The Discursive Construction of (In)security: The Paradigm “Change” in Security Policies Since the “Chocobar Doctrine”¹

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The notion of security in the political and media discourse has an almost direct connection with crime rates and public policies introduced by governments to combat insecurity. Criminal events described by the press as related to “insecurity” take up important sections in newspapers or TV. Cases such as the kidnapping and murder of Axel Blumberg, Candela Sol Rodríguez, or the latest Chocobar case, were highly mediatized. Analyzing media discourse is very important when studying how, from a spectacularization point of view, news carrying meaning are published, and start shaping the opinion of the society regarding the public, the private, and the individual. This does not mean that, as audience, we believe everything the media tells us to be true. However, it should be considered that media presence in society is significant and that its discourse, to some extent, shows signs of the different problems the society is faced with, always from a biased and political perspective. This paper aims at explaining how, from the analysis of Minister Patricia Bullrich’s statements about the Chocobar case, it is possible to find traces in favor of the new security paradigm that was established in Argentina, from the beginning of the current government.

Keywords: discourse analysis, security paradigm, communication

Those who want to be armed, be armed; those who do not want to be armed, don’t be armed. Argentina is a free country. We’d rather people not to carry arms. But if we say there’s someone protecting people, don’t destroy them.

-Minister of Security of Argentina, Patricia Bullrich²

Introduction

Around the middle of the 1980s and early 1990s, Argentina was in a transitional period between the civic-military dictatorship and the advance of democracy as a form of government. In this Latin American and

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¹ Taken from the analysis performed by Sociologist Alina Ríos (University of Buenos Aires (UBA)-National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET)), in an interview on the program *Insurgentes* of Radio Sur, on last March 30th, where she postulates the paradigm shift in the national security system, since the case of the police officer Chocobar, who killed the alleged assailant of an American tourist, Pablo Kukoc. According to the Sociologist, *there is an urgent need to reflect on what this means, and what we can say in order to start thinking about this is that “doctrine” is a term introduced by the Security Minister, Patricia Bullrich. She did this in accordance with a discourse that intended to establish an interpretation matrix of a particular event where a young man was killed from behind, by a police officer in civilian clothes, and who was out of service, in the neighborhood of La Boca. This is the case known as Luis Chocobar.* <https://notasperiodismopopular.com.ar/2018/03/30/policia-poco-profesional-recurso-arma/>.

² Statements of Ms. Minister Patricia Bullrich in a brief interview with journalists of the magazine *Puntal AM* on the way out of a dinner with members of cabinet of the city of Río Cuarto, last November 2nd. <https://www.lanacion.com.ar/2188123-bullrich-desato-una-fuerte-polemica-al-hablar-de-que-la-gente-pueda-portar-armas>.

global context, another paradigm emerges in the economical field, but which also penetrates little by little the field of the media. This is the emergence of neoliberalism, which placed the theme of *insecurity* in the media agendas, but also in the political discourse of our leaders, in response to society's demands. Actually, what was set on these agendas was the pressure due to the "growing" insecurity, placed only in the criminal area. With this, this paper refers to the fact that this concept of security/insecurity is not linked to other meanings or notions of the term, such as labor, food, health security, among others.

Analyzing the notion of security in the political and media discourse has to do, in principle, with an almost direct connection with crime rates and public policies introduced by governments in order to combat insecurity. Currently, most citizens place insecurity as one of the main or most burning issues of the country, together with poverty and unemployment. The criminal events described by the press as related to "insecurity" take up important sections in newspapers or in TV news programs, as well as in the radio. Cases such as the kidnapping and murder of Axel Blumberg, Candela Sol Rodríguez, or the latest Chocobar case, were highly mediatized.

The analysis of media discourse is very important when studying how—from a spectacularization point of view—pieces of news carrying meaning are published and start mapping out and shaping the opinion of society regarding the public, the private, and the individual. This does not mean that, as audience, we believe everything the media tells us to be true. However, it should be considered that the media's presence in society is significant, and that its discourse, to some extent, shows signs of the different problems a society is faced with, always from a biased and political perspective.

This paper aims to explain how, from the analysis of Minister Patricia Bullrich's statements about the Chocobar case, it is possible to find traces that go in favor of or against the new security paradigm that was established in the present society, from the beginning of the current Argentine government.

Starting Points

The issue of insecurity expressed as a media discursive construction cannot go against the fact that there is a problem of an objective nature. As Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1987, pp. 176-177) hold, a discourse is a practice that articulates elements which, under certain operations, organize a social reality. Thus, this article can state that what the media shows when discussing issues of insecurity, beyond the editorial component in their discourse, does not remove the social reality which demands precise actions to protect public safety. The criminal events are real, but the focus should be on the way these events are discursively reconstructed. This emphasizes a delimitation of what Laclau introduces as "excess of sense". A delimitation of those discursive operations constructing meanings about a topic; in this particular case: insecurity.

In this regard, it is also important to affirm that in these discursive articulations of social demands organizing a social reality, there is a particular one which is presented as most important and dominant, and in the case of insecurity, it can be said that it is mediatically organized as a prevailing claim. We can read the newspapers, watch the news, and not much effort is needed to find, in different media with dissimilar editorial lines, this demand exhibited to us almost excessively.

