

Media violence: a study case

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Abstract: The present work has as objective to state how violence appears in the mass media, for the effects of it, an analysis of referring journalistic notes to the reality of the State of Mexico is made, in the months from June to August, 2005 —period of electoral activity— from two newspapers, one local (Sol de Toluca Newspaper) and another national, in its “Estado” section (Reforma Newspaper). In order to achieve said objective the methodology of discourse analysis was used, specifically in its variant of the semantic micro-structures (summary, titular and heading of the journal report) upon which an analysis of the sort and form of the argumentation is performed; this is to say, the macro-structures understood as that hierarchical set of topics which conform the text’s thematic structure, allowed centering the analysis on the problem of violence, identifying the dominating elements, examining the range of differences and diversity of styles, as well as the diversity of styles, as well as identifying the diversity of the discourses the printed media construct around violence. Describing the discourses, generally and those of violence in particular, enable us to understand how the printed media, as media institution, has an important role in the construction of reality.

Key words: conflict, violence, mass media.

Resumen: El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo plantear cómo se representa la violencia en los medios de comunicación, para ese efecto se realiza un análisis de notas periodísticas referentes a la realidad del Estado de México, en los meses de junio a agosto de 2005 —periodo de actividad electoral—, a partir de dos periódicos, uno netamente local (*El Sol de Toluca*) y otro de corte nacional, en su sección “Estado” (*Reforma*). Para lograr dicho objetivo se ocupó como metodología el análisis del discurso, específicamente en su variante de las macroestructuras semánticas (resumen, titular y encabezamiento de la nota periodística), sobre las cuales se efectúa un análisis del tipo y forma de la argumentación; es decir, las macroestructuras entendidas como ese conjunto jerárquico de temas que conforman la estructura temática del texto, permitió centrar el análisis en el problema de la violencia, identificar los elementos dominantes, examinar la gama de diferencias y diversidad de estilos, así como la diversidad de discursos que la prensa construye en torno a la violencia. Describir los discursos, en general, y los de la violencia, en particular, nos posibilita comprender de qué manera la prensa, en tanto institución mediática, tiene un papel importante en la construcción de la realidad.

Palabras clave: conflicto, violencia, medios de comunicación.

Introduction

The importance of media at this moment lies in two inseparable facts: the integration that they have in daily life and in the fact that they are important producers and distributors of meanings and significations about reality.

So important are media in the daily life, that their study and analysis deserves special attention. This is especially necessary if one considers that their discourses construct social sense and new social frameworks.

As Van Dijk states, “most of our social and political knowledge, as well as our beliefs about the world, emanate from the dozens of informations that we see, read or listen every day. Maybe there is not another discursive practice, aside from the everyday conversation, that is performed with such frequency and by so many people as the monitoring of news on the press and on television” (1997: 29-30). Press is certainly the *par excellence* medium to obtain detailed information about daily events.

Discourses and the ways in which they are related privilege what is supposedly interesting. They determine what can be of public interest with the help of other narrations.

A narrative can be understood as a way of organizing and knowing the world... the narrative coincides with the so called “frameworks” that are the platform where the receiver organizes their experiences within other cognitive structures [...] the efficacy of the narrative and symbolic structures lies in their function as instrument to introduce values and norms that assist as basis to the formation of beliefs and to construct reality. (Mateo and Penalva, 2000: 188)

Therefore, media truth is all what is thought and assumed as real. This refers especially to everything that has the form a great story. In the end, this truth conforms the preferential models to comprehend the world, where undoubtedly, some aspects are boosted according to the way the discourse is made. Then it is not surprising that through the press, social realities are constructed discursively, to the extent that language is constitutive of an institutional reality.

Not only do the media construct discourses, they also construct the discursive games that allow understanding the ways in which reality is narrated. In order for this to happen, it is necessary to comprehend the significant buttresses that determine the conditions of their circulation.

Commercial television is the dominant medium almost all around the world due to its capacity to present messages as credible as though they were a live show, i.e. any event is potentially scenic. This happens to the extent that the concept of news acquires a new meaning, because as Ignacio Ramonet says, to “see” becomes a synonym of being “informed”. An example of this is the fact that the rules of war changed in order to satisfy the need of the info-entertainment industry. Contrary to TV, the press keeps another media language.

