

## **Política e jornalismo de sensações na imprensa de referência: as capas do Estado de Minas no período da pandemia de covid-19**

### **Politics and journalism of sensations in the reference press: the covers of the Estado de Minas during the Pandemic period of COVID-19**

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**Resumo:** *Este artigo visa refletir sobre a cobertura do noticiário político e sensações presentes no jornal Estado de Minas, uma publicação de referência jornalística. Tendo como base, especificamente, os recortes de 5 capas que tratam do momento da pandemia de covid-19 no Brasil, o texto analisa o modo como um veículo tradicional se vale de elementos da linguagem do jornalismo popular para atrair seus leitores. Com isso, apoiando-se na ótica da Análise do Discurso (AD), é possível entender as escolhas feitas pelo veículo mineiro. Além disso, metodologicamente, busca-se investigar de que maneira as cores utilizadas nas capas conseguem obter o sentido desejado pela publicação. Constatamos que as estratégias discursivas presentes nos materiais demonstram a intenção do periódico em causar impacto no leitor, promovendo sensações e estimulando o questionamento.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Análise de discurso; jornalismo popular; pandemia; sensações; política.*

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**Abstract:** *This article aims to reflect on the coverage of the political news and sensations present in the newspaper Estado de Minas, a journalistic reference publication. Based, specifically, on the 5-cover clippings that deal with the moment of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Brazil, the text analyzes the way in which a traditional vehicle makes use of elements of the language of popular journalism to attract its readers. Thus, based on the Discourse Analysis (AD) perspective, it is possible to understand the choices made by the mining vehicle. In addition, methodologically, we seek to investigate how the colors used in the covers manage to obtain the meaning desired by the publication. We found that the discursive strategies present in the materials demonstrate the journal's intention to impact the reader, thus promoting sensations and stimulating questioning.*

**Keywords:** *Discourse analysis; Popular journalism; Pandemic; Sensations; Policy.*

## Introduction

Visual and graphic layout communicates and carries direct messages to readers. What changes from the sensationalist newspaper to the popular press is the content, as Amaral (2006) observes. That is, while in the 1990s, there was no concern with credibility and the intention was to sell as much as possible, the popular press – represented in publications such as *Super Notícia* (Belo Horizonte), *Extra* (Rio de Janeiro), *Meia Hora de Notícias* (Rio de Janeiro), and *Diário Gaúcho* (Porto Alegre) – has now abolished fake stories and news in the name of readers' trust and loyalty.

A reflection of these changes is that, over the last few decades, studies in journalism, a field that guides itself by ethics, respect, and objectivity, have shown particular interest in the so-called sensory journalism, a technique that comprises the physical and psychic dimensions, proposing to arouse attention, for example, through the title and lead, and provoke interlocutors' interest through the bias of sensations. In fact, Marcondes Filho (2000) made a precise analysis of the presence of the sensory technique in reference journalism as well. But what differentiates them is the form and mode of presenting the news.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, these characteristics have materialized in books *Espreme que Sai Sangue* (1996) and *O Discurso da Violência no Jornal Sensacionalista* (1994) and opened an interesting field of study about what was then called sensationalist journalism. Portari (2013, p. 130) defines sensationalist journalism as an expression of “exaggeration, the use of fait divers, the valuing of emotion, an inversion of form and content, and, very often, the presence of the tragic materialized in violence and death on covers.” In this context, one of the greatest exponents in Brazil, until the early 2000s, was the extinct newspaper *Notícias Populares*, known mainly for publishing shocking photos and headlines that brought situations that bordered on the absurd.

As the years passed, the formula of this type of sensory journalism wore out. However, the journalistic market adapted itself to a new reality. The extinction of this way of doing journalism, often called the brown press, led to the emergence of another type of journalistic production called the popular press, a shift related to publications' search for credibility.

As heirs of a good deal of the sensationalist formula, so-called popular newspapers came to satisfy a market segment interested in that model. Among the legacies they bring, we can mention the interest in police news, sports, and the presence of half-naked women on their covers. In the graphic aspect, popular newspapers continue to apply the organic layout (not organized as in the traditional press), boldface letters, and strong colors. The graphic aspect of the layout is essential in their communication with readers, as their intention is to serve a segment interested in this visual language.

The print page arranges a multiplicity of codes in the structure that convention calls diagramming or pagination, which enables complex dialogues between its elements. Typographic writing, for example, can be as personalized as oral language. Typographic variations convey much more than a linear and diachronic text sequence, giving rise to representations that had been previously only possible in radio broadcasts: the size, thickness, condensation, expansion, italic, and style of print characters reinterpret the text's reading with diverse marks of emphasis, exclamations, interjections, volumes, and tones. (GUIMARÃES, 2003, p. 67)

One notices the repositioning allowed the popular press to establish itself in the market with publications printing up to 300 thousand daily copies for sale in newsstands or on the streets, differently from the constant falls in the circulation of newspapers regarded as "references," such as *Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Globo*, or *Estado de Minas*.

However, in 2020, the pandemic period, in particular, brought about an interesting shift in this context. "Reference" (or mainstream)

newspapers that traditionally have a more sober layout, focusing mostly on themes of (national or international) politics and the economy (stock market, currency exchange rate, among other information from the capital and stock markets) find themselves in a situation never before experienced: the presence of a disease rapidly spreading around the world that, once in Brazil, made not just the frailness of the health system evident but triggered a political crisis involving denialism, inefficient use of medications, and suspicious negotiations in the purchase of the vaccine.

At the center of this crisis was the President of the Republic, Jair Bolsonaro, and his political position and attitudes towards measures to fight the spread of covid-19 in Brazil, constantly confronting governors and mayors, besides attempting to minimize the disease and the number of deaths that occurred in the country, directly contradicting doctors, scientists, and researchers.

The press then acquired great relevance in the media coverage of the crisis, and, at this moment, reference or mainstream newspapers are applying resources present in the popular press to impact their readers, as we will see ahead. Sensory journalism is prevailing within the traditional media segment, which often projects a higher-income and more educated readership<sup>5</sup>.

From this realization, we go on to discuss the political news coverage through five covers of the *Estado de Minas* newspaper selected between the months of April and May 2020. The period defined for the analysis reflects the beginning of social isolation in Brazil. Within this temporal selection, we chose a cover for each week because they present the growing curve of the increase in daily covid-19 deaths in the country. Thus, based on the materials collected for this work, the total number of deaths appears to have tripled in just four weeks, from 5,017 to 17,971 deaths.

5 Authors such as AMARAL (2006) and AUTOR, COSTA (2016) extensively debate the question of newspapers' projected reader.

Furthermore, our choice is also due to the observation that a traditional newspaper used popular language at a delicate moment of the pandemic in Brazil, combining traditional political coverage with graphic and textual elements present in the popular press. In this way, it is possible to perceive a shift in the usual practice of the vehicle, which sought to innovate the way of presenting its covers to attract and impact new readers.

### **Reference press x popular newspaper**

In this study, we will use the concept of Reference Press, despite being aware that the term reference journalism has been employed in research in Brazil as a space to delimit the object of study. It is important to highlight that these uses must consider research contexts and their relations or oppositions that allow the researcher to access the central concept with which they are working. Zamin (2014, p. 919) identifies researchers that opt for the concept of “Reference Journalism to access the central concept, Popular Newspaper, and others that approach popular journalism to speak of reference journalism; and there are those who employ the expression as if the conceptual framework was contained therein.” In this sense, the factors that lead the newspaper to be considered a reference are clippings of the voices authorized to speak in the newspaper, marketing strategies, and the commitment to promote facts of public interest.

