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DEVELOPING A METHODOLOGICAL PROTOCOL FOR THE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF REPORTAGE



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ABSTRACT – This article proposes the development of a methodological protocol, the Critical Analysis of Reportage (CAR), for the qualitative and quantitative evaluation of reportage, understood as the most prestigious journalistic genre, yet one that has been the subject of scarce reflection. Throughout the article, a literature review is conducted on the consolidation of studies in journalism and on reporting, considered not only as a privileged object of research but also as a benchmark for best professional practices.

Keywords: Journalism. Reportage. Critical Analysis of Reportage (CAR). Communication. Methodology.

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CONSTRUINDO UM PROTOCOLO METODOLÓGICO PