

## DEMONIZING THE BORDER OF BRAZIL-PARAGUAY: A TEST ON MEDIA VIOLENCE

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### ABSTRACT

In this manuscript, we seek to present and analyze the sociocultural facts that engender the media demonization of the Brazil / Paraguay border by the mass communication. The aim of this paper was to discuss in a succinct way the influence of the mass media in the construction of the social imaginary of Paraguayans and Brazilians with respect to the construction of representations on the phenomenon of violence on the Brazil / Paraguay border, especially in border cities of Pedro Juan Caballero (PY) and Ponta Porã (BR), as well as Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguacu (BR). In this manuscript a bibliographic and documentary methodology was adopted. The theoretical background adopted in the sequencing of argumentation is based on authors working with the mass communication, media and frontier categories, as well as researchers and theoreticians in the fields of communication sciences, anthropology, sociology and philosophy. This manuscript shows that it is necessary to elaborate discursive strategies that aim at the construction of other understandings about the reality of the Brazil / Paraguay border. Understandings that can be apprehended and interpreted beyond the media discourse about the Brazil / Paraguay border.

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### INTRODUCTION

The Paraguayan city Pedro Juan Caballero (Latitude: 22 ° 32.8332 'S Longitude: 55 ° 43.9998' O) make borders the Brazilian city called Ponta Porã. The municipality of Ponta Porã is located at the south of the Center-West region of Brasil, state of Mato Grosso do Sul (Coordinates: 22°32'09"S 55°43'33"W). On the other hand, Paraguayan city Ciudad del Este (Latitude: 25°30.5832 'S Longitude: 54°36.6666' O) make border with Foz do Iguacu in Brazil. Foz do Iguacu is the Brazilian city on the border of Iguacu Falls (Coordinates: 25°33'S 54°35'W). These cities are portrayed by the Brazilian and Paraguayan media as violent cities. In view of the above, such borders between countries carry with them a stigma that generates the marginalization of Paraguayan citizens, as if everyone participated or at least agreed to the illegal activities

that take place there (RABOSSO, 2004). In this sense, often presented by the Brazilian and Paraguayan media as locus of illegality and abandonment, the frontier ends up being seen, for those who are outside, under a dichotomous view. This corresponds to two different points of view: the first point the "shopping paradise", where it is possible to find the most varied types of products at prices much lower than in Brazil; On the other, it is synonymous with illegality and marginality, so much so that "Paraguayan" became a term widely used to designate something false or adulterated. Both images are also related to the commercial dynamics that unfold in the border; however, are not the only ones. More than a space of commercial exchanges, it is a space of experiences, perceived and conceived differently by those who pass there (DUTRA; THOMAZ JUNIOR, 2010). The present paper aims to discuss and reveal the influence of the mass media in the construction