Among the main dissonant points of newspapers regarded as popular or sensationalist is the publication’s format: while traditional newspapers adopt the standard model (60 cm high x 50 cm wide, divided into six 4.5 cm columns of text and 0.5 cm blank spaces between columns), popular newspapers use the tabloid format (43 cm high x 28 cm wide, usually divided into three text columns, with some variation of up to four columns, maintaining the 0.5 cm blank spaces between columns), as we can observe in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – *Extra* (Rio de Janeiro), May 12, 2020

Source: *Extra* (2020)

The very format of the publication became synonymous with low-quality journalism and is frequently used to discredit reference media because of the origins of the layout and published content.<sup>6</sup>

Among other characteristics of sensory journalism, as opposed to the reference press, is the emphasis on news usually guided by

<sup>6</sup> In its origins in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, tabloid newspapers focused mostly on crimes, mystical events, ghost stories, and other fables. Later in the US, with the adoption of this format, the tabloid turned to information, short texts, and boldfaced headlines. With technological advances, tabloids started stamping large images on their covers. Many images captured heinous crimes, generating diverse “sensations” in readers. Hence the historical association of the tabloid format with low-quality journalism, as AMARAL (2006) and PEDROSO (2001) observe.

“intensification and graphic, thematic, linguistic, and semantic exaggeration.” (PEDROSO, 2001, p. 52). Danilo Angrimani adds that this segment is fond of “the appreciation of emotion; exploring the extraordinary, valuing decontextualized content; the exchange of the essential for the superfluous or picturesque, and the inversion of content for the form.” (ANGRIMANI, 1995, p. 17).

As noted above, another outstanding feature of the press that serves this segment is its graphic or visual composition, which is always full of colors with less white space and maximum use of the margin area on its first page. The use of color contrast and language that tends to promote a meeting point with its readers (at times, with the use of slang, catchphrases, or even textual orality) are marks also present in publications in this segment.

Popular Journalism also carries editorial differences in relation to so-called reference media, especially when it comes to so-called “News Values,” editorial criteria that dictate what that media will deal with primarily. Amaral (2006) illustrates the difference in approach to news values as follows:

In the reference press, an event has a better chance of becoming news if it involves relevant individuals, impacts the nation, concerns many people, generates significant developments, pertains to public policies, and can be disclosed exclusively. In the popular press, a fact will most likely become news if it possesses the capacity to entertain, is geographically or culturally close to the reader, can be simplified or dramatically narrated, has characters with whom readers can identify (personalization), or is helpful. (AMARAL, 2006, p. 63)

We observe that the principal news values for the popular media are entertainment capacity and the geographic or cultural proximity to their target audience, while for the reference media is the relevance of individuals and impact on the nation. These differences are fundamental to distinguish forms of journalism production and to understand how, at times, the reference press resorts to popular language to convey information to its niche of readers. This is especially evident in the

political crises the covid-19 pandemic triggered in Brazil, reflecting mainly the positions of the President of the Republic that directly contradicted his own Health Ministers (Luiz Henrique Mandetta and Nelson Teich) and even the World Health Organization (WHO).

### ***Estado de Minas* and the pandemic's covers**

Established on March 7, 1928, the *Estado de Minas* newspaper belongs to the Diários Associados group and is considered one of the most traditional of the state of Minas Gerais. Throughout its trajectory, the daily publication established itself as a reference, costing R\$ 2.50 from Monday through Saturday and R\$ 3.50 on Sundays. Its main competitor in the fight for leadership in the state's editorial market is the tabloid newspaper *O Tempo*.

*Estado de Minas* focuses on state news but also highlights national and international news on its covers, especially in the economics and politics editorships. This way, the newspaper maintains a traditional diagramming model in its standard format, as we can see in Figure 2.

The example of Figure 2 demonstrates typical edition prior to the covid-19 pandemic period, about one year before the disease arrived in the country. The cover's focus is on national political news and the topic of reference is the pension reform. Above the main headline, there is a call indicating the Culture and Entertainment news section. The lower half of the cover turns to sports news, emphasizing the two principal teams in Minas Gerais: Atlético Mineiro and Cruzeiro. The cover is filled with headlines on the dangerous of other dam bursts, the state government's debt with the municipalities, gun sales in Brazil, and works to restore historical heritage sights in Ouro Preto.

