

## Work routines of crime reporters on Argentinian television (2011-2015)

*Rutinas de trabajo de los periodistas de  
noticias policiales de la televisión en  
Argentina (2011-2015)*

BRENDA FOCÁS<sup>1</sup>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2019i0.6822>

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1749-6757>

Based on ten interviews with TV crime reporters, I focus in this article on journalistic routines, construction of the media agenda, and the relationship with sources. It is observed that, in the period 2011-2015, during the second term of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, the feeling of insecurity increases as much as the perception of risk. At the same time, insecurity has been placed as a stable public concern, which affects journalists' morale and can progressively modify the way in which we present the information, and therefore, construct the news.

Keywords: Journalists, crime programmes, newsmaking, insecurity, television.

*En este artículo, a partir de diez entrevistas a periodistas especializados en noticias policiales que trabajan en canales televisivos, se analizan las rutinas periodísticas, la construcción de la agenda mediática, y la relación con las fuentes. Se observa que en el periodo 2011-2015, durante el segundo mandato de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, el sentimiento de inseguridad aumentó tanto como la percepción del riesgo. Este posicionamiento de la inseguridad como problema público afecta la moral de los periodistas, y lleva a modificar las formas de presentar la información y, por lo tanto, de construir las noticias.*

*Palabras clave: Periodistas, noticias policiales, newsmaking, inseguridad, televisión.*

### How to cite:

Focás, B. (2018). Work routines of crime reporters on Argentinian television (2011-2015). *Comunicación y Sociedad*, e6822. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32870/cys.v2019i0.6822>

<sup>1</sup> Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Argentina.

E-mail: [bfocas@gmail.com](mailto:bfocas@gmail.com)

Submitted: 15/05/17. Accepted: 10/01/18. Published: 06/02/19.

## INTRODUCTION<sup>2</sup>

Both the formats that provide information (news programs, web portals and radio programs) and those that focus on entertainment (magazine shows or reality shows) help to change or alter the way that public problems are constructed. From studies in communication and the sociology of public problems, we understand that the media over-representation of a topic can make the public aware of the existence of a problem, encourage them to think about certain topics and their solutions, and even lead to public protests (Gusfield, 2014). In other words, some high-profile cases can start off public conformation or motivation, and have the capacity for criticism, demand, denunciation and mobilisation (Schillagi, 2011).

In the case of insecurity, this is a familiar topic for the media, which is omnipresent in the field of television, both in time and space (Lorenc Valcarce, 2005; Martini, 2009). In fact, for many governments, international organisations and part of society, the media have become “guilty of insecurity”: they are sensationalist, they exaggerate, and they induce fear. Undoubtedly, the gruesome images and sensationalist representations both contribute to the fact that the crime news is branded as “exaggerated”, “sensationalist” or simply “macabre”.

These first comments on the role of the media in the construction of insecurity as a regular concern for citizens led to the lines of research for this article. Some of the questions that shape this work are: what are the main characteristics of the processes that lead to the production of news about insecurity? How are criteria such as newsworthiness articulated when it comes to insecurity in the news? Ten interviews were conducted with crime reporters who worked for different channels on terrestrial and cable TV in order to summarise and categorise some of the key discussion elements in the construction of crime stories.

---

<sup>2</sup> I appreciate all the suggestions, comments and observations of the anonymous journalists who contributed to this text.

## CONTEXT

This research has become part of public debates due to the credibility of the media and the problem of insecurity, both hot topics, so that they are now public opinion. The positioning of insecurity as a social and public problem has spread in recent years, especially in Latin America where the objective crime data, when compared with subjective data (feelings of insecurity), shows disparities, paradoxes and inconsistencies when trying to make a linear analysis. The phenomenon takes place in a particular way, in which at least two dimensions intersect: a general effect of the time we live in, linked to the new “social question”, and the changes related to the crime itself. In Argentina, according to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, the number of criminal acts doubled in the period 1991-2002 and began to fall gradually after the crisis in 2001, the peak of crime in the country. In the selected period, 2011-2015, during the second term of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, although there is a decrease in the crime rate and an increase in the perception of police surveillance in the public space, both the perception of risk and the feeling of insecurity are increasing. According to data from the Social Debt Observatory of the Catholic University of Argentina (Observatorio de la Deuda Social, 2017), the feeling of insecurity increased from 74.4% in 2010 to 76.7% in 2015, while the perception of risk went from 62.2% to 72.3%. On the same lines, 79.2% of the population feels insecure in their neighbourhood, at home, on the street or when travelling by public transport (Observatorio de la Deuda Social, 2017).

On the other hand, the feeling of insecurity has increased constantly in the face of real crime rates, with exponential growth since 2002.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> This article is purely focused on one type of crime: those that contribute to the idea of “insecurity” in the public opinion. These are crimes that are perceived as threats to property and to people who are completely random; in other words, with the perception that it could have happened to anyone (Kessler, 2014). As such, white collar, environmental crimes and those linked to gender violence, among others, are excluded from the study.

This panorama shows that there is no causal or direct relationship between these two dimensions and gives rise to explanations related to a certain sociocultural configuration of crime. In that sense, recent studies suggest that the understanding of insecurity should include explanations about the role of the media as “guilty parties” or “enablers” of the phenomenon (Kessler, 2009; Martini, 2012; Sozzo, 2011; Vilker, 2011).

It is true that in the last twenty years, there has been an increase (in both quantity and space) in the media representation of crime, both in graphic and audio-visual media. Quantitative growth was accompanied by a qualitative transition; traditional police news has become “insecurity news” and has acquired new characteristics: generalisation (we are always at risk everywhere and everywhere); fragmentation (an episodic account of each event, without context or general causes); and an increasing focus on the victims. Meanwhile, the debate on criminality is given a strong emotional focus, while the young, poor, male criminal is represented as an object of fear and the appeal to “crime waves or tendencies”. This change in the system that represents crime feeds back into intense social sensitivity to the issue (Kessler & Focás, 2014). Several studies coincide in pointing out this transition and expose some of the predominant characteristics of crime news which became news of insecurity, such as the discourse of a “new delinquency”, more violent images and new descriptive terms (Martini, 2009; Rodríguez Alzueta, 2014).

The reconversion of the dominant local media in order to give greater space to the problem of “insecurity” responded to changes in structural conditions (growth of crime) but also to an editorial formula that guaranteed a greater flow of readers and loyalty of the readership/audience (Focás, 2016). In this context, the work of TV crime reporters has varied substantially in recent years, due to a situation that positioned insecurity and violence as issues of daily concern, and therefore, stable topics on the media agenda.

#### DEMARICATION OF OBJECT OF STUDY

The construction of the problem was carried out from a theoretical-methodological perspective which led to the dialogue of different

conceptual components, which in turn allowed for the creation of operational definitions to work in the field. The interest is based on two areas of study: the media construction of the news of insecurity and the placing of insecurity as a public problem. This configuration of a public problem is due to a number of processes which involve the formulation of lawsuits and plaintiffs in a situation that is considered negative and that deserves to be solved; the elaboration of apparently-true causal explanations about the problem; and widespread concern in the population which remains stable over time (Pereyra, 2013). In this sense, there is no doubt about insecurity being a problem of this nature.

To investigate these concerns, I resorted to different theories which address the multidimensionality of my topic. On the one hand, I propose to make clear that some of the discursive strategies used in the production of insecurity news are problematic in order to understand these representations and elucidate the circulation of meanings that the media builds about insecurity (Calzado, 2015; Martini, 2009). Media representations of crime are part of social perceptions of insecurity inasmuch as the ways in which the news is constructed, forms an essential symbolic order for the creation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In this article, the notion of representation concerns the effects of thinking about the ways in which a truth becomes credible for a given society (De Certeau, 1999) and of unravelling the mechanisms by which these representations enter and circulate through the social imaginary. These representations are not “inventions” of the media, they do not come from nothing, but they work by inserting themselves in pre-existing structures which have historical meaning, and for that reason, they are able to combine transcendental meanings for society (Arancibia & Cebrelli, 2008; Rodríguez Alzueta, 2014).

The second theoretical factor are the newsmaking studies or news production processes as they provide tools to understand the work methods of crime reporters and elucidate perceptions which they share with the public and work around the circulation of meanings (Aruguete, 2015; Martini, 2009; Martini & Luchessi, 2004; Tuchman, 1975). There is a vast range of literature about newsmaking; however, for analytical purposes, in this article we use the British studies known as media sociology as a theoretical framework according to

the author's preference, such as newsmaking studies, the sociology of journalism, the sociology of news production, and even the sociology of news generation. This theory is based on the idea that news is a social construct; that is to say, that the content of the news is the product resulting from a social process. The reality presented in the news is not made up of facts and events that exist independently of the way in which journalists conceive and treat them when they produce the news (Hernández Ramírez, 1997, p. 224).

## METHODOLOGY

This article is derived from my doctoral thesis,<sup>4</sup> in which we worked on perceptions of insecurity that were configured in relation to crime news, in two neighbourhoods of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The work investigated the construction of news on insecurity from two perspectives, based on a qualitative methodology. Firstly the visualisation of content of this type of news in the highest rated TV news shows.<sup>5</sup> In second place, ten interviews were carried out with TV crime reporters between October and December 2014, while they were working as specialist journalists from different terrestrial and cable

---

<sup>4</sup> See Focás (2016), on which this article is based was part of my doctoral thesis and was financed by the National Council of Scientific and Technological Research (CONICET) thanks to a scholarship obtained during the period 2011-2015.

<sup>5</sup> This was carried out over a period of three months in 2012 and in 2014 (February, March and April) and assessed the coverage of criminal acts in the main news programs that are broadcast during peak times; that is, between 20:00 and 23:00 hours, and that have higher ratings: "Telenoche" and "Telefe Noticias". We also added some programmes from Visión Siete and the two news channels that have the highest cable ratings: TN and C5N. This survey was conducted as a mapping, and for this we had access to the news recordings, followed at least three days a week. The intention was not to carry out a content analysis of the news, but to see crime news and its most frequent formats among those that were issued during that period.

channels. As such, this article analyses different dimensions of the topic. The interviews with journalists were carried out as important actors in the construction of crime news, and therefore in the conformation of public perceptions on the question of insecurity.

The data collection technique applied was the in-depth interview (personal, semi-structured), which Marradi, Archenti and Piovani (2007), define as:

A special form of conversation between two people, directed and recorded by the researcher, with the purpose of favouring the production of a continuous conversational discourse which has a certain line of argument on the part of the interviewee, about a topic of interest defined within the framework of the investigation (p. 216).

The interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours, and focused on a semi-structured questionnaire on different topics, such as their work routines, their specialisation in the crime genre, changes in their work in the last decade, and the relationship between the dissemination of this news and the growing concern for insecurity, among other issues. The scope of the interviews is limited in order to establish general statements that are representative of the entire population. However, in-depth interviews are almost always used in the framework of so-called non-standard research: that is, ones that “do not have as a main objective the statistical generalisation of their results, but rather access the perspective of the actors, to understand how they interpret their experiences on their own terms” (Marradi et al, 2007, pp. 220-221).

## ANALYSIS: THE WORK PROCESSES OF TV CRIME REPORTERS

Journalistic work is developed in real time and the activities are organized according to a daily agenda, the times of which are difficult to foresee. In any editorial team, work routines must have the necessary flexibility to deal with unpredictable events that must be covered during the day. Martini (2002) explains that when talking about production routines, not only the organisational forms of daily work are included,

but also a way of thinking about reality, a world view: this naturalisation of a discourse about the world is based on an agreement or in a consensus (real or apparent) about reality, about imaginaries on society, and about one's own work and values "which defines the selection and classification of information and the ways in which agendas and news items are interpreted and constructed" (p. 79). That is to say, creating a news item requires the existence of dynamic processes, amongst which are included information-gathering routines which imply spaces for negotiation and conflict around journalistic evaluations.<sup>6</sup>

The crime section has become the most important in Argentinian news, as it has high ratings. Some of the journalists interviewed for this investigation, high-profile crime reporters for the channels they work for, tell their story: "I started in Telam<sup>7</sup> and there they let me choose what I wanted to do". I then asked my interviewer what he considered to be the strongest section to write stories, and he told me: "Crime without a doubt. You will have a lot of activity on the street, speaking to sources ...", and well, that's how I started and they weren't wrong (Journalist, *C5N*).

I think crime news takes more work than other sections. Articles, true journalistic articles, are learned in the crime section. Legal terms, procedural times ... you have to go deep into some basic procedures. To do it seriously, one has to be prepared (Journalist, *América Noticias*).

---

<sup>6</sup> For this analysis, my interest lies in understanding the methods and frameworks in which TV crime reporters' work processes affect the constructions of an insecurity news story. In this sense, I consider journalists as relevant to the debate on the problem of insecurity that maintain certain values and interests beyond the companies for whom they work. On the other hand, it is necessary to clarify that in this investigation, the analysis of the production of crime news is done using interviews by specialist journalists and literature on the topic. A complete analysis of this requires participant observation in the newsrooms and television channels, interviews with producers, and other methodologies.

<sup>7</sup> Telam is the state news agency in Argentina.



These testimonies show the preparation of police journalists, their knowledge of the fields of justice and criminality. When asked about their daily routines, many journalists recognise that most of their day is waiting for work, mainly in the present, while in the editorial offices, the focus is on crime and the demand is constant:

I start work at 6:00 in the morning and finish at 3:00 in the afternoon, but professionally, regardless of whether I get paid or not, I'm on the phones all day, even on Saturdays and Sundays. When there is some case, I go out. I really like what I do, and being there when things are happening (Journalist, *América 24*).

The calls all come to me, whether in the office or not. And they call you all the time: "listen, something or other has happened", you get all caught up. Sometimes early in the morning too, you're sleeping and the phone rings. Doctors, firemen, policemen and journalists are the only ones whose life doesn't have a set schedule, but crime reporters more than any of these (Journalist, *Telefe Noticias*).

The work routine of the work basically consists of solving three operations: the selection of events that will be disseminated as news, which implies leaving aside others; the determination of the hierarchy that will be given to each fact in the coverage (the space and minutes on the air that will be dedicated to them); and the focus with which the story will be told (where to put more emphasis, what sources will be cited). It also answers to "an articulation of prejudices, the values shared with the environment and with society, the representations of one's work and values that are implicit (subconscious or involuntary distortion)" (Martini, 2002, p. 77).

For at least the last 15 years, insecurity has been a permanent agenda item in the Argentinian media. According to the agenda setting theory, the media play an important role in establishing the agenda for news consumers (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). TV journalists set their routines in relation to the day's agenda topics, which comes from reading newspapers and cables from news agencies:

Actually I start early in the morning ... Today, for example, I got up, saw the information, and checked with the producers what we can do, and we said: "Let's go for this topic". In the production meetings, I often make suggestions. Afterwards, I tell my boss, "I have this; do you want to add something else?" (Journalist, *América Noticias*).

I go to the office, check the agenda items of the day, and, together with the production people, decide what the most important news is, who goes to the location live, where I'll go, and so on. For secondary news items, cameras go to record. There are a lot of crime stories, maybe up to ten in a single day. Now I am lucky that mobile phones have Internet access and I can read about it while I'm travelling there. Before it was a little more complicated. I had to read all the newspapers before leaving or improvise (Journalist, *Crónica TV*).

These testimonies show that the process of producing news on television is a joint task that is carried out between producers, cameramen, editors and journalists. In the "production meetings", in relation to the agenda of the day, the topics covered by the news and those that do not are decided. At the same time, some topics are proposed outside the agenda (investigations carried out by journalists), which can be included in the news programme as a "special report".<sup>8</sup>

Part of the journalists' work process includes speaking with sources; that is, with those people or institutions that provide information for the construction of the news. The relationship of journalists with their sources is complex and subject to the relationship with the editors, as well as to the companies with the power. Sources are "the actors that the journalist observes or interviews, including both those interviewed that are aired or quoted in news articles, and those that only provide basic information or suggestions for stories" (Gans, 2004, p. 80).

This relationship between journalists and sources, based on a pact of trust and mutual need, is central to the construction of the news. For Martini (2002, p. 48), in addition to the information that arrives

---

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed analysis of the topic, see: Martini & Luchessi (2004). Also see: Farré (2004).

through the cables of the news agencies, that which circulates from one medium to another (which a newspaper takes from a news channel or vice versa, or that which found online) depends on the information from primary sources. And, in the case of crime news historically, there is a privileged primary source: the police. Besides the testimonies of victims, prosecutors and judges, which accompany the news, “the voice” of the police always appears in any story, as it constitutes a primary source of information for crime reporters. Academic literature on the relationship between the police as a source of information and the media forms a subfield of research that attempts to discern both the strategies of the police towards the media, and of journalists towards the police (Leishman & Mason, 2003; Mawby, 2010; Reiner, 2008).<sup>9</sup>

In the interviews with news reporters, it was evident that the relationship with sources is a key issue in the profession. As part of the logic of the television medium, many journalists have producers who select the information initially, according to the topics on the agenda and also those that interest the medium as a company. However, since they are journalists of considerable experience, with big names in the TV world and whose image is central in the news when dealing with police issues, most of them strive to maintain a strong and trusting link with their sources, which in many cases they have forged for many years and which they don't share with their producers:

I operate alone, I have my agenda, my phones, and I try to have my own news story. I speak with Production, they give me the OK and I present it. Obviously there are also stories that Production gives me and I provide some information, but I try ... I really like having my own sources (Journalist, *América 24*).

---

<sup>9</sup> An important piece of work on this topic is by Steve Chibnall (1975) who described the relationships between the press and the police as “reciprocal interests, but asymmetrical in favour of the police”. For the investigator, it is the crime reporter who dominates this relationship because they act as gatekeepers by deciding which events they want to report upon. These interests are usually linked to maintaining a positive image, and promoting a good public reputation.

I am used to having my sources, and to dealing with them myself every day. I am also selfish with information. I want to talk to my sources myself, because I always have one more question to ask. Sometimes I tell my producer, but did you ask her this? And if she says no, I call myself. I could simply not do it and leave it to the producers, but it comes naturally to me (Journalist, *América Noticias*).

I get up at 6:00 in the morning and I start calling police superintendents, officers, and ambulance workers ... Today at 6:30 in the morning they told me that a superintendent let 4 prisoners escape for 5 grand and I started to head out to the prison. After a while, I found out that they had freed the alleged rapist from Villa Urquiza because he was innocent. All this is personal checking. I have the phone on 24 hours a day. I never turn it off (Journalist, *C5N*).

These testimonies show a relationship of trust with their sources that journalists do not delegate and that they maintain themselves, despite having the collaboration of producers. These sources have been harvested over many years of work and, therefore, are jealously guarded by the journalists.

In this web of relationships of power that are woven around crime news, journalists recognize that they often make mistakes with information. Although, “involuntary errors” or lack of checking of sources is common to all sections, the truth is that in the crime section, victims or criminals are often implicated with false information. In general, journalists show some reluctance to accept that information was given wrongly due to the fear of breaking the contract with the public that trusts the news of that channel, and not on another.

#### NEWSWORTHINESS CRITERIA: WHEN INSECURITY BECOMES NEWS

Linked to the work processes of journalists is the selection and prioritisation of information, as well as the application of newsworthiness criteria. Wolf defines newsworthiness as “the set of elements through which the information apparatus controls and manages the quantity and type of events of which they select the news” (1991, p. 222). The

author poses the following question: “What events are considered sufficiently interesting, significant or relevant to be transformed into news?” (1991, p. 22). The first studies in the field coined the concept of gatekeeping to account for the ways in which the content published in newspapers or news programs and the filtering process of information are articulated. This theory was widely criticised for not considering the entire communication process, although it is recognised that it provided a new perspective in the analysis of news producers and their selection process (Gans, 2004).

In any selection process, there are general criteria about what events are newsworthy but the journalists and editors can also place topics on the media agenda. In that sense, in 1979, Golding and Elliott demonstrated the importance of what they defined as values/news; that is, those “criteria to select the elements worthy of being included in the final product from all of the stories available in the news office” (p. 114). The values/news work in the news offices as reference guides that allow us to emphasise some events, mitigate others and highlight any stories that interest the public to read in a set order of priorities (Arrueta, 2010). With technological transformations, the media have little power of decision left because in the process of digitisation, the news passes through many hands. For this reason, any possible “manipulation” that a channel wants to carry out in order to comply with its editorial line highlights the news that has been selected and, even more so, what is not covered and or broadcast, and what will never be able to go on the air (Farré, 2004, p. 38).

The journalists interviewed agree that for a news item to get on the air, it must meet certain characteristics. The agenda, the ratings and the competition affect the choice and length (in time and space) of the treatment of certain topics (Focás & Galar, 2016). In this context of changes in the news, it is considered necessary to reflect on the redefinition of the newsworthiness criteria of crime stories on TV. Some testimonies demonstrate this question:

It is an important selection that must be made. It is part of the professional exercise to ask yourself “is this newsworthy or not?” And nowadays, it depends on many things ... it depends on the impact that the news may have,

if it can affect many people, if it is something that you can see elsewhere, and if it is something, for me, in some cases that can call for reflection to have a concrete solution. I relate everything to everyday life (Journalist, *América Noticias*).

Mass media presence means that crimes have to be more and more spectacular for the media to cover them. Sometimes someone calls in with information, and the producer asks: “Was there only one death? Well, we’ll see, if there is a unit left over, I’ll send it, but for a single death, we’re not interested”. And then they tell you, “Well, we are going here because there are four deaths ...”. In the past, everything would be covered (Journalist, *Crónica TV*).

To decide what is news today, we’re looking for a little more impact. For example, today a tonne of marijuana being imported is not news, and it is incredible. Breaking and entering, even if it’s always the same, is always news, because people are attracted to know how the thief entered and what happened inside. Insecurity is undoubtedly a permanent topic on the agenda (Journalist, *Telefe Noticias*).

The classic news criteria (impact, rarity, mass scale) are now added to those linked to the issue of insecurity. A permanent topic on the media agenda; crimes require a unique flavour for journalistic coverage.

One of the most relevant issues of the news of insecurity regarding crimes is the focus on the victim or their close relatives as sources of information. This phenomenon, which can be seen throughout the world’s press, appeals directly to the emotions of the viewers by generating ties of empathy and identification. In the words of Garland (2005), the victim, as represented by the media, emerges as a representative character whose experience is supposed to be common and collective instead of individual and atypical. The immediate language of the media story “directly addresses the fears and anger of the spectators, producing identification and reinforcement effects that are used politically and commercially” (2005, p. 242). The interviewed journalists give an account of this regularity in the production process of current affairs news:

TV programmes dedicated to this have a terrible habit taken from graphic media: they talk security policy with the victim. I don't know of any programme on the economy that talks about inflation with an unemployed person, or with a housewife. We have that bad custom, because it is within reach. Before they begin to mourn, we stick the microphone in front of them. Then, crime policies with the victim, a perversion, an aberration, shouldn't be done but it is done. Is it the fault of the media? Yes. Look, I have the story, I have the testimony of the victim's mother, what do you say? Come on! (Journalist, *canal 13/TN*).

The construction of the news affects the social class as well as the famous, the location made famous by the well-known victim or criminal. But it is mainly the crimes committed on and/or by members of the traditional middle or high social sectors that make the media agendas with discursive modalities different from those used in crimes involving ordinary people, preferably humble (Martini, 2009). The focus on the victim (and the following of the coverage) has preferential place if they can be considered middle or high class. This fact, highlighted by different works on crime news, is recognised by journalists:

It has always been that the media prioritises in a discriminatory way. News is news so long as it affects a victim who could be the son of the general manager of the media. For example, Ángeles is Ángeles<sup>10</sup> because she's the girl from Colegiales who wears a jumper and goes to a private school, while Rocío Abigail Juárez<sup>11</sup> is nobody because she's poor. So well, I try

---

<sup>10</sup> Ángeles Rawson disappeared on June 10th, 2013, and was found dead the next day in an area within the Ecological Coordination Society of the State Metropolitan Area (CEAMSE), in José León Suárez in Buenos Aires. She was 16 years old and lived in the neighbourhood of Palermo. The news about Ángeles was on the news agenda for months. The doorman of the building was finally found guilty of the crime.

<sup>11</sup> Rocío Abigail Juárez disappeared on June 4th and was found on the 15th raped and killed by a gunshot to the head. She was 22. His body was partially charred and abandoned in an open field in the city of Zárate. The case had hardly any media coverage.

to reverse that, I try to place myself in a more balanced world (Journalist, *C5N*).

From this broadcasting perspective, the media is also positioned as a victim or potential victim, and from there it establishes its contract of trust.

There are victims that generate more impact. Belsunce<sup>12</sup> for example, was the story of one summer. Norita,<sup>13</sup> well, with Norita, people began to say that the victims were single women who were avoiding lovers ... The only thing I can say for sure is that this type of social group has links to power. The thing is with people who have a lot of money, anything can happen but always behind closed doors. So when the door is left ajar because there is a dead person inside, then you can get in, and basically see how the case ends. But if it happened in the slums, it wasn't newsworthy; it's true (Journalist, *canal 13/TN*).

Another central feature in the newsworthiness of the insecurity news is linked to the social circles of those affected:

Insecurity is an agenda item but there is a kind of "assessment of the victim's worth". What I mean is by that is that poor people die every day in assaults, victim of a robbery, in Ingeniero Bunge, in Varela, in Burzaco<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> María Marta García Belsunce was found down in her home in the gated community of Carmel, located in Pilar, on October 27th, 2002. At first it was believed that it was a domestic accident, but a month and a half later it was discovered that five gunshot wounds to the head had killed her. For her murder, the only person convicted has been her husband, Carlos Carrascosa, who pleads his innocence.

<sup>13</sup> On November 26th, 2006, the body of Nora Dalmasso was found naked and lying face up on her daughter's bed in her home in the neighbourhood of Villa Golf in Río Cuarto. She had been hanged with the belt of a dressing gown. All those accused were released.

<sup>14</sup> These are locations in the Buenos Aires suburbs that have high rates of poverty and inequality.



in thousands of places in the suburbs and that isn't news ... until someone middle class dies in those circumstances ... I try to go against that, but ... (Journalist, *C5N*).

My daily struggle is because of the topic of insecurity. I believe that the crimes committed by the police are much more important than the crimes committed by other people. Basically crimes by the police can be covered up, they have more impunity and they are also crimes of State. For the police to kill you is one thing, while a kid who wants to steal your bike and ends up killing you is another. But on the channel, it is difficult to maintain that agenda (Journalist, *Visión Siete*).

In summary, in relation to this topic, two issues can be observed. On the one hand, there is a perception by crime reporters of inequality of information regarding what has been framed as insecurity. Newsworthiness is subject to the victim being middle class, or that the crime has happened in a well-off area. On the other hand, there is a certain degree of recognition and even discomfort on the part of journalists who cannot cover crimes linked to the lower sectors. This denotes a conflict of interests between the media as a journalistic company and journalists as workers.

Faced with these discrepancies with editorial policy, Arrueta (2013) finds two positions that journalists can take. On the one hand, what he calls the "passive acceptance of its consequences" as a result of the necessary admission of a financing network and linking strategies. Those journalists who hold this position reason that a media company is, above all, a company and as such pursues profit. The second form is related to the presence of intra-institutional resistance channels, which refers to the dispute and negotiation of intra-institutional agendas that cause tension between the different ways of seeing and assessing that circulate in a newsroom" (Arrueta, 2013, p. 83).

The journalists interviewed report this tension in terms of the visibility (or lack of visibility) of certain facts in relation to the victim's social origin. The contribution of this investigation shows that TV crime reporters on different occasions avoid the daily routine, in order to give airtime to some news stories outside of the agenda. These tactics

(De Certeau, 1996) that journalists use in their work processes are observed in the resistance channels that are originated and sustained around the editorial policy, and which are disputed via the conveniences or feasibilities that should be considered when deciding which news events to make visible and invisible.

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

In this article, I have explained how some of the characteristics of the TV crime reporters' work processes are problematic. Daily routines, relationships with sources, the selection of the information and current newsworthiness criteria were the main topics that were analysed in order to reflect on the production of news of insecurity. Along the way, it has been observed that, beyond the changes in the media system from the incorporation of new technologies, the transition from crime news into news of insecurity brought about changes in the journalists' work processes.

As such, it plays a decisive role in the impact of the news, the use of dramatisations and sensationalist stories, and other journalistic resources that compete to capture the attention of the public. At the same time, it is interesting to highlight the differences between journalists in the construction of crime news, since their views and perceptions vary, and there are even conflicting views regarding the editorial policy or the ways of dealing with the agenda and crime cases.

In the course of this article, it was also observed that crime reporters achieved a prominent place in the media, while at the same time varying their work routines, influenced both by the positioning of insecurity as a public problem, as well as by changes in the system of the media. Beyond these factors, we have been able to identify that in some situations, the actions of the journalist can modify a routine that seems closed and defined externally. A particular feature took place in terms of the selection of events that will or will not have media visibility. According to the criteria of newsworthiness for crime stories linked to insecurity, a fact is more likely to appear in the media if the victim is middle-class, or if the crime took place in a well-off neighbourhood. On this issue, the interviewed journalists show some disagreement with the established rules and ensure that, despite not being of interest to the media, they

try to cover criminal cases linked to the lower classes (Focás, 2016). This “intra-institutional resistance” results in the fact that they often use the television space to show events outside of the routine agreed with the producers (Arrueta, 2013). The dispute –sometimes explicit– that they face is with the channels’ editorial policies and with the producers who constantly compare what competing news programmes are broadcasting and are guided by the ratings. Beyond the visibility of this confrontation, concrete problematic situations emerge that affect the morals of journalists and that can progressively modify ways of presenting information and therefore constructing news.

This finding suggests that newsmaking studies should consider these tactics implemented by certain journalists on TV channels, who use the air to report on issues outside the agenda. From pragmatic sociology,<sup>15</sup> it is interesting to state that there is, in this logic, evidence of a rupture with utilitarianism, from the point of view of a social dynamic; that is to say, certain journalists will critique the general system and at the same time morally justify their daily task (Focás, 2016). In the recurrent forms of conflict resolution, journalists show a rule set for action upon which rest their ethics (they take advantage of TV airtime to show crime news that involve victims from lower classes) which suggests, for future investigations, a new approach to the subject of morals in agreement with the activities and individual configurations of the actors in question.

### ***Bibliographic references***

Arancibia, V. & Cebrelli, A. (2008). Acerca del espesor temporal de las representaciones como categoría para historizar las producciones. *Actas de la XII Jornadas de Investigadores en Comunicación*. Rosario, Argentina: Universidad Nacional de Rosario.

---

<sup>15</sup> The works of Luc Boltanski (2000) and Laurent Thévenot (2014) allow us to take another look at the mutual dependencies between collective representations and individual activities through the criticisms and justifications of their actors. The texts of Cyril Lemieux (2000, 2013), in that same tradition, provide conceptual tools to think about the multiple rule sets specifically in the media.