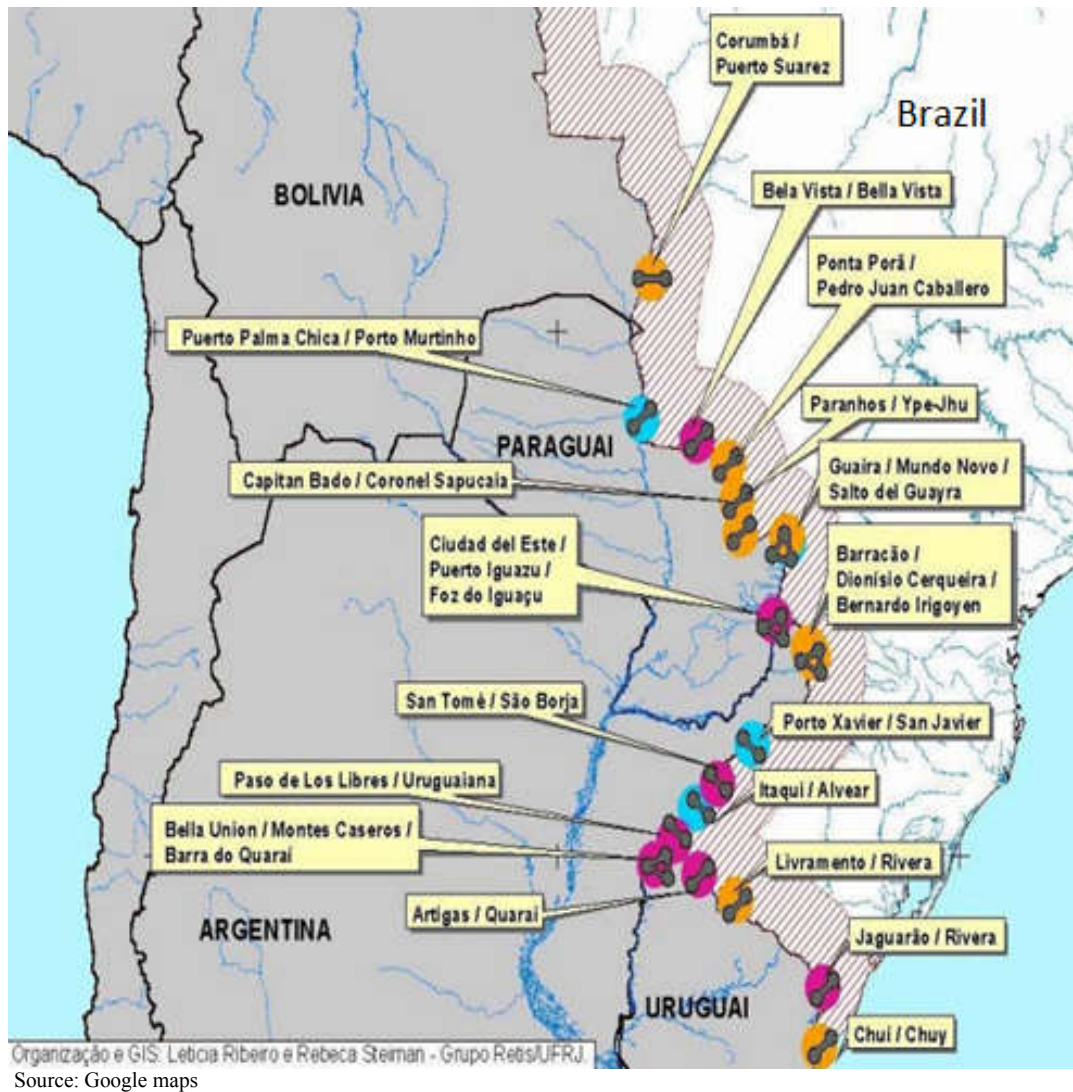


Figure 1. Maps of the various cities of Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina which border the Brazil

of the social imaginary of Brazilians and Paraguayans regarding violence in the border cities of Pedro Juan Caballero (PY) and Ponta Porã (BR), as well as Ciudad del Este and Foz do Iguazu (BR). The relevance of this discussion is related to the need to elaborate strategies that aim at the construction of other understandings about the reality of the Brazil / Paraguay border. That is, understandings that can be apprehended and interpreted beyond the media discourse on the Brazil/Paraguay border.

### Demonizing the border of Brazil-Paraguay: media violence in perspective

There are some literary and cinematographic productions that contribute to stigmatizing the frontier as a space for violence. Books written in Portuguese as "País-Bandido: crime tipo exportação" reflects in the title the biased view that runs through all work (WAGNER, 2003). According to Albuquerque (2010, p. 40), the book refers to the region as Pedro Juan Caballero (Amambay-Paraguay) and Ponta Porã (Mato Grosso do Sul - Brazil) and extends to Itapiranga and Bernardo Irigoyen (Misiones-Argentina). Those book is the result of several reports made in the regions mentioned. According to Wagner (2003, p.17), the bandit country has no official existence, and is located between Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay being the 13th of South America.

Its extension is equivalent to half the state of the territory and population of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil. Figure 1 shows the positioning of the various cities of Paraguay, Bolivia and Argentina which border the Brazil. In this way, this book has several reports about the economic activities that stand out most in the so-called bandit-like region such as smuggling, piracy, planting and exporting marijuana, robbery and theft of vehicles and cell phones, trade of cigarettes, trafficking in drugs, among other illicit goods. In this context, "bandits" are considered the heroes of the country, authority is limited to the possession, possession and use of guns, ie, it is expressed through the "pipe of the revolver"; In this bandit country, what is most exported is "violence" in all its forms, colors and dislikes (ALBUQUERQUE, 2010, p. 42). Film productions that deal with the border between Brazil and Paraguay always do so from the bias of violence, crime and drug trafficking. The movie *The Matadors* (1997), by Beto Brant; The film "Border" of David Cardoso is a film that was not shown commercially because it follows the same line of the glamorization of the violence "Tri- Border" of Jose Padilha, they are part of this process of demonization of the borders. Not only in Brazil and Paraguay, but also other countries such as the border between Mexico and the United States are also dedicated to the production of films involving frontier regions. The movie "Get the Gringo" by director Adrian Grunberg, starring and scripted in partnership with Grunberg by Mel

