way, although innumerable differences were found with regards to the two newspapers’ enunciative strategies, a clear correspondence between them is shown in this respect. What is important is “what is being informed,” as a “truth”; while the aspects involved in “how it is informed” attempt to consolidate this value in their targeted readers, renewing and reproducing the “reading contract” as a form of socially institutionalized identification.

Throughout this work different modalities used by the newspapers to enforce this reading contract are shown, by appealing to what we call the form of the content, the form of the form and the content of the form, demonstrated in the way the idea of “having been there” is constructed as a guarantee of objectivity as well as to produce in the readers their own representation as if they “had been there.” The feature story is therefore shaped by this apparent contradiction between the aims of objectivity and subjectivity: on the one hand the “value of truth” is guaranteed by the use of and for the purpose of “objectivity”; and, on the other hand, a representational complicity with the readers is generated in order to guarantee the perpetuation of the reading contract. In other words, both newspapers present the content of the content as the ultimate and sole purpose of their stories, in which all the aspects related to the form of reporting are supposedly a neutral means with which to convey the information, maintaining an exclusively — purely — informative relationship with their readers when, as we will see, this is not actually so. This conclusion remains valid even though it is practically impossible to establish a clear-cut distinction between the levels of

content and the expression since both are inevitably influenced by the ethical, political, ideological and professional attitudes of those informing.

Specific aspects by category

The individual analysis of the categories into which the corpus was classified led to the observation of a number of findings that regularly occurred in the “robberies-assaults” (RA) category, which held the greatest number of stories published during the period herein analyzed.

As Table 2 illustrates, La Nación mostly published stories on crime incidents that were followed by a confrontation between the police and the robbers (g), which could suggest to readers that almost all acts of crime are responded to by the “security forces.” This representation could prove, on the one hand, the efficacy of this mechanism of social control and, on the other, the seriousness of the crime incidents. The violence demonstrated in the fact that each of these incidents almost invariably ended up in armed confrontations reinforced the legitimacy of this “control.”

Clarín, however, prioritized the reporting of “every” crime incident that occurred, whether or not they had ended up in confrontations with the police, as evidenced by the fact that within the period analyzed Clarín consistently published the greatest number of stories, particularly within the category of robberies-assaults. The valuation underlying this approach of “The Great Argentinean Newspaper” (Clarín’s slogan, “El Gran Diario Argentino”) is that reporting “every incident” means giving an account of “everything that happens.” Here we see that the objectivities of each newspaper were completely different, almost as different as their subjectivities.

The newspapers also differed in the type of information sources they considered reliable for the construction of the features: La Nación newspaper relied on police and security and justice officials while Clarín relied on eyewitnesses and the victim’s family members and neighbors.

Table 2. SYNTHESIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE "ROBBERIES-ASSAULTS" (RA) CATEGORY

	CLARÍN	LA NACIÓN
INFORMATION SELECTION CRITERIA	Information about all the incidents that occurred.	Crime incidents followed by confrontation between the criminals and the police.
STYLE	Popular rhetoric.	A similar rhetoric, in moments of greatest social conflict.
THEMATIZATION	"Lack of safety" ("Inseguridad").	"Crime wave" ("Ola de inseguridad") = increase in the number of murdered policemen.
CONCLUSION INFERRED	Position: "on the side of the people."	Position: "on the side of truth" (constructed from information provided by the accredited sources).
	LOGIC OF VERISIMILITUDE	LOGIC OF VERIFICATION

Source: Own elaboration

Clarín consistently applied a more popular rhetoric, assuming its characteristic position "on the side of the people." La Nación chose to use a similar rhetoric in times of high social conflict (December 2001); during these critical times, there were several stories published by Clarín that demonstrated the contrary. These variations with a "central tendency" not only evidenced the intention of the newspapers to consolidate their hegemony but also how they managed to do so by selecting an institutionalized social identification that would result in a perfectly complementary competition: "the truth of power" (which both newspapers embodied and reproduced). As Michael Foucault explains:

There is a battle "for truth" or at least "around truth" —it being understood once again that by truth I do not mean "the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted" but rather "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true," it being understood also that it's not a matter of a battle "in favor" of truth, but a battle about the regime of truth and the economic and political roles it plays. (35 p. 155)

We observed how, starting in April 2001, and while giving an account of the increasing number of "robberies-assaults" (RA),

each newspaper increasingly made reference to the issue of "safety" by using the terms "lack of safety" ("inseguridad")(OI), in the case of Clarín, and "crime wave" ("ola de inseguridad") (OI), in the case of La Nación. The latter also made a direct connection between such a crime wave (OI) and the increase in the number deaths of police officers during confrontations with criminals. It was evident how, in response to the increase in "illegitimate violence," both newspapers, and especially La Nación, used their publications as a means to extend and justify the alleged demand of citizens for the use of "legitimate violence" — the one exercised by the State — with La Nación advocating for the implementation of a more punitive "firm hand" (for example, making reference to the need to lower the age of eligibility for criminal prosecution) and Clarín advocating for a approach guaranteeing civil rights, both newspapers reinforcing the unquestionable difference between the two types of violence.

The analysis of this category also showed a suggestive gradual decrease in specific references to the "wave" (OI) (in both newspapers) during the second half of 2001. Starting in September 2001 the references began to drop — although the total number of crime incidents reported did not decrease — and the newspapers "suspiciously" focused on providing thorough and lengthy coverage of certain "cases with social resonance" (R) (h) that had occurred

during that period (i). As the level of social conflict increased and the power of the government progressively decreased, the “crime wave” (OI) argument lost its relevance. Did the two newspapers do this in order to downplay the hard times the country was undergoing? It is impossible to prove the hypothesis underlying this question, at least in this work, but what is not impossible is to show — as we believe we have done — the flipside of this reality, that is, the alarmist attitude adopted by both newspapers when forming public opinion during most of that year. However, as real violence is not discrete but rather continuous, history was taking place without much concerning itself with the possible manipulations that could occur.

During the first months of 2002 (after the incidents on December 19 and 20, 2001) La Nación once more began to make reference to the “crime wave” (OI), insistently relating it to the number of murdered policemen (j); Clarín preferred to focus on the singularities of the incidents without classifying them in the “lack of safety” (OI) category as it had done during most of the previous year. It is therefore concluded that, after the massive demonstrations in December 2001, which challenged the established order of the country, both newspapers — historically complementary in their defense of the “status quo” — demonstrated confusion and disorientation about what position to adopt in the face of changing events and ongoing uncertainty. Where was the truth? And where was the power? “The depletion of one fiction renders the discourse ineffective” (36 p.58).

As a final point regarding the “robberies-assaults” (RA) category, and returning to one of the initial hypotheses of this work, it should be mentioned that although there was no clear — marked — change in the modalities of enunciation used by either newspapers after the incidents of December 2001 regarding these type of incidents, the newspapers did show a deviation from their traditional enunciative positions.

It was in the analysis of this category that the importance placed by La Nación in the “security forces” was most explicitly shown, demonstrated in the different terminology it used to refer to policemen and criminals, in the

thorough account of the number of policemen who had “fallen in the line of duty,” in the direct connection made between the “crime wave” (OI) and the death of the policemen, in the value of proof given to the sources, and the value of truth given to its official expert reports.

As regards the characterization of the circumstances of the reported incidents and the people involved, both newspapers abounded in details to consolidate the “objectivity effect” sought, but, as has already been mentioned, they relied upon different types of sources, different rhetorics and different modalities of enunciation, in addition to each newspaper supporting its characteristic position: La Nación taking “the side of truth,” a truth constructed using the data provided by the sources considered reliable; and Clarín taking “the side of the people.” The two positions represented a logic of “verification” versus a logic of “verisimilitude” (7). These are two differential methods of establishing legitimacy: the former based on the power of arguments to convince, the latter based on the credibility of the narration in terms of its similarity to life. Hence, both logics were based on the potential to assign meanings to the experiences of citizens.

The “crimes of passion” (CP) category presented some enunciative characteristics similar to those observed in other categories, such as the fact that Clarín placed more importance on the specific geographical locations where the incidents took place and La Nación on “the outcome” of the incidents (generally mentioned in the headlines). Nonetheless, there were some singularities in the stories within this category which set them apart from the rest (Table 3).

In order to keep the readers’ interest until the end of the stories, Clarín did not mention the motive of the crime in the headlines while La Nación referred to the victimizer as “the accused.” As has been previously stated, Clarín’s use of sensationalist rhetoric is part of its identity; this does not mean that La Nación does not also resort to a popular rhetoric using other strategies. Therefore, based on what was observed in the analysis of this category, when we address “Clarín’s sensationalism” we mean the form assumed by the content of its stories (popular

Table 3. SYNTHESIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE "CRIMES OF PASSION" (CP) CATEGORY

	LA NACIÓN	CLARÍN
INFORMATION SELECTION CRITERIA	Reference to the victimizer as "the accused" and concealment of evidence to support this accusation in the headlines.	Concealment of the motives for committing the crimes in the headlines.
STYLE	Sensationalism = "content of the form."	Sensationalism = "form of the content."
THEMATIZATION	High value placed on evidence and official scientific expert reports.	Greater use of interdiscursivity with the crime genre.
	CONTRADICTIONS.	CONTRADICTIONS.
CONCLUSION INFERRED	Were the circumstances more important than the incident itself? Search for an emotional rather than descriptive meaning.	

Source: Own elaboration

rhetoric) while when we address "La Nación's sensationalism" we mean the content of its form. La Nación's sensationalism is thus less explicit and more suggestive, connotative, but still an example of sensationalism (because there would be no "sensation" without this play of concealment-bringing into light in which both newspapers take part, although using different modalities).

What is important to highlight here is that these differences may have similar effects as regards their power to shake readers' certainties about the issues being reported, preventing the readers from deviating from the dominant common sense and from reflecting upon, problematizing and renewing their comprehension of the issue. An example of what we are referring to is that in both newspapers the categorization "crimes of passion" (CP) conceals the fact that those crimes were generally committed by men against women (an aspect that was never highlighted in any of the stories herein analyzed). This is why we can refer, in both cases, to "sensationalism."

The summarized mode of La Nación, generating interest in the readers by concealing in the title the proof justifying the accusation of the victimizer, could reinforce the value the newspaper gives to the evidence as a way to attain "truth." If truth lies in the soundness of the evidence, and the sources accredited by the newspaper are fundamentally the "security forces," then the truth must be found in the

official expert reports — thus closes the circle of the unbreakable consistency of the newspaper's traditional position.

A notable observation, found only within the analysis of this category, were the "blatant contradictions" within both newspapers as regards the accuracy of information typically included in a feature story (place of occurrence, details of the incident, people involved and their possible motives, etc). This may support the hypothesis that, in these cases, the circumstances surrounding the incident were more important than the incident itself — the content of the content — and the forms overtly claimed a central role that had been concealed in other categories, in order to achieve the typical anecdotal character of stories dealing with this type of crime, that is, shifting from "public interest" news to news of interest "to" the public.

In this sense, Clarín used the resource of "interdiscursivity" within the crime and/or "thriller" genres as the preferred form of the content for the features in this category, a typical resource used in narrative journalism to stir and hold the reader's interest.

All the stories included in the "urban violence" (VU) category were those that explicitly referred to incidents in this way. The incidents generally involved confrontations between "poor people" or between "poor people and the police." Strangely enough, during 2001, there was only one such feature story.

Equally revealing is that none of the stories on homicide within this category — throughout the two years analyzed — related the crime to the “crime wave” (OI), which leads to the following questions: Whom were those made unsafe by this crime wave? What other lacks of safety and what “others” were not included in the crime wave? Who were considered to be the ones troubling the waters that would then provoke the wave? We believe that the richness in this otherwise “poor” category lies precisely in the questions it provokes.

In order to provide an answer to these questions we refer to the analysis of the only feature story from 2001 included in this category (published by La Nación on April 10th about the confrontation between “rival gangs” (k) in Villa 31, located in the neighborhood of Retiro in the city of Buenos Aires) since it is representative of the rest of stories under this category. Throughout this study, we highlighted how the feature story described the crime as inherent to an “outside” the city, something treated as apart or other. Violence was regarded as a normal, typical, constitutive part of that “outside,” and consequently, it was not worthwhile including the violent incident in the “crime wave.” After all, how important are the waves among the waves? Just more of the same. Nothing new.

In this way, the stories published by both newspapers during 2002, after the critical incidents in December 2001, referred to social conflicts (confrontations between “gangs,” between “criminals and the police,” “between poor people and the police,” “among the poor,” etc.) as clashes of polarities, recognizing no subtleties that would disturb the dual logic predominant at the time: “good and evil” (central/inside vs. peripheral/outside) or directly “evil and evil” (outside vs. outside), as happened in the example previously described.