Press has become one of the instruments from which the public space is made public. By public space we mean the space which allows public deliberation of the social and political events. It deals with issues such as conflict exposing the controversial topics and their different interpretations by highlighting the profile and the points of view of the different actors, consequently raising the amount and quality of the ways to know about the social debate. Of course, this is not always true because press provides distortions, some topic are hidden or simply restricted from certain fields of expression.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the State of Mexico is located in the central zone of the Mexican Republic and is adjacent to the Federal District, the capital of the country. Both spaces concentrate an important part of the industries and services, as well as an important part of the population. This has complicated the quality of life of their inhabitants because a higher population density represents a more complex environment for the government to provide the basic needs, such as employment and education; this brings with it levels of social insecurity and crime which are on rise.

The Fourth National Survey on Insecurity (*Cuarta Encuesta Nacional sobre Inseguridad ENSI-4*) that was carried out in 2005 by the National Institute on Studies on Insecurity (*ICESI Instituto Nacional de Estudios sobre la Inseguridad*) mentions that one out of three citizens of the Mexico City has

been victim of a crime, i.e. 33.67% of the population. The next zone with a high level of insecurity are the suburbs of the State of Mexico and Federal District with a percentage of 26.5% and the metropolitan area of the Valley of Mexico with 30.02%.¹

The Federal District and the suburbs of the State of Mexico represent 70% of the total of the studied victims in the 16 urban zones where the survey was carried out. This means that the Mexico city was the first place in crime incidence during 2005 and the most frequent crime in the State of Mexico is kidnapping.² The same survey states that the crime incidence for the Federal District is of 2 861 951, whereas for the suburbs is of 1 774 705. Toluca shows a total of 123 744 cases. The total number of cases in this area is of 4 636 656.

Rafael Ruiz declares that the number of murdered women in Toluca from 1990 to 1994 (1 153) exceeds by a third the number of women that died in Ciudad Juarez (1 373). Despite this, more attention is paid to the murder cases which occurred in the north of the country than to the ones in the capital of the State of Mexico, although these situations are similar in age, marital status and social conditions, et cetera.³

Social insecurity, lack of confidence in police forces and the rejection of political parties has lead to lynching cases. 90% of them occur in the south and central regions of the Mexican Republic, whereas in the northern states they do not reach 10%. The states that belong to the central and south zones such as Morelos, Guerrero, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Federal District and the State of Mexico hold more than 80% of the cases.

This work aims to explain how violence is represented in the media taking into consideration the previous reasoning. In order to achieve this, notes that are related to the reality of the State of Mexico will be taken as examples. The period to be analyzed will be from June to August 2005. Two newspapers will be analyzed: *El Sol de Toluca*, which is a newspaper that only covers local news, and *Reforma*, which has a national coverage and contains a specific section for the State of Mexico called “*State*”.

¹<http://www.icesi.org.mx>

² <http://www.icesi.org.mx>

³ Ruiz, 2005 at <<http://www.icesi.org.mx/publicaciones/articulos/2005/Toluca-y-juarez-losfeminicidios.asp>>.

The selection of the newspapers was based on their circulation and relevance for local life. *El Sol de Toluca* has been printed since 1945 and belongs to a national journalistic company called *Editora Mexicana*. It is the newspaper with the highest circulation in the capital of the State of Mexico due to the fact that it covers local information. *Reforma*, on the other hand, was first published in 1993 and has a circulation of 280 thousand copies. It contains an special section called “*State*” that only covers information about the State of Mexico.

A theme search was made in the news items of both newspapers, in order to weigh the most recurrent topics. It was not enough to read the lines but to *read between the lines*.

The first part of the research was to collect the all of the first pages⁴ of *El Sol de Toluca* and the political and economy parts of the “*State*”⁵ section of *Reforma*. The headlines of all the collected items of news were taken⁶. A list of the headlines that referred to the categories of violence and violent behavior was made. This allowed us to select the *corpus*: we would only consider headlines without side-notes and subtitles.

In discourse analysis, a *corpus* are the semantic macrostructures, topics and macropositions which help to perform an analysis of kinds and forms of argumentation.