In the political area, this demand has a great influence when it comes to delineating either campaign promises or public policies, so as to discursively take on a position against other parties. This is the particular case of the current government of *Cambiemos*, who, in their campaign platform, were already announcing measures they would take regarding the security management. It is not surprising, then, that what occurred in the case of the murder of Pablo Kukoc by the police officer Chocobar was the key point for marking the

direction that the government had taken in order to give official status to their “change” of paradigm as regards security.

Furthermore, it is necessary to fully understand that the media and how they treat the news are closely related to their need of remaining in the current market. Certain media does this from a clear extreme and sensationalist vision, because this sells, while other media, also, explicitly respond to political sectors which “mold” their vision of (in)security.

As this paper stated above, this analysis will only concentrate on the print media (digital newspaper: *La Nación* and *Tiempo Argentino*) to analyze how they deal with the news related to the new security policies of the current national government.

The issue of public (in)security has become a matter of public, political, and communicative interest. The stories about (in)security are created through the media in their news or fictional stories, or in the communication experiences and practices of everyday life and engagement in politics. Omar Rincón and Gerardo Rey state that

Thus, we understand public (in)security as a “perception” construed on the basis of media stories and political discourses, which becomes a “real reality” and a “true experience” of living everyday life, because, even though we have not experienced insecurity, we know we are a potential victim. (Rey & Rincón, 2008, p. 36)

In the production and spreading of the discourses about security/insecurity it is possible to observe the establishing of a concomitant position. The media, since it is massive and due to its reach and its possibility of reiterating, that is, because of its communication effectiveness, impacts on public opinion to a greater extent, but undoubtedly it can also articulate its discourse with other genres, such as advertising, literary, or political.

The “veracity” of information discourse is based on the verisimilar established by concurrence with other discourses especially analyzed. Todorov holds that one of the ways the verisimilar is established is not through “the reality”, but through the discourses that circulate about it, and that we name “public opinion” (1972, p. 12).

On the other hand, Omar Rincón and Gerardo Rey believe that “the symbolic effects of public (in)security are fears. These are the result of numerous and diverse symbolic productions, but above all, of the work of the communication market and media” (Rey & Rincón, 2008, p. 35). In this way, the more fears are created, the bigger the security market: surveillance, technologies, devices, insurance, police officers, sentences, authoritarian politicians; always a loss of liberties. The more fears there are, the more mediatized tales of fear: more publications, more stories, more sensationalism, more individuals, more stigmatization, less research, less democracy.

Faced with this market trend, politics and the media seek preventive strategies of citizen formation and participation, of incidence on civil society, of work in fields such as education and culture, of reform of institutions of the state in charge of that field, of fight against corruption and impunity, of other versions of the mediatized tales.

The management of social control is based on the common need to enhance repressive plots, which according to Martini and Contursi would be “guaranteed through surveillance, appropriate legislation, and the exclusion of undesirable sectors” (2012, p. 9). This governability system survives on the production and circulation of stigmatization and violent practices which are introduced from different enunciation spaces, in order to shape a “reality” and “a territory” as threatened and threatening. This area has to be “cleaned up” so as to achieve the return to the utopian place, a *locus amoenus* of total security. On this matter, Rossana Reguillo

propounds a map that works in a three-valid logic. In this map there would be *topian*, *heterotopian*, and *utopian* territories. The first one alludes to our own and familiar space, which is “safe”, but at the same time, “threatened”. The second one denotes the territory of the “others”, the other people’s space, which is frightening, where everyone knows that “things happen”. And the last one, the utopian territory, is recognized as the desirable space, and it works as the guiding place in the understanding of the *topian* territory in its relations with the heterotopian space (Reguillo, 2007b, p. 72).

Following this signification plane to understand how these spaces of the topic of security are articulated, it is important to affirm that according to what Reguillo (2007a) suggests, the security discourse mediatically positioned is the one that fosters the articulation between the *topian* and *heterotopian* spaces, since citizens are the ones who, from their “safe” spaces, are provided with news and stories about insecurity, and feel that their space is being threatened. Also, citizens demand, hence, security related public policies to the government of the moment. Otherwise, it becomes “necessary” to buy an arm so as to feel protected (?) in the face of the potential threat, and lack of protection from the state and justice. That is, this is a discursive articulation of security that comprises the citizen’s defenselessness and the state’s idleness as a whole and which is positioned in the media agendas.

Media, Discourse, and Security Paradigm

Last November 2nd, statements by Minister of Security Patricia Bullrich were published on different media. The Minister made reference to a change of paradigm regarding the security policies of her management in contrast to the policies of the previous government. In the interview held by a journalist of the magazine *Puntal AM* of the city of Rio Cuarto, the Minister stated that “there is a change of paradigm” and pointed out, also, that we should fight for the end of “guarantism”, making reference to the laws passed during the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, regarding criminality.