The cover has large blank spaces, allowing for relief in the reading and a cleaner look, as described by Collaro (2007). The language of the headlines and texts is sober and follows the precepts of journalism handbooks, such as impersonality, objectivity, clarity, conciseness, and so forth.

Figure 2 – Estado de Minas, April 4, 2019



Source: Estado de Minas (2019)

In 2020, we perceive a constant shift in the publication’s language. The arrival of the pandemic and the political crisis caused the newspaper to adopt another tone in its production, as we can see in the four covers we analyze below, involving political authorities and the pandemic.

We note that, due to the atypical moment, the publication abdicates the traditional sobriety expected by its reader and, in doing so, seeks to provoke sensations and impact those who face the news. And this is evident not only through the text but also through the graphic design of the covers selected in this work, which are all in poster format. In the newspaper issues under analysis, we see white spaces replaced by black. The color contrast is between black, white, and yellow. There is

no breathing space. There is only the presence of darkness, grief, and death explicitly mentioned in texts but also implied in the color palette. According to Collaro (2007, p. 74), “each color and its nuances impose a peculiar psychological reaction on individuals, and it is up to those who intend to perform visual works to know these principles to provoke in the receptors the necessary reaction to the proposed objective.” In terms of content, the main focus of headlines is national political news. However, the language the publication assumes is different. We must then make an individual analysis to understand the publication’s position during these times accurately. Thus, we will follow our analysis in chronological order.

### **Methodological path**

In this study, we examined the covers of Estado de Minas’ issues on April 29 and May 9, 16, and 20 through the Discourse Analysis (DA) approach of the French line of research. This segment of analysis comprises a variety of approaches to the study of texts. Hence, there is not just one type of “discourse analysis.” But all perspectives of analysis have in common the “rejection of the realist notion that language is simply a neutral means of reflecting on or describing the world and the conviction of the central importance of discourse in the construction of social life” (GILL, 2002, p. 244).

According to Mutti (2003), Discourse Analysis (DA) aims to interrogate the meanings that diverse forms of production establish, be them verbal or non-verbal texts, as long as their materiality produces significations for possible interpretations. Still, for the author, Michel Pêcheux was one of the pioneers of this methodology, defining the relationship between language/subject/history or language/ideology. Hence, this work resorts to the French approach to analyze the covers of the newspaper. Orlandi (2015) explains the proposition of DA is to understand beyond what is said, that is, the text not only in its structural form but also taking into account social and cultural aspects. Discourse

Analysis (DA) is “understanding the language making sense as symbolic labor, part of the general social labor, constitutive of man and their history.” (ORLANDI, 2015, p. 15). It is the language in motion, being used by a subject in constant transformation. French Discourse Analysis, following Pêcheux’s (1993) standpoint, works with the interpretation of meanings and is, according to Orlandi (2003), susceptible to mistakes, because “even if the interpretation seems clear, there are many definitions in reality, and meanings are not as evident as they seem.” (CAREGNATO; MUTTI, 2006, p. 682). The newspaper’s chromatic choices draw our attention, especially the extensive use of black as a background for its headlines, as opposed to the traditional neutral color of newsprint. In this sense, we can turn to Guimarães (2000, 2003) to understand the intention of the newspaper from a Brazilian cultural context. In his work on the use of colors in the media and journalism, he applies the semiotics of culture, drawing from authors Iuri Lótmán, Ivan Bystrina, and Harry Pross to discuss how we can interpret color codes according to the context in which they are used. In this way, Guimarães intends to move away from the mere color-meaning association (for example, red = love; white = peace) to delve deeper and verify how color communicates with media broadcast receptors. Thus, there is an intense relationship between positive and negative codes associated with colors, depending on the moment of use and the culture in which this resource is inserted. It is important to take into account the cultural context seen as, for example, white is the color of peace in the West and the color of mourning in the East. The author points out that:

[...] By incorporating positive or negative values to colors, it is possible to transfer such values to specific information, fact, person, or entity (partisan, corporate, social, etc.) identified with these colors. Or better yet, by applying to these information specific colors with symbolic and historical values rescued from determined context, fact, person, or entity, it is possible to transfer such values, positive or negative, to them. (GUIMARÃES, 2003, p. 2)

Estado de Minas' choice of black color connects directly to these cultural contexts. For Brazil, the color of mourning is black. This expression of mourning in the published content is perceived before the texts, as Garcia (1990) observes in an experiment he carried out in the United States using a device called "eye tracker" to trace the itinerary of reading a newspaper page. The experiment concluded the two information the eyes perceive first are photographs and colors; only later do people pay attention to texts.