Gibson, adopts the same stereotypes about the border, that is: space par excellence for corruption, crime, drug trafficking and abandonment. The aforementioned films were recorded (and will be recorded, in the case of the Triple Frontier) on the borders of Brazil with Paraguay and Argentina. Their scenario are always the same: gunslingers on the lookout of any victim; Smugglers and traffickers involved with the police; Shots, death, fear and insecurity. They pass the image - and reinforce the already existing ones - that the border is a space where the danger rages through the streets diuturnamente; Where impunity reigns; Corruption, where law and order do not exist and when they exist only serve to protect the powerful; Finally, it reinforces and reproduces prejudice - already deeply embedded in the social imaginary of both Brazilians and Paraguayans who do not live on the frontier - against the inhabitants of the border, associating them with the space in which they live, these are also seen, indistinctly, as Traffickers - in fact or potential - as dangerous, violent, bellicose and dishonest. There is a prejudiced view of the Brazilian in relation to the Paraguayan. In this way, the Brazilian reveals his intolerance, his lackluster, his own dishonesty; Not only to the Paraguayans, but to themselves. It is a concept, as Albuquerque Júnior (2007) points out, hastily generated, conceived without critical examination, is an unfavorable opinion or feeling, formed a priori that comes before any real effort to understand the other, the different, the foreigner, The strange, in its difference and alterity.

The Brazilian and Paraguayan media emphasize the episodes in which violence and the moral and physical degradation of the human being are the main theme. They present the region as if it were the only one in the world where such events unfold. They oversize events, color their nuances, disregard the context in which events occur; They dramatize the reality of the frontier and represent it in a caricature, deformed and illusory form. To verify this assertion, just be aware of the stories that are published in newspapers and magazines, both printed and televised as online, in Brazil and also in Paraguay. This determination of the media to exploit the bad news had already been observed by McLuhan (1964) when he analyzed that journals, since the birth of journalism, had a sick propensity to report all that was a public or private disaster on land, Sea and air, fire, flood; In short, all sorts of particular misery and horror. Thus, news of truth was bad news and, according to McLuhan (1964), no means of communication outweighed the newspapers when it came to exposing the miseries and misfortunes of humanity.

The affirmation of McLuhan (1964) adds to Michaud's (1989) analysis of violence. According to Michaud's (1989), the media need violent episodes because it feeds on what is sensational, unusual and spectacular. Thus, the reality of the events is inverted, made up and transformed into a spectacle, constituting, in this way, another product to be traded in the market of attractions explored by the mass media (DEBORD, 1997). According to Michaud (1996) - adhering to the catharsis theory -, this type of mediatic spectacle and the violence it contains has a cathartic function, externalizing an atavistic violence present in the social unconscious, in this perspective, scenes of violence are a symptom of the nervousness of society. Thus, according to Michaud, this may make children more violent, but certainly contribute to excite them. Media seeks audience and financial gain. Everybody knows that news breaks, soap operas and show programs are sold by broadcasters and are played by multinationals, who see

in these timeframes the opportunity to reach more consumers for their products and / or services. That is why the great conglomerates of communication strive to show to the exhaustion, through the media that they command, all the sort of disasters, wars and misfortunes that take place around the world. In this way, social problems and malaises have a deformed visibility, they are travestied of spectacle (CHAMPAGNE, 2000).