The same piece of news, reproduced by the newspaper *La Nación*, gave the matter this headline: *Bullrich sparked a fierce controversy when talking about the possibility for people to carry arms*. In this headline, a non-partial utterance can be appreciated; however, it is not entirely opposed to the issue. It presents the situation as controversial in the sender plane (Bullrich) and does not categorically dismiss the possibility that the reader may feel addressed regarding the arm use that the Minister would be endorsing. This can be inferred since, in the body of the piece of news, the context in which the Minister issued those statements is also clarified. The newspaper is addressing a reader who is concerned for that topic: “safe”, which may be threatened. This is the same reader who demands security policies, who claims that the guarantist laws do not support police actions, since criminals are captured and “are freed the next day” by judges. This is the same reader-citizen the Minister is addressing with her statements. In this discourse, the place of enunciation is very complex, since the Minister, for instance, would be in a decision taking political position which endorses taking the law into one’s own hands, in response to that civic demand that has adopted the mediatically construed meaning as its own.

The same news, but dealt with by the journal *Tiempo Argentino*, is given the following headline *Bullrich endorsed the use of arms for self-defense*. Clearly, the editorial line of this newspaper is in utter opposition and in non-conformity to the Minister’s statements. This journal accuses and questions her, and is in opposition to the paradigm of taking the law into one’s own hands. Contrary to *La Nación*, in the first line of the article, this newspaper states that the context where the Minister Bullrich made these statements was during a protest

against her outside a restaurant in the city of Río Cuarto, where, as the news article emphasizes, the Minister “vindicated” the policy against crime of *Cambiamos*, and defended the police officer Luis Chocobar. It is clear that the recipient this periodical publication is building is very far from the kind of reader of the other newspaper. In this case, a reader who is concerned about security would also be addressed, however, this reader is opposing to the policies of the current government.

Each communication media imagines a different model of consumer. By way of example it can be observed that the kind of reader of *La Nación* is far from the kind of reader construed by *Tiempo Argentino*. Although both journals target a massive audience, one will emphasize the social factors and inequality to account for insecurity, while the other will suggest that the decline of respect for the law and criminals’ impunity are the causes of this social scourge. However, a particular situation arises making this reading contract not as precise as it could be perceived from the analysis. This paper refers to the comments made by readers in the comment section of the news published by *La Nación*. Since the article is published in the digital version of the journal, readers’ comments are enabled. These comments show a great diversity of opinions, but most of the comments would be in opposition to the sense that the newspaper is trying to convey in the piece of news, that is, with the ineffectiveness of the current law, the criminals’ impunity and the implicit support the Minister provides to the use of arms for self-defense. What can be perceived in those comments is a deeper contempt for Bullrich’s statements and to the security policies of the current government.

Tiempo Argentino has not enabled the comment function for this article. Only readers who are subscribed to the journal are allowed to comment. However, through the whole body of the piece of news, the Minister’s statements are highlighted with terms such as “vindicated”, “endorsed”, “strong defense”; so as to emphasize how controversial her statements are. Also, several paragraphs refer to the case of the police officer Chocobar who “killed a criminal” last December. In the same way, the article clarifies that, in the words of the Minister, the change of paradigm in the face of crime is what makes her statements controversial. This communication media is clearly addressing a reader who is against the current government.

Furthermore, this paper can infer that the enunciation resource used by *La Nación* attempts at keeping its distance from the Minister’s statements, by objectifying the events. By including by the end of the article the comment function for readers, but at the same time inserting statements from other officials from the opposition, who made negative comments about Bullrich’s declarations, the journal deals with the topic with certain editorial distance, while at the same time it is fueling the controversy.

Final Thoughts

Reading the news in two media of antagonistic editorial lines somehow leads to more ambiguity on the topic in question: insecurity. Are we still placing the blame for this issue to the current legislation? Is it still a function of the state to solve this problem? Is the communication media the one that perpetuates the matter creating a controversy about this issue with a political nature? The change of paradigm, from a state with supposedly garantist laws to the endorsement of institutional violence and taking the law into one’s hands, seems not to be the underlying problem. This “controversy” suggests the vast difference between one sector of the population who considers that the security issue is not restricted to criminal events only, but to the urgency of clear public policies guaranteeing this safety in all spheres of social reality: health, labor, education, housing, food. And there is another sector of the population who believes the criminal activity should be eradicated from society with even harsher and coercive measures.

The media discourse is not produced in a vacuum, but is part of the social, economic, and political dynamics. Insecurity is not a media invention, but it is the way in which we as society represent crime, violence, and injustice, in the context of societies that have lost social security and where great part of the population has to live with poorer labor conditions and exclusion. However, the communication media is part of the construction of our present. Nonetheless, and more and more explicitly, what is going to guide the value of the piece of news is the economic value of the market: what sells is useful. These are neoliberal policies that also impact on the press in particular and the media in general, since they are companies and they have to pay to their employees. And, regarding security/insecurity, what sells is being in favor or against the government policies concerning this issue.

For this reason, it is necessary, as pointed out by Santiago Mazzuchini³,

to condemn the schizophrenia of mass journalism, who assigned themselves the ownership of the voice of the people, but are not willing to assume their political role, exhibiting a corporate and commercial behavior which paradoxically threatens the freedom of the press they supposedly defend. (2012, p. 8)

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