- Arrueta, C. (2010). *¿Qué realidad construyen los diarios? Una mirada desde el periodismo en contextos de periferia*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: La Crujía Ediciones.
- Arrueta, C. (2013). Una mirada desde los escenarios en tensión. *Trampas de la Comunicación*, 76, 81-87.
- Best, J. (1999). *Random violence. How we talk about new crimes and new victims*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Boltanski, L. (2000). *El amor y la justicia como competencias. Tres ensayos de sociología de la acción*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Amorrortu.
- Calzado, M. (2015). *Inseguros. El rol de los medios y la respuesta política frente a la violencia. De Blumberg a hoy*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Aguilar.
- Chibnall, S. (1975). The police and the press. In J. Brown & G. Howes (Eds.), *The police and the community* (pp. 67-81). Farnborough: Saxon House.
- De Certeau, M. (1999). *La invención de lo cotidiano*. Mexico: Universidad Iberoamericana.
- Farré, M. (2004). *El noticiero como mundo posible*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: La Crujía Ediciones.
- Focás, B. (2016). La trama de la inseguridad. Percepciones del delito, medios de comunicación y vida cotidiana (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Focás, B. & Galar, S. (2016). Inseguridad y medios de comunicación. Prácticas periodísticas y conformación de públicos para el delito en Argentina (2010-2015). *Delito y Sociedad*, 41, 51-76.
- Gans, H. (2004). *Deciding what's news. A study CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. Evanston: Random House.
- Golding, P. & Elliott, P. (1979). *Making the news*. London: Longman.
- Gusfield, J. (2014). *La cultura de los problemas públicos. El mito del conductor alcoholizado versus la sociedad inocente*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Siglo XXI Editores.
- Hernández Ramírez, M. (1997). La sociología de la producción de noticias. Hacia un nuevo campo de investigación en México. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 30, 209-242.

- Kessler, G. & Focás, B. (2014). ¿Responsables del temor? Medios y sentimiento de inseguridad en América Latina. *Nueva Sociedad*, 249, 137-148.
- Kessler, G. & Galar, S. (2015). El caso Píparo: muerte, conmoción y cambios. In S. Gayol & G. Kessler (Comps.), *Muerte, política y sociedad*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Edhasa.
- Leishman, F. & Mason, P. (2003). *Policing and the media: Facts fictions and factions*. Cullompton: Willan.
- Lemieux, C. (2000). *Mauvaise presse, une sociologie compréhensive du travail journalistique et de ses critiques*. Paris: Métailié.
- Lemieux, C. (2013). Sociologie pragmatique: mode d'emploi. *Politix. Revue des sciences sociales du politique*, 103, 175-204.
- Lorenc Valcarce, F. (2005). El trabajo periodístico y los modos de producción de la noticia: el tratamiento de la inseguridad en la prensa argentina. *Question*, 1(7).
- Martini, S. (2002). *Periodismo, noticia y noticiabilidad*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Norma.
- Martini, S. (2009). El delito y las lógicas sociales. La información periodística y la comunicación política. In S. Martini & S. Pereyra (Eds.), *La irrupción del delito en la vida cotidiana, relatos de la comunicación política*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Biblos.
- Martini, S. & Luchessi, L. (2004). *Los que hacen la noticia*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Biblos.
- Marradi, A., Archenti, N. & Piovani, J. (2007). *Metodología de las ciencias sociales*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Emecé.
- Mawby, R. (2010). Police corporate communications, crime reporting and the shaping of policing news. *Policing & Society*, 20(1), 124-139.
- McCombs, M. & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda setting function of the mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, 176-187.
- Pereyra, S. (2013). *Política y transparencia. La corrupción como problema público*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Siglo XXI Editores. Reiner, R. (2008). Policing and the media. In T. Newburn (Ed.), *Handbook of policing* (pp. 313-335). Cullompton: Willan.
- Rodrigo Alsina, M. (1989). *La construcción de la noticia*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Paidós.

- Rodríguez Alzueta, E. (2014). *Temor y control: la gestión de la inseguridad como forma de gobierno*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Futuro Anterior Ediciones.
- Schillagi, C. (2011). Problemas públicos, casos resonantes y escándalos. Algunos elementos para una discusión teórica. *Polis, Revista de la Universidad Bolivariana*, 10(30), 245-266.
- Thévenot, L. (2014). Voicing concern and difference. From public spaces to common-places. *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 1 (1), 7-34.
- Tuchman, G. (1973). *La producción de la noticia. Estudio sobre la construcción de la realidad*. México: Mass Media.
- Observatorio de la Deuda Social. (2017). *Seguridad ciudadana en la Argentina urbana (2010-2016)*. Retrieved from <http://www.uca.edu.ar/uca/common/grupo68/files/2017-Observatorio-Informe-Avance-Inseguridad.pdf>
- van Dijk, T. (1994). *La noticia como discurso. Comprensión, estructura y producción*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Wolf, M. (1991). *La investigación en la comunicación de masas. Crítica y perspectivas de la información*. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Paidós.