In relation to the “mysterious murder” (AM) category, one of the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of this research was that Clarín frequently used this expression to describe crime incidents in which motives were from the start unclear. It is important to mention that this enunciative strategy was also used by La Nación, although to a lesser extent, since the newspaper

also used other similar labels to refer to these incidents such as: strange case, unusual event, etc.

It was noted that, as in the other categories, La Nación’s predominant strategy was to put forward possible hypotheses in the headlines, which would then be supported and/or refuted by the clues, suspicions, proof, evidence, etc. mentioned in the body of the feature story. On the other hand, Clarín’s used popular rhetoric tied to narrative journalism style to heighten interest in the stories. We could therefore say that the former aimed for an “objective” emphasis with reliable data, while the latter aimed for a “subjective” emphasis using witnesses’ and neighbors’ opinions, and commentaries from diverse sources — without denying that both newspapers used these two strategies in stories within this category. Consequently, the fact that these two differences are described does not attempt to attribute them with a conclusive character (although we do believe that the description helps to validate the underlying hypothesis of the study when understood as part of the global findings).

The “mafia crimes” (CM) category was limited, in both newspapers, exclusively to crimes that involved people of Asian origin, with sparse mention made to other “unnecessary” specifications such as their country of birth, their social class, their profession, how long they had lived in Argentina, etc. Stories in this category made reference to “the Chinese” in general and “the Chinese mafia” in particular. It is suggestive how in this way a double “otherness” is constructed in which, on the one hand, the Chinese — in the discourse of both newspapers, our discourse — do not form part of the collective “we” and, on the other hand, the fact that the Chinese constitute “mafias” becomes — and represents — a second exclusion from “the way things should be.” Here we see another “outside” clearly defined by both newspapers, another “outside” alien to ourselves and, consequently, threatening to the “inside,” to the “we.”

A number of fragments from the stories mentioned “the wall of silence” police would encounter when trying to investigate these cases. They made reference to “witnesses who refuse to speak,” the fact that “there are no qualified translators available” and that “codes appear

which are impossible to decipher," etc. All these expressions were used to guarantee the impunity that worried the newspapers so much. These real, concrete difficulties fit perfectly into the repeated phrase "wall of silence": that which does not speak the way we do does not speak, does not communicate, does not signify anything but a threat. It is only as something alien to us, as a "Chinese mafia," that it acquires some kind of meaning. This is the reason why we did not find any references to "Argentine mafia" or Argentine "mafia crimes" in the stories published during the period analyzed, at least not in those terms.

The "kidnapping" (S) category was comprised of stories on "express kidnappings" resulting in death, a type of crime that has gained increasing importance in the media from that period to the present. The stories in this category presented some enunciative characteristics that supported the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of this research, such as the use of different lexemes when referring to the criminals and to the victim; the thematization — regarded as a modality of the message (herein referred to as the form of the form) — of the words "lack of safety" by Clarín and "crime wave" by La Nación (OI); the two types of "sensationalism" used by each newspaper to guarantee the reading contract; etc. What is important to highlight here is that after the analysis of the stories in this category, it became evident — perhaps more so than in the analysis of the other categories — that when dealing with a type of crime highly condemned by public opinion both newspapers made explicit their characteristic ideological positions. To illustrate this: When did the newspapers consider the crime solved? For La Nación, the crime was solved once there was a person accused with some evidence against him (evidence obtained after specific expert reports). For Clarín, the solving of cases merited an indicative modality, when a decision had been issued by the Justice system; until then, the presumption of innocence of the accused was maintained in spite of the existence of evidence against him.

Similarly, in the analysis of the stories under the "trigger-happy" (GF-IMP) category it was also observed that, as a result of the serious social conflicts during the last days of 2001 and

the first months of 2002, the traditional ideological positions of each newspapers were polarized, clearly evidenced in references to confrontations and rivalry between the citizens and the security forces. Crucial to the analysis of this category — as a particular yet paradigmatic case — was the extensive coverage given to an incident in which a retired policeman killed three youths after they had commented — while watching television in a public place — on the violent incidents occurring in different areas of the City of Buenos Aires during those days. Each newspaper polarized its position when reporting on the incident: Clarín gave priority to the social context in which the incident was inscribed, condemning without mitigation the retired policeman's actions and relativizing the comments made by "the young men"; while La Nación, although condemning the policeman's action, described his behavior more as "a reaction" triggered (however unjustifiably) by the comments of the young men. In the follow-up stories on the repercussions of the case, La Nación gave a detailed account of the changes the incident provoked in security forces (after unbridled repression of demonstrations in which neighbors protested against the incident). Clarín, on the other hand, gave voice to the protestors by relating the events from their point of view.