It is worth stressing the choice for coloring texts in yellow and white, which, as opposed to black, are respectively the two colors with the most luminous contrast. All these deliberate choices communicate in advance what the reader will find in the issue: the production of meaning.

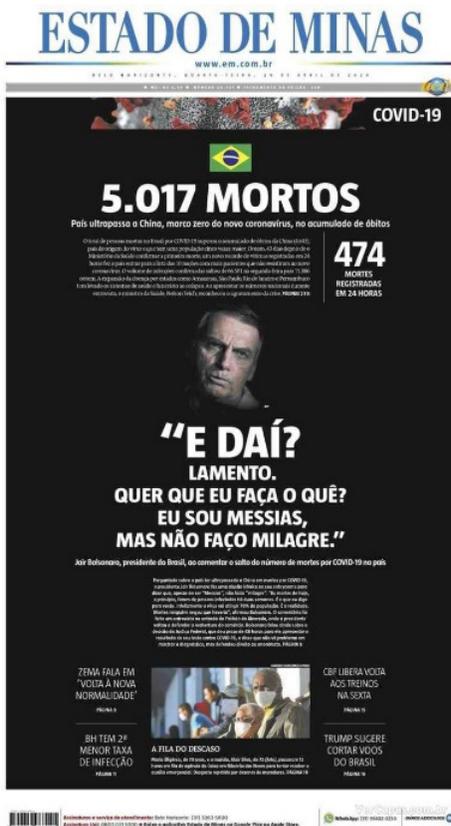
### **"I am Messiah, but I don't perform miracles"**

The following cover was published on April 29, 2020 (Figure 3). On the previous day, Brazil had crossed the mark of five thousand deaths in the covid-19 pandemic, exceeding the total number of losses recorded in China, the country where the virus first emerged and whose population is five times bigger than Brazil's.

The publication came out amidst a context of arm wrestling between the Ministry of Health - that was following recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO) - and the President of the Republic, Jair Bolsonaro, who defended the end of social isolation and the adoption of medications of unproven efficacy as a treatment protocol in the country. On that date, 43 days after the confirmation of the first death, Brazil joined the list of 10 countries with the highest number of covid-19 cases and deaths, especially in the states of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Amazonas. In the Ministry of Health's daily press conference, the then minister Nelson Teich admitted – as did his predecessor Luís Mandetta – that the pandemic was far from being under control in Brazilian territory.

In the media coverage, the press insisted, at every opportunity, on questioning the president about the number of deaths and whether he intended to act differently as the pandemic progressed. Many of these interviews were carried out collectively at times when Jair Bolsonaro allowed journalists closer access. When asked about the number of deaths on that date, the answer was emphatic and became *Estado de Minas*' main headline:

Figure 3 – *Estado de Minas*, April 29, 2020



Source: *Estado de Minas* (2020)

By adopting the poster cover model, assuming the language of popular newspapers, and by connecting its main texts (in larger font size), the number of 5,017 deaths, and the reproduction of the president's statement, "So what? I am sorry. What do you want me to do? I am Messiah [Messiah], but I don't perform miracles," the newspaper breaks with the tradition of writing headlines – usually journalistic – to make the president's voice its own reproduced in quotation marks.