Macrostructures allowed us to analyze the problem of violence. They allowed us to identify dominant elements and to examine the differences in styles; as well as the diversity of the discourses that integrate the problem of violence.

⁴ One can see the importance given to a public, local, national or international theme in the first page. In the case of *El Sol de Toluca*, the first page covers notes that are important locally.

⁵ In the case of this newspaper with national coverage, the first page has national or international information, and its “*State*” section important news items are located in its politics and economy sections.

⁶ The kind and size of the headlines determine the importance of the note

Violence and its media representation.

Martin Serrano (1989) asserts that it is important to distinguish between the events and the way one knows about it. Media play a fundamental role by the account of the events that they provide to the receiver. These media are part of the social communication that has as a function to report public events. The representations they make of the world are a result of

subjective conflicts between desires and restrictions [...] mass communication, along with other less influential sources of information, can promote those conflicts. It can also do its best to promote a specific state of mind or towards a specific action that is prompted by the Sender (Martín Serrano, 1989: 44).

A journalistic text is one of the accountings of reality that circulate in society and one which helps to construct a new model to redefine the world. In this text, the discourses that are formulated by the power and ideology are displayed. A discourse may be attached to a certain ideology by identifying the project of nation that it is in favor of. It is also possible to identify the influence of the political actors who will define the future of a social system. Ideology is necessary because changes occur at the same time on both, discourse and in the way transformations of the social structures are stated and resolved. They determine the direction that a nation, a political party or a single actor have to follow.

Thompson states that “the study of ideology is the study of the ways in which the significative establishes and supports the relations of domination. In specific socio-historic circumstances, ideological phenomena are symbolic phenomena to the extent that they help to establish and support those relations of domination. The importance and support to domination of an ideology phenomenon depends on specific socio-historic circumstances. (Thompson quoted in Montesinos, 2006: 82).

The study of discourse has become more important, especially if one considers that discourse in general, and the political one in particular, is more frequently attained by means of the media. Therefore, its comprehension requires understanding the communicational logic.

The study of discourse implies understanding the symbolic forms that humans use to create and recreate their relation with the others (Thompson, 1998). This study of discourse also implies to research social representations that allow us to approach the world. So important is discourse to social life, that studying it implies to penetrate in social and political problems.

Media social representations in general and the press ones in particular are determined by two factors: the news selection and the framework in which they are set. This is important because in order to consider them part of the media agenda, they have to be significant within the daily events. Representations allude to “public interest” situations and by doing this, they offer an specific characterization of the events and communicative acts that provide sense to the social reality.

Social representations are social because of two reasons: they are produced and shared by a group, i.e. they imply shared meanings and group consensus that are part of the daily processes of communication and interaction. They constitute an intricate social configuration of knowledge that is shared by individuals. They provide account of the social reality that allow us to approach to collective phenomena and to change from the interpersonal to the social level. This assumption is based on considering that the information that an individual receives, their experiences and shared thought models allow the description, symbolization and characterization of the objects by ascribing them a sense (Jodelet, 1985).

Social representations play an important role because they define the world and the others, their social functions revolve around constructions and interpretations of reality. Despite this, they use media to influence daily life and to be important in the orientation of the social sense.

The configuration of space and temporality has been modified throughout media history. This is true especially after the invention of press. In the same regard, the dichotomy between what is and is not visible, with it the public and private spaces, is so clear that nowadays one can observe the concern of politicians to manage their visibility through media. This is proved by the fact that they are conscious and arranged (Thompson, 1998).

Not only is visibility administration part of political campaigns, it is also part of the daily governing life, which requires a continuous decision-making process. This process implies deciding what and who to announce, and how to do it. Therefore, the visibility that media create can become a new and different source of fragileness (Thompson, 1998: 188).

If one considers that media configure our reality, then one can say that peace is not part of the media. War, violent behavior and violence in general become a subject of more interest. Peace, from this point of view, is not subject of being translated into a news item because it depicts boredom. On the contrary, as Rivière asserts (2003), war and violence are photogenic and highly attractive.