In support of these assertions regarding the different positions adopted by each newspaper, other enunciative characteristics were found during the analysis of other stories in this same category. The conditional tense (used by Clarín, as we saw in the previous category, to maintain the presumption of innocence of the accused "until proven guilty") was now employed by La Nación in favor of the police. That is, in order to consider the case closed and declare the police guilty, it was necessary for the judicial process to come to a close.

The critical incidents of "December 19 and 20, 2001" (D 2001), with their causes and consequences — one being the rise in the incidence of homicides by firearms that month as studied in the investigation of reference (2) — were to a great extent the key element (not just in terms of the time frame) around which the present study was structured (1). Consequently, the analysis of the press coverage of those

incidents was reserved for the end of this paper. Before proceeding to the discussion of the results, it is first pertinent to point out that this category, while lacking the characteristics that jointed the other categories (for example, referring to a specific type of violence and containing stories published over the two-year period analyzed), was nonetheless prioritized because it referred to events of such importance and magnitude that it not only constituted a turning point in our research but also — and fundamentally — a turning point in recent Argentine history. Therefore, we believe we have acted in alignment with what the research question and objectives demand.

The most important point to highlight regarding this category was the fact that, in the days following these critical events, La Nación adopted a more democratic position, more explicit in condemning the police and the security forces' actions and less discriminatory and stigmatizing in relation to the most radical demonstrators. Clarín, on the other hand, made reference to the demonstrators using the expressions "enraged activists," "violent people" or "political activists headed by Hebe de Bonafini" [one of the founders of the human rights group Madres de Plaza de Mayo], "teenagers armed with stones and slingshots," etc., was less sensationalist in the forms it used to express the content of its stories.

What interpretations of this apparently contradictory situation can we offer? It is possible that this supposed contradiction is the result of the polarization and crystallization of the particular and characteristic ethical-ideological positions of each newspaper: Clarín by echoing the anti-political sentiment of the chant "que se vayan todos" (m) ("every one of them must go," an expression coined mainly by the recently impoverished middle class, whom, as was previously mentioned, Clarín has always claimed to represent) and La Nación by trying to protect "the order and respect for private property," which had been breached during those days. Both elements represent for La Nación the most important ontological pillars of its conception of "society," which bars the possibility that "every one of them must go," consequently leaving "nobody" to guarantee these elements.

Another possible argument to support this hypothesis is that La Nación, upon seeing that the two pillars of its conception of "society" were being severely threatened, decided to give priority to the coverage of incidents that were happening within the city of Buenos Aires, while Clarín, from the very beginning, treated the crisis as a national conflict and gave national coverage of the incidents.

Reversing the meanings of the newspapers' names, Clarín chose the "nation" while La Nación focused only on those areas where the "bugles" (in Spanish, clarines) were most loudly playing (and ought to be playing): the capital city (the center) of the country.

We do not believe that, within the stories chronicling these events, the newspapers showed any intention of broadening their view of the incidents in order to explore the social potential that had been awakened, that is to say, the endless opportunities unfolding in a time when all the established orders had been severely put in to question in a matter of hours. The open defiance of the martial law declared by the government, the unexpected popular mobilization without social class distinctions, the resignation of the president of the Republic, the generalized repudiation of the ruling classes, the aggression towards financial and banking entities, etc., did not call for anything more than a factual enumeration and the corresponding description of "a crisis," conceived of as innumerable threats, a "social danger," but not an opportunity.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

None of the texts analyzed in this research made reference to the social problem of homicides by firearms as an issue related to public health, nor did they give priority to the Health System as "another" source of information and producer of data in order to explain and/or give more extensive news coverage of the crimes. The texts merely made brief mention of the hospitals to which the injured were taken.

The study of reference (2), which also acted as the catalyst for this study, is a clear

example of how the health sector can contribute to providing information highly useful in public administration, even in areas outside the health field, as long as there is a policy to incorporate and combine this information with that provided by other sectors. In this sense, the lack of awareness of the information produced by the Health Sector on the part of the two newspapers analyzed could be indicators of the lack of connection mentioned at the beginning of this article.

For this reason, our research attempted to move in the opposite direction, along a road certainly less traveled, in order to contribute to the reflection and analysis of the social practices of which this discourse is a part, "a sample of semiotic tissue taken from the flow of the social production of meaning" (9, p.57).

The example which best illustrates the affirmations in the preceding paragraphs is the likely social representation of the areas at highest risk of death by homicide resulting from the analysis of the stories, which clearly differed from the information shown by the epidemiological study of reference (2), and consequently serves as an example of the lack of connection between the print media discourse on homicides and the health sector. The lack of safety in unsafe neighborhoods, "the waves among waves," are not news.

After analyzing the singularities of each of the categories into which the corpus was classified and the "descriptive coherences" of each newspaper, an underlying consistency, which may be described as prescriptive, was observed. In this underlying prescriptive consistency, many of the differences in the typical characteristics of each number were fused and were con-fused, in a complementary production that guarantees the social reproduction of "one" meaning in opposition to the diverse possible ways of understanding "violent incidents."

The stories were not exhausted at the factual level (the content of the content) but, on the contrary, through the use of different narrative techniques that were also analyzed, they extended (through the different forms assumed by the content, the content connoted in the form and the characteristic rhetorics) to contribute significantly to the social construction of the

meaning aforementioned, producing hegemonic ideological effects such as:

ESTABLISHED SYSTEMS OF CONCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS:

- Policemen's deaths during confrontations with criminals = "crime wave" (OI);
- Value of truth placed on official "scientific" reports and acknowledgement of the police and judicial officials as the most reliable sources to provide information;
- Higher risk of death by homicide in the areas of the city in which the middle class and upper middle class live;
- Risk of suffering different types of violence = risk of death;
- "Alien" feature attributed to violence "among the poor."

NATURALIZED SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITIES:

- Police as guarantor of the public order;
- Marginalization = crime;
- Youths = danger;
- Violence among the poor "is natural" and, consequently, is not considered part of the "crime wave" (OI);
- "Crimes of passion" are committed because of love, hate, anger, etc., concealing the character of femicide implicated in the fact that in the immense majority of cases, the victimizers are men and the victims are women;
- The voice of "the neighbors'" is "the truth."

STIGMATIZATING CHARACTERIZATIONS OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL ACTORS AND COMMUNITIES:

- Poor youth = criminals
- Activists of the left = violent
- The Chinese = mafia

We believe that in this way both newspapers, using these predominant enunciative logics, helped to consolidate the "established" social, and hence, linguistic interactions: those assumptions considered valid in that they form a background of obviousness (37).

As has been observed in many examples provided herein, this socially constructed “truth” is the result of the priority given to particular interpretations over others. It is a silent violence committed upon reality, a constant reaffirmation of the positions adopted by each newspaper, acting as disciplinary devices (29, 38-40) and influencing the morality of domestic-collective life. The fact that we observed and questioned this “truth” from our perspective, able to separate ourselves from this background of obviousness and identify and expose the assumptions that are concealed within it, will only yield positive results if it is able to bring about discussions from other perspectives and/or when it has contributed to shift from a referential criticism related to objectivity —

concerned about to what extent an enunciated statement agrees with a specific event — to narrative criticism — concerned about how a particular narration relates to the comprehension of an event — that could broaden reflections on the different types of violent incidents.

We understand that the path taken in this research — an exploration of discursive practice in the print media (processes of production and consumption of the texts) and a description of these processes, followed by an interpretation of the two “instances” in light of the social practice in which that discourse is immersed — is an unusual way to deal with this health issue. Nonetheless we believe that it is absolutely necessary in order to encourage true interdisciplinary discussions.

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ENDNOTES

a. In order to achieve the objectives of this research, the term “homicide” is defined as a “death caused to a person by another person” (in this case using a firearm). We did not use any of the many specific discourses that deal with homicide, albeit in a different way, for example the legal discourse, which does not consider to be homicides the deaths caused by excessive police force during “confrontations” while carrying out activities of control/repressions of crime; or the medical discourse, which encodes under “External Causes of Morbidity and Mortality” in the International Classification of Diseases, 10th edition (ICD-10) the deaths caused by firearms as accidents (codes W32-W32), homicides (codes X93-X95) or injuries of undetermined intent (Y22-Y24).