Moreover, the publication emphasizes a policy that reflects the lack of concern of the country's top leadership in controlling or managing the number of deaths. The explicit phrase "So what?" translates the oral vocabulary used daily by the population to demonstrate insignificance in the face of confrontation and such an impactful reality in the everyday lives of Brazilian families. Connected to the number of deaths, it becomes evident what Achille Mbembe (2016) characterizes as necropolitics: instead of the control over lives exercised by biopower (in Michel Foucault's words), there is a part of politics that stimulates – or does not care about – people's deaths:

[...] contemporary forms of subjugating life to the power of death (necropolitics) are deeply reconfiguring the relations between resistance, sacrifice, and terror. I have demonstrated that the notion of biopower is insufficient to account for contemporary forms of the subjugation of life to the power of death. Moreover, I have put forward the notion of necropolitics, or necropower, to account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximally destroying persons and creating death-worlds, that is, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead. (MBEMBE, 2016, p. 29)

In a vast population like Brazil's, where there is glaring social inequality, contradicting medical and scientific recommendations is equivalent to creating a "death-world," as seen with the growing number of deaths as a result of the disease. The choice to make the headline the reproduction of a statement by the president brings the publication even

closer to its readers, using a “textual orality” (MIRANDA, 2009; DIAS, 1996) that is typical of popular journalism.

In the newspaper’s “statement-headline,” the direct reference to religion with a play on the word Messiah also draws attention. Referring to his own family name (Jair Messias Bolsonaro), at that moment, the president shifts its meaning to say that he is not a savior, the biblical messiah, the one who overcomes death and takes away the sin of the world. The effect used in the president’s picture, with dark tones and shadow on his face (unlike the divine light of the savior), is associated with this headline, placing him as a bearer of death by referring to classic representations of the figure of death with a black hood that shows hopelessness and can, at any moment, seek out the living sick.

Assuming this role of “non-savior,” the president shows signs that he does not know or would not act to stop the deaths, attributing this condition to a miracle or divine intervention that should have occurred in the country. The discourse of necropolitics, evidenced on the cover of the newspaper, demonstrates the mass destruction of lives is not a problem, while at the same time it tends to impact the reader. That is sensory journalism present in a reference newspaper, the mixing of two languages from different models of journalistic production but which together explain the position of the publication in relation to the drastic and dramatic situation.

### **“Everyone is invited: 1,300 people at the barbecue”**

Ten days after the above issue, the number of deaths practically doubled in the country. And, in its routine journalistic coverage, the press asked the President of the Republic once again about these facts and whether his positions would change in the face of the considerable increase in deaths. The answer to this question was that a barbecue would take place at Palácio da Alvorada on the following weekend (Figure 4), leading the newspaper to make explicit once again the policy of mass deaths by linking a statement the president made in early March – when Brazil

registered the first cases – referring to covid-19 as “a minor flu” to the death toll of the previous day and the presidential intention of holding a barbecue in that moment of perplexity:

Figure 4 – *Estado de Minas*, May 9, 2020

**ESTADO DE MINAS**  
www.em.com.br  
RUA MARCELO TAVARES, 1000 - JARDIM SÃO JOÃO - Belo Horizonte - Minas Gerais - CEP: 31130-000

**“Uma gripezinha”**  
Ironizado pelo presidente, vírus se espalhou rapidamente e sobrecarregou sistemas de saúde e funerário

8 de maio

**9.897  
BRASILEIROS  
MORTOS**

Brasil registra 751 mortos em 24 horas, o terceiro recorde diário de vítimas apenas esta semana

**“Está todo mundo convidado:  
1.300 pessoas no churrasco”**

**ZERO**  
MORTA E HOSPIÇOS  
DOS ESTADOS  
MAIS Atingidos

**ZERO**  
REUNIÃO COM  
MÉDICOS NA  
LINHA DE FRENTE

**ZERO**  
ENCONTRO  
COM FAMILIARES  
DE VÍTIMAS

Publicação semanal de 16 páginas. Belo Horizonte: 2013. 2014. 2015. 2016. 2017. 2018. 2019. 2020. 2021. 2022. 2023. 2024. 2025. 2026. 2027. 2028. 2029. 2030. 2031. 2032. 2033. 2034. 2035. 2036. 2037. 2038. 2039. 2040. 2041. 2042. 2043. 2044. 2045. 2046. 2047. 2048. 2049. 2050. 2051. 2052. 2053. 2054. 2055. 2056. 2057. 2058. 2059. 2060. 2061. 2062. 2063. 2064. 2065. 2066. 2067. 2068. 2069. 2070. 2071. 2072. 2073. 2074. 2075. 2076. 2077. 2078. 2079. 2080. 2081. 2082. 2083. 2084. 2085. 2086. 2087. 2088. 2089. 2090. 2091. 2092. 2093. 2094. 2095. 2096. 2097. 2098. 2099. 2100. 2101. 2102. 2103. 2104. 2105. 2106. 2107. 2108. 2109. 2110. 2111. 2112. 2113. 2114. 2115. 2116. 2117. 2118. 2119. 2120. 2121. 2122. 2123. 2124. 2125. 2126. 2127. 2128. 2129. 2130. 2131. 2132. 2133. 2134. 2135. 2136. 2137. 2138. 2139. 2140. 2141. 2142. 2143. 2144. 2145. 2146. 2147. 2148. 2149. 2150. 2151. 2152. 2153. 2154. 2155. 2156. 2157. 2158. 2159. 2160. 2161. 2162. 2163. 2164. 2165. 2166. 2167. 2168. 2169. 2170. 2171. 2172. 2173. 2174. 2175. 2176. 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According to the association of photos, the service of the gravediggers increases at each declaration of the president. And they seem to be expecting an increasingly worse situation as Bolsonaro smiles and announces a barbecue at Palácio da Alvorada (bottom photo). The “minor flu” in the beginning resulted in almost 10,000 deaths (on that date). And the response the population would receive is a crowded party teasing and mocking those who defend social distancing and prevention measures as safe ways to reduce contamination and deaths in the country.

Repeated three times, the word “Zero” in yellow criticizes the president’s stance by noting that there was no meeting with victims’ families, no visits to the worst affected hospitals, and no meetings with frontline medical teams. The newspaper suggests to its readers the feeling they should have – indignation.

This sensory game is part of the editorial composition, the cover’s poster layout, the verbal and non-verbal elements, and the use of irony derivatives on two occasions: “A minor flu:’ mocked by the president, the virus spread quickly and overloaded health and funeral systems,” at the top of the page, and “President Jair Bolsonaro said that ‘whoever is at the entrance of Palácio da Alvorada will be welcome’ in the party and joked about having up to 3,000 guests.” This information consolidates the position adopted by the publication as news value: current events, proximity, relevance, and exceptionality relative to the facts.

### **“Life is made of choices” / “Those on the right take chloroquine, those on the left take... *tubaina!*”**

Next, we opted for a double analysis since the publications are only four days apart. The headlines in both issues are also connected directly, creating a narrative for the publication’s regular readers. On the left side of Figure 5, we find the May 16, 2020, edition, which shows a more emphatic position by composing the map of Brazil with cemetery crosses. The image associated with the headline “Adrift” clearly objects to President Jair Bolsonaro’s stance in the fight against the disease, which had reached the mark of 14,817 deaths the day before. As we have

underlined above, the choice of black color anticipates grief, which can take on two connotations in both publications: the great loss of lives due to the disease or the political crisis the government itself created by letting the post of minister of health vacant while conducting the main issues of the fight against the pandemic. This reading is possible only if we observe two sub-headlines present in the issues: “‘We lost a month. Let us pray.’ – Luiz Mandetta, former minister of Health,” and “‘Life is made of choices’ – Nelson Teich, former minister of Health” (in the May 16 issue) and “1,179 deaths recorded in 24 hours. And no minister of Health,” in the main headline of May 20.

Figure 5 –*Estado de Minas*, May 16, 2020, and May 20, 2020



Source: *Estado de Minas* (2020)

Criticism against President Bolsonaro's exercise of power is also expressed in reference to the adoption of a medical treatment using "chloroquine," a reason for disagreements between the president and the health ministers, which led to Mandetta's exoneration and Teich's resignation. On the cover of the May 16 edition, the newspaper states that "Recent research disapproves chloroquine" in a sub-headline to the left of the map of Brazil. On May 20, another controversial presidential statement converted into a headline, "Those on the right take chloroquine, those on the left take... tubaína [any local soft drink brand]," followed by a photo of the president smiling, calls attention to the moment the country reached the mark of 1,179 deaths in 24 hours.

The newspaper confronts the smiley President of Brazil and his irony towards the disease with another statement, but this time by the President of the United States, Donald Trump, for whom Bolsonaro has declared admiration on several occasions: "I don't want anyone coming here and infecting our people," a phrase pronounced by the head of the US government when announcing the interruption of flights to and from Brazil. The newspaper explores the national-political context and creates tension between the policies the two countries adopted, reinforcing that Brazilian decisions are so harmful that even its main international political partner closed air borders with the strong argument of protecting the lives of Americans from visitors potentially infected with covid-19.

## **Final considerations**

Although the covid-19 pandemic is not over yet in Brazil as we construct this work, exercising an attentive eye on print journalism is important to understand how the media portrays, in real-time, the anguish, pain, and suffering experienced by the entire Brazilian population.

We selected four editions published in April and May 2020, a period when a series of political and public health crises took shape and intensified, to discuss how the reference press assumes a different form from the usual one, opting for frames that mark the strength of

narratives, the colorful layouts that recall the fatalities, and the modes of operating journalism that come closer to the segment called popular journalism.

In this perspective, this research aimed to discuss the covers of *Estado de Minas*, a mainstream print newspaper, which, facing a pandemic in the country linked to constant political crises, has used sensory journalism to attract its readership and, in a certain sense, innovate its way of doing journalism in such unstable days.

During the period of covid-19-induced confinement, we noticed a change in the graphic design of the covers of the newspaper under analysis. We identified strategies that reinforce these narrative angles, as in the poster cover that associates the photograph of the current president with another of gravediggers waiting for a burial. That is, instead of a sensible attitude from the head of government, each of his statements - "I'm not a gravedigger," "minor flu," "so, what?" -, his party at the *Palácio do Planalto*, his invitation to crowding, and his mocking of those who recommend social distancing to reduce contagion worsen the situation, increasing the virus' spread, the death toll, and consequently, the services of gravediggers. In this way, sensory journalism invites readers to be careful, attentive, and indignant.

Before social isolation, *Estado de Minas* articulated the structure of the cover on a white background that alluded to the feeling of lightness, creating the visual perception of the "page's breathing." Differently, during the confinement, the white background is changed to black, pointing to the feeling of death, mourning, confinement, and suffocation that the pandemic imposed on the country.

Another relevant change was the structural one. The covers in the form of a poster were impactful, approaching only the political news, focusing on statements by President Jair Messias Bolsonaro that represented the unpreparedness and neglect with which the executive power dealt with the growth in the number of deaths by covid-19.

The repetition of these graphic elements, combined with the President's statements and the increase in the number of new cases and

deaths, was used as a visual identification strategy to illustrate and draw attention to discrepancies in the executive power's discourse and acts.

At the same time, covers made a hybrid of reference journalism and popular newspapers, noticeable by how they stamped excerpts of authorities' discourses, highlighting the president's statements and confronting them with official sources on the growing numbers of new cases and deaths.

However, statements by the head of the executive power confronted with the escalating numbers of the virus' spread and lethality signaled a natural path to the extraordinary. In view of this, the newspaper adopted a visual strategy inclined to sensationalism.

During the period analyzed for this research, the combination of these elements represented and exposed the dynamics of necropolitics put into effect. That is, the discursive strategies present in the materials demonstrate the newspaper's intention to impact readers, promoting sensations, stimulating questions, and, above all, the ability to feel indignation before the mockery and the pain and suffering of families who have lost their loved ones without having the right to say a dignified farewell.

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