Galtung (quoted by Zepeda, 2002) states 12 points on which journalism errs when dealing with violence:

- 1) The lack of an adequate framework for violence
- 2) Dualism: to reduce the number of conflict parts to two, when there are usually more parts involved.
- 3) Manichaeism: to portray one part as good and to demonize the other as evil.
- 4) Armageddon: to display violence as inevitable by omitting possible alternatives to avoid it.
- 5) To focus on particular violent acts by refusing to refer to its structural causes such as poverty, government's lack of interest and military or police repression.
- 6) Confusion: to focus on the conflict scenery instead of the forces and factors that have influenced it.
- 7) To exclude and to omit the mourners: to fail to explain why revenge acts and spirals of violence occur.
- 8) To avoid investigating the causes of the spiral of violence and the impact of its broadcasting or printing.
- 9) To avoid exploring the goals of the external interventionists, especially the great powers.
- 10) To avoid exploring peace proposals and not to provide images of conflicts resolved by peaceful means.
- 11) To confuse ceasefires with true peace.

12) To omit reconciliation: conflicts tend to rekindle if no attention is paid to heal broken societies.

The fact that these issues are disregarded at the moment of writing a journalistic discourse leads knowledge and social sense towards a consideration which regards violence as the only response to conflict.

For Galtung (1995) violence “exists when human beings are so influenced that their affective, somatic and mental relations are beneath their potential fulfillment”. Galtung (1995) also considers that there are three kinds of violence: physical, structural and cultural. The first one takes place in the body and it is easy to understand why an actor commits violence. Structural or indirect violence can be understood as violence in the system, therefore no actor exists; in this case, looking for a subject is senseless. This violence is part of the structure and exists when there is an unequal balance of power in regard to the distribution of resources. This inequality influences the unequal allotment of them. In this case we refer to feeding, housing, education, medical assistance, etcetera. The importance of conceptualizing structural violence is to make it clear that violence is exercised, even if there is not a clear relation between subject-action-object, which is frequently used as synonym of social injustice.

Cultural violence is the less visible of all. This is so due to the fact that they are all the elements of culture that allow us to legitimate any kind of violence, cultural violence justifies a social system with well incorporated norms.

In order to perform an analysis of violence it is worth distinguishing, as Tortosa states, the cases in which it is displayed as a previous problem (frustration, oppression, marginalization, fragmentation, alienation) and the cases in which it is a means to achieve a goal (territory, power, goods, satisfaction, revenge) (2001: 39). So that violence is far from being a violent behavior but a response to conflict.

Imbert (2004) states that violence in media has much visibility. That visibility highlights the importance of analyzing how the actors of conflicts are socially represented, because the way they are represented will result in interpretative models that are used by the speakers. The interpretative models in this case are understood as argumentative paradigms. When these models are used for representing a discursive reality, they assume (Vasilachis, 1998: 301):

- a) A model of society and social organization
- b) A single or several ways of differentiation or hierarchical organization among its members
- c) A kind of predominant social relations, therefore,
- d) A higher or lower possibility of social, individual or collective actors to contribute to the construction of society, its values, norms, meanings and orientations. As well as proposing and obtaining a transformation in the distribution of goods, either material or material or spiritual.

Analysis

The questions that support the analysis of the two newspapers are, how violence is displayed in media and how a vision of the actors of conflict is mainly focused on violent processes and not at peace.

In order to perform this analysis it was necessary to study the way the two newspapers treat conflict and the significance they attach to it. It was also necessary to analyze the thematic changes that are made of it, that make it a subject of media attention. Also, we had to determine the reference and characterization of the actors of the conflict that is presented.

June represents, in this case, the month before state elections in the State of Mexico and a great amount of notes that allude to the election process.

Ideology is what allows politicians to be delivered towards society. They use messages that may be considered nation projects and differ from the other candidate's. Thus, in order to compete for the power, a discourse that helps as medium contact with the society is necessary.

In this context, the media are a forum in which individuals act and react to political activities. In the case of Mexico, since the 2000 elections, the struggle and conquest of political power is disputed in media. The president elected in 2000, Vicente Fox, not only changed the rules that had been imposed during seventy years by the ruling party, Institutional Revolutionary party (PRI), he also allowed, having as a support his policy of "freedom of expression", the use political campaigns that discredit another candidate, dirty wars, campaigns that are based on fear, etcetera (Baena, 2005).

The expenditure made on press propaganda by each of the candidates to the government of the state in that year and from May 1 to May 15 is as follows: Enrique Peña Nieto from a collation between PRI and the Green Party of Mexico (PVEM): 3 504 623 MXN; Ruben Mendoza from a collation made by the National Action Party (PAN) and Convergencia Party: 205 392 MXN; and Yeidckol Polevnsky from Democratic Revolution Party (PRD): 0 MXN(Soto, 2005).

It is important to mention that in the case of *El Sol de Toluca* only the first page was taken. In the case of *Reforma* the whole “State” section, though only notes that are related to any kind of conflict or violent behavior are considered.

In order to perform the analysis, macrostructures were used. According to Van Dijk (1996, 1997), propositions are assertions that guide interpretations. The more complex they are, the better they guide the interpretation the reality, therefore, topics can be understood as semantic macrostructures. This, considering that they are an organized set of propositions, thus, macropropositions are propositions that are part of macrostructures.

Since in journalistic discourses texts are usually long, it is necessary to define, by using macrorules, what the hierarchical organization of a macrostructure is. Thus, macrorules have the function of reducing information, by calling it in a simple way.

Macrorules are rules of semantic projection or projections that relate propositions to a lower level with macropropositions to a higher level. This means that issues or topics derive from meanings in a text through this condensation of macrorules. Thiese rules define the final result, the nucleus, the most important information, and therefore the topic or issue for each sequence of propositions of a text (Van Dijk, 1996: 56).

It is also important to mention that aside from macrostructures, it is necessary to use the superstructure considering that “topics are usually organized on an abstract diagram that consists of conventional categories that specify the general function of the topics in a text. That diagram is known as superstructure (Van Dijk, 1997: 35).Summaries, and headings

are part of these categories, they express the main topics of a text, i.e. the function as an initial summary and express a semantic macrostructure. It is important to clarify that in headings only a special sequence of a specific event is expressed among the variety of changeable contents. The formulation of a content in a sentence expresses the category of a headline in a real headline (Van Dijk, 1996).

Based on these assumptions, the results were the following:

Reforma in its “State” section has notes that allude to events of the election process, at the same time, it has notes that are referred to social insecurity. These notes highlight the concern on the existence of mobs in the suburbs of the Federal District. They continuously commit violent deeds such as burglary, robberies and drug consumption.

Throughout the theme research, one observes that mobs are part of headlines. The interesting fact, as Liebel mentions, is that the reference to criminal and violent groups, for the terms mob or gang suggest

that they are dealing with groups of young people whose issues and ways of life are based on violence, theft and drugs. The public image and vision that they portray are well pervaded in media, which almost unanimously, classify these groups as the worst kind of delinquency and social decadence. Their articles stigmatize young people as hell spawns that have to be handled with firm hand (2004: 86)

The problem here is that this reference is not made *to all young people*, but only the ones who are part of gangs and that live in marginalized zones. The equation “being young, poor and part of a gang” is translated as synonym of performer of vandalism and social insecurity. The borders become unclear to the extent which the representation describes the actor as cause of conflicts of class, with the following economic and social consequences. The Manichaeian posture and the description of the gang members as the main actors of criminal events increases the social distancing that is being represented. Gangs seem to invade, without chance to stop them, the residential zones and the “good consciences”.

Thus, on page 8 of *Reforma* of June 10, 2005 one reads “Gangs take over schools. Atizapan police acknowledges that there are 32 schools that represent “warning signs” by their levels of violence. They impose fear. Authorities are afraid of them. Death threat makes life possible aside from law and denies any possible coexistence. The exposed representation is that violence is the way of life of the gang. It is assumed that the gang lives on violent acts. Violence, then, is not a social process with many causes and factors, it is a behavior and a way of life that young people from marginalized suburbs have. Also, in the theme research we observe the attitude of the state authorities and sometimes also the attitude of civil organizations. Their attitude is remarkable. The representation is translated into social surveillance as adequate scenery to “punish” that violent and criminal young people. *A bit of firm hand* that Liebel states, i.e. surveillance that acknowledges the “other” as a subject that enters in the social order: the transgressor of the social-urban space. Residential zones thus, require private vigilance, so that they are protected from disorder and human *diversity*:

- *Criminal gang discovered. Neighbors of Lomas de Atizapan describe their modus operandi (June 26: 26)*

- *Streets must be closed due to spate of robberies. Who has control over 5 access routes to Las Alamedas subdivision. Taxi drivers dispute a taxi stand. 400 police officers are mobilized to Las Alamedas to avoid clash (June 22: 12)*

- *Fear due social insecurity revealed. Children in Naucalpan use a contest to express their fear. (June 24: 30)*

- *Attack against drug traffickers delays end of courses. Atizapan’s authorities prepare surveillance operation with special group in high-risk schools (June 24: 10)*

The only way to cope with violent acts is to provide arms that are of higher caliber than the ones used by “criminals”. The increase in the number of patrols that perform surveillance in the zone and the use of arms by all police forces politicize the distribution of services having as aim to provide a better position to a specific political image, instead of solving the social conflict considering its causes and actors.

Conflict is sold as “easy”. It is assumed that the end to violence is achieved by the use of violence. And contrary to this, it increases the “spiral of violence”. In news reports that are referred to this kind of social insecurity

one can observe what Vizer states: “Violence and the complex transformations have broken the spatial and temporal senses in social ties. Collective ties have been broken, the warp of the ontological culture of social life” (2003: 29).

Throughout the theme research, one notices that the number of criminal groups is increasing and their activities cover a wider area, as well as having more access to different spaces. In the same regard, attention is paid to the intensity of the direct violence events. They leave aside structural, cultural and symbolic issues that cause them. The use of direct violence, thus, appears as a cause that justifies the means to defend what one owns. Social representation that is made of conflicts states them as a social security issue, which is related to “the other” who invades the living space.

During July and August, the agenda continues with the same tendency. Social insecurity is assumed as a problem than can be solved by controlling and using police forces which “have control over transgressors”. This transgressor can be found in a specific region, for the theme research that work as macrostructures consider the zone where the criminal acts take place. In this case it usually refers to the suburbs of Mexico City:

- *Social insecurity on the rise. Chiluca registers 4 robberies per day. Surveillance is increased in Zona Esmeralda (July 3: 4)*
- *Control over security booth is requested. 70 residents of Bosques del Lago demand to have control over the access to their subdivision (July 3: 6).*
- *Surveillance is increased in municipality limits. Naucalpan and Atizápan carry out surveillance operation in the “Border” of Zona Esmeralda (July 5: 5)*
- *Streets with highest criminal levels are made public. The streets with higher criminal levels in Valle Dorado are Maracaibo, Paris and Buenos Aires (August 24: 6).*

The theme research provides constant account of direct violence on the side of gangs. The new actors of the social and political scenery are constructed. At least in June, the candidates to the government of the state made capital out of the problem of public security. They use it and turn it into one of their priorities. Conflict resolution discourse is also in some headlines related to clashes. Despite the fact that the pacific way to solve the conflict is clear, conflict is hidden and clear reference is made to chaos and senselessness (Vizer, 2003: 130). For example:

After peaceful demonstrations, argument for “el Cerrito” becomes more intense. Naucalpan neighbors are against the construction of a commercial zone in Lomas Verdes grounds. Companies agree to create recreational and service areas as part of the project (August 10: 12)

Considering headlines as the previous, one confirms that what is hidden is the conflict and what is shown is its violent expression. This expression, far from being a matter of values, is an issue related to the construction of social senses (Vizer, 2003).

The agenda of *El Sol de Toluca* is mainly covered by the election issues and events that intertwine in three different directions: firstly, the role of the Electoral Institute of the State of Mexico in the election process, the political campaigns of the candidates to the government, especially that of Enrique Peña Nieto and the interest of the, by then governor of the state, Arturo Montiel Rojas to obtain the candidature to the national government., linked to the processes of building up internal unity of PRI at national level.

The second theme in the agenda of this newspaper is the concern over public security and criminal justice. Considering the way they are described, one suspects that issues of structural violence are part of these problems. Despite this, they are only mentioned and no further research is made. They are depicted as legal truths and not as historic ones. We must bear in mind that in order to visualize conflict one must state the causes to its actors, a historical and contextual map of its causes and sceneries where it happens. The research shows a tendency to legitimate the institutions that secure justice. It seems as if information about conflicts and structural violence – inequity, injustice and exclusion - was given, but the way the story is told leaves aside the context where the events take place. In this case, a Manichaeism is shown in regard to the causes and actors of the conflict, they look for a responsible actor. For example:

- Chapito⁷ leaves La Palma. A federal judge authorizes him to leave. No money laundry was found (June 3)

⁷ He is the son of a Mexican drug lord. [T. N.]

- *Chapito in La Palma. AFI carries out surveillance operation outside the prison (June 4)*
- *Raul has no money to pay the bail. He has been released, but is still in prison. Family contribution to collect \$32 million (June 11)*
- *I'm a free man and bear no grudges. After midnight, Raul Salinas left "Santiaguito" prison. His case was not negotiated politically, he said (June 14).*
- *Miguel Mercado had prepared acts to destabilize. Atizapán police reveal 70 drug selling points near schools. Children under 3 years become addicted. The problem increases (July 27)*
- *War among attorney generals is harsh. They insist: The Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR) tried to legitimate documents of the case of "Enrique Salinas" (August 6).*

The previous headlines show that actors of conflicts have no intention of solving conflicts. It is worth mentioning that there are images or information about possible peaceful results and scenarios of resolution to avoid strengthen fatalism and representations that encourage more violence. As Baudrillard asserts: "the function of the symbol in the world is to disappear reality and to mask this disappearance simultaneously" (quoted in Gubern, 1996: 178)

In contrast to *Reforma*, in *El Sol de Toluca* there is a difference in the way actors and social insecurity processes are mentioned. Whereas in *Reforma* marginalized young people are actors of violence and therefore cause of social conflict, in *El Sol de Toluca* clues are given to suspect that a structural conflict is being dealt with. As Tortosa (2003) correctly asserts, when the enemies are created in conflict, they are not the same in a specific conflict as in one of structural nature.

Institutions in charge of securing justice appear as actors and certainly as enemies as well, but note that special emphasis is made on federal entities and institutions, in contrast to the state ones. The former collaborate in the social framework of a legal *corpus* which is not enough to secure justice. This emphasis on institutions that do not belong to the most popular party of the state, PRI, change the nature of conflicts from a structural to a political one.

In the light of the representations that are created, especially if one tries to find the causes and actors that promote insecurity, it is important to consider what Tortosa states “As in everything that is related to politics, and these issues are political, it is advisable to distinguish, as far as possible, between the real reasons that encourage actors and the rethoric that comes with their behavior” (2003: 183).

The previous headlines suggest, then, that federal institutions negotiate conflicts in a violent manner, i.e. headlines cast doubt on their capability and process of justice securing by highlighting their corruption practices and vulnerability. This uncertainty is also valid in the case of the party that lead national politics, PAN. We must bear in mind that the State of Mexico is governed by a PRI member. These representations are strengthen with some other pieces of news that allude to the role of the President and his cabinet:

- *Fox’s celebration appears to be political support to a candidate. His statement “In democracy anything is valid” is suspicious, Peña Nieto (June 6).*
- *PAN supports the control over “Periferico”. This is is a war for a “real goldmine”. They’ll bring a dispute over constitutional understanding” (June 21).*
- *Parturient will saturate public hospitals. IMSS (Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social) treat an average of 800 labors per month. PRD is in favor of methods to avoid pregnancy. Carlos Abascal⁸ should remain aside from the issue. A woman is used in experimentation: Federal Government (July 25).*
- *To attack drug traffic by other means. PGR is not useful to fight against the evil, Santiago Creel⁹ proposes a specialized institution (July 31).*
- *The process of providing account from the Federal Government has not been consolidated. Fox is not strong enough with the “big fish” (August 4).*

The problems that these representations can cause have to do with the fact that in conflicts, especially the structural ones, there are several internal and external causes that make it difficult to solve them in the short term. Also, actors and attitudes are excluded, so that it seems as though they were only individual acts, leaving aside structural causes such as: poverty, government lack of interest, corruption, et cetera.

⁸ Carlos Abascal was Secretary of Government under Fox. [T. N.]

⁹ Carlos Abascal substituted Santiago Creel as Secretary of Government [T. N.]

It is also true that election campaigns are a communicative strategy that aims to attract the voter. They become political exercises that intelligently lead to obtain a vote, and they become journalistic notes in these cases.

The visibility of the media agenda can or cannot be seen. This depends on the way conflict discourse, its actors, causes and resolutions are constructed. In this case it is related to social insecurity and the way to confront it or tackling it.

The fact is that the danger that awaits to this fear depends on the visibility made of the conflict and one runs the risk of leaving it hidden when politicizing it.

Conclusion

Press as information medium acts as creator of social representations that name, classify and organizes the social practice. Through discourses with their narrative ways, they establish the senses about what is real, thanks to its high content of symbolic forms. Being able to recognize social representations will allow us to approach to knowledge, significances, as well as to ways of conceiving and interpreting reality. Based on the two newspapers, we have found some features that allow us to read the conflicts and the violence beneath two discourses:

Discursive axis	<i>Reforma</i>	<i>El Sol de Toluca</i>
Conflicts	Direct violence with violence that appears to be class conflict	Normative conflict that is highly institutionalized
Types of violence	Violent behavior	Single-faced structural violence and considering it as consequence of politicization of institutions
Justification of violence	Protection and control	A way of pressuring to achieve consolidation of normative institutions (ascribable to certain institutions)
Representation of social insecurity	"Otherness" as cause of violent acts	Political institutionalism as a cause of violence

Based on these two discourses, it is clear that conflicts are resolved by considering that their cause is social distancing. In the first case, its cause is the interaction and intersection of the social spaces by the criminal groups. In the second, conflicts and social problems are assumed as if they belonged to someone else and distant as long as they don't have an effect on daily life. Its resolution lies in the change of the normative proposal that comes from the federal administration. Both examples highlight the little amount of participation that society has to transform them. The previous supposition allows to suggest that there is more visibility of violence and/or violent behavior when the consequences of conflicts are exhibited as inevitable in the daily life of the social subject. If discourse is part of the social and cultural reality by the importance of its symbolic forms, then it is clear why conflict and its causes are of no importance. What is not clear is why there exist a violent response to it.

Interpretations that are made about violence tend to associate it to social insecurity. This assumption is related then to a level of vulnerability instead of considering it a wide range of possibilities to warranty meeting the basic needs. In the first example the social subject is vulnerable to "the other", and in the second it is vulnerable to institutions that are "out of control" and that at the same time have no "control" over the social dynamics.

Through discourse the political position is assumed. The production of underlying symbolic forms in newspapers respond to certain social, political or economic interests in order to legitimate and promote current power relations.

How possible is it to resolve conflicts in which citizenship participation is dismissed by the poor understanding of its social content due to the structural violence and whose descriptions lack real actors, causes and consequences?

Using macro-structures as a methodological tool to perform discourse analysis one can give an account of how each newspaper represents a discursive axis. By using it, it is also possible to show how none of them states clearly the structural causes of social problems.

Discourses produce meanings and conform representations that maintain relations of power. So strong are these relations, that they take for granted that discourses which are different to the hegemonic one can not be assumed.

Narration helps to provide sense to the symbolic forms that construct a chain of thoughts. These symbolic forms aim to defend or justify a set of relations or social institutions. Therefore, conflict disappears and the violent acts that fall within daily life are made evident.

The justification of violence in the analyzed newspapers is presented as a mechanism to legitimate social distancing. In one case it is referred to the subject and in the other to the institution. Also, one can observe a complete displacement of violence. A high grade of dualism and Manichaenism appears. Most of the attention is focused on violent acts and the structural causes that enclose them are taken for granted.

Along this article, one can draw three main conclusions. The first one regards the ways conflict is understood and can be hidden through the narration. Instead of aiming at depicting the social framework that would explain conflict, the narration merely describes violent behavior and political discourse.

The second conclusion has to do with the ways in which violence is constructed on two ways: dualist and Manichaeian. This causes, at least in this case, fear of social insecurity.

The third conclusion deals with the function of the mass media and the interactions that exist with them. Despite the fact that social representations are preferential models to comprehend the world, an audience that distinguishes the different nuances of the discourse, the ways it deals with manifestations of violence and the possibilities of admitting or denying it, would make clear that the relations does not point in a single direction. The description that Galtung makes of journalism becomes suitable. Therefore, understanding how violence is read and signified, will allow us to elaborate a map on how social sense is constructed.

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