b. The research of reference shows that deaths by homicide accounted for 17% of the total number of violent deaths that occurred throughout the periods analyzed therein. There was a significant increase in homicides between the years 1988 (8.4%) and 1991 (7.8%) and the years 2001 (24.1%) and 2002 (23.1%). As regards the distribution by sex, the greatest disparity was recorded in 2002, with 92.4% corresponding to men as opposed to 7.6% in women. Homicides rates according to age group indicated that the

people at the highest risk of death by homicide were young adults aged between 15 and 39 years (the largest proportion within this group being youths aged between 20 and 24 years). Homicides rates according to cause showed that the most frequent causes of homicides were bullet wounds (66.2%) and sharp instruments (15.9%), with an even higher occurrence in 2001 and 2002, in which bullet-caused homicides rates were close to 70%. Though bullet and sharp instrument wounds were the first and second causes of death by homicide of men and women, the rates of deaths by homicide for both causes were significantly higher in men than in women. These causes were followed by homicides by physical aggression, transportation accidents and strangulation. The percentages of deaths by homicide in the second halves of 2001 and 2002 were notably dissimilar, with a greater number in 2001, particularly in December 2001, when the proportion of homicide was double that in December 2002 (12.1% and 6% respectively) (2 p. 78-10).

c. As a direct consequence of the policies implemented in the previous decade, reaching record levels of poverty, indigence and unemployment, crisis finally erupted in December 2001, expressed through social uprisings in different cities of the country, with looting of stores and massive popular

demonstrations against the government in power at the time. In the city of Buenos Aires, on December 19 and 20 of 2001, as a result of the immense popular demonstrations against the government and its declaration of “martial law,” a brutal repression on the part of “security forces” was responsible for injuring hundreds of people and for the death of 5 people (there were a total of 34 deaths in the whole country; the figure would then increase to 39). After President De La Rúa’s resignation, there were four successive presidents in ten days. This situation is part of the long process of economic, political, institutional and social debacle that Argentina underwent during the last decades of the 20th century, which included de facto (1976-1983) and democratic governments (1983 to date): “between 1993 and 2001 the foreign debt tripled from 1.6% to 3.6% of the GDP, increasing from 7.6 billion US dollars in 1978 to 155 billion in 2011; unemployment jumped from 3% to 20%; the number of people in extreme poverty from 200,000 to 5,000,000, and the number in poverty from 1 million to 14 million; illiteracy from 2% to 12% and functional illiteracy from 5% to 32% [...] in the last 25 years (1976 to 2001), capital flight totaled 120 billion dollars and 200 billion dollars were paid by successive Argentinean governments to foreign creditors” (4 p 88-93).

d. Master’s thesis of the same name defended on June 18, 2008 (6th cohort of the Master’s Program in Epidemiology, Management and Health Policies, Universidad Nacional de Lanús). Author: Leonardo Federico. Thesis Director: Romeu Gomes, Thesis Co-director: Paola Piacenza.

e. The collection process of the material making up the corpus of this study began in 2003 within the framework of the study of reference. We carried out further analysis and data collection following the stated methodology, and also reviewed information provided to us by the research team of the Universidad Nacional de Lanús.

f. A colloquial Argentine expression generally used to refer to any death or injury caused illegally by a uniformed policeman.

g. This categorization was carried out by identifying within the all the stories making up the robberies-assaults” (RA) category those that made reference to a later confrontation between the criminals and the police (EP). Generally, most of these stories were also as “ordinary” (O) category because they had little repercussion within the media after the incident.

h. The analysis here emphasized was facilitated by the classification of the stories into “ordinary cases” (O) and “cases with social resonance” (R), whether or not the homicides were committed with firearms.

i. Examples: the case of a woman who was raped and strangled, the crime involving the owner of Buenos Aires nightclubs, and the case associated with the “taxi mafia,” to cite those that received the greatest media coverage.

j. Neither of the newspapers made reference to the “total” number of deaths in this type of violent incidents. There were constant references to the policemen’s deaths in confrontations with criminals but none to the criminals who also died in those confrontations, as if their having been involved in an act of crime automatically rendered their lives worthless.

k. It is important to highlight that the confrontation between these “gangs of poor youths” was justified – according to the way these stories were narrated – by their “rivalry,” ignoring any other possible motive.

l. Due to its geographical specifications, this study did not include the analysis of the stories about the incidents on June 26 and 27, 2002, known as “the Pueyrredón Bridge massacre” (“la massacre del Puente Pueyrredón”) in which two social activists, Maximiliano Kosteki and Darío Santillán, were killed by police from the Greater Buenos Aires police force.

m. For example, carrying out a detailed description of the attacks on the private residences of various politicians.

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