In this context, the means of communications exploit the social problems and inequalities, not with the purpose of making a social critique, but with the intention that the exposing and hyperdimensioning ills - as if reality in its harshness needed more "Color" - attract the indoctrinated curiosity of the viewer and that, between one death and another one, bad news or even the futilities disguised as entertainment, one can sell a space for a commercial; as well as perhaps, a space for political marketing by some government that needs to hide its inefficiency or dishonesty through orchestrated lies. Lyotard (1987), Baudrillard (1991) and Debord (1997) call attention to the fact that the media are not tied to the social context in which they operate; that is: they are structurally embedded in an articulated system that is closely related to several other social dimensions of the market economy in vogue. Thus, violence in its various manifestations can be understood as a social phenomenon and occur in any society, always subjecting itself to the dialectical circumstances and injunctions imposed by the socio-cultural context in which the events listed as violent. Consequently the media among its objectives, not only aims to reach and conquer specific markets, but also to relentlessly inquire into the ways in which individuals and groups express themselves, thereby attempting to shape and direct social behavior and representations in their favor. Such a conjecture does not advocate that the media aspire to convince its recipients, but tries to direct their opinions towards the issues that it deems necessary and to be discussed, influencing, as they are presented, in the opinion of the attendance of those who confer audience. Thus, crime and violence associated with it constitute part of this dynamic that makes up the flagship of media production.

The responsibility of the media is not limited to the conveyance of facts that affect a change of perception of reality. According to Nogueira (2001), the media reports the facts, but does not contribute with solutions, because it is distanced from reality, committed to an "old agenda" that is dedicated to competing with other vehicles. Such competition has characterized journalistic production for a long time - ever since the Industrial Revolution in its various forms of expression in a mere business; On the other hand, the news into a highly profitable commodity for the companies that exploit this branch of activity (TRAQUINA, 2005). Bourdieu (1997), in part agreeing with the authors cited above, believes that the struggle around the audience and the constant search for journalistic holes is inextricably linked to the capitalist trade logic. Thus, Bourdieu (1997) argues that the journalistic and mediatic material produced in this context contributes to the creation and maintenance of stereotyped representations of the world. Concerning the extreme way in which the media convey the facts related to violence and crime, Zaluar (1994/95) and Adorno (1995) point out that, despite the real increase, the media's conception of the categories mentioned, tends to engender far more dread than the very dimension of the facts, notably in strata of the population considered by medians. This assertion is supported by the blatant visibility

with which they are treated - by the press - the facts that have crime, the criminal and public safety as subjects. According to Adorno (1995), the dramatization of events is closely related to the expressions and venerabilities present in popular sentiments that delight and identify with the representation of the phenomenon in the way that it is presented to them. Thus, the representations that a given society itemize to categorize the manifestations of deviant behavior of its members are explored by the press - and other media - in the clear intention of reaching, with its subjects, an avid audience for stereotyped and historically constructed representations under the base of epiphenomena. However, representations provide links and convergences between the social and the individual, leading to the elaboration - by the members of a given society - of a kind of knowledge about their own experiences. In this way, representations tend to guide social actions simply because they are considered as manifestations of reality. Regarding the avidness of the aforementioned audience, the argument of some news professionals is that journalistic matters - both written and televised and film - that emphasize aspects related to violence are better accepted and, therefore, more easily sold to the consuming.

### Conclusion

Despite the undeniable contributions of the mass media to the denunciation of reprehensible behaviors, specifically by the political class, it is also necessary to recognize their harmful influences on the constitution of the social imaginary in relation to various themes pertaining to the socio-cultural reality. Its influence is felt in politics, in that it manipulates information to privilege this or that candidate when in election season; In the affective reality of the viewers, when it creates national heroes and transforms them into martyrs when of their deaths; The influence of the media, both negative and positive, is felt in the concrete reality of individuals living in society. With regard to violence, it is transformed into a show, a product for sale in the aesthetic-imagery market, either through police reports, action films and / or books whose main propaganda consists in portraying the naked reality and Raw, without makeup; A strategy so common in investigative journalism and the production of documentaries. It is not a question here of demonizing the media or the professionals who produce it; or to defend the theoretical-scientific rhetoric in which a representation of the media prevails as an evil influence, in which it always appears as villainous, dangerous and harmful to society as a whole (RIAL, 2004). What has been tried to demonstrate is that it is necessary to recognize that the media, in their various expressions, some more less, are, from their origins, a generator of models of conduct, conveying representations (sometimes mistaken) and values, and in what concerns the categories of violence and crime in the border context, teaching and fomenting fear (HIKIJ, 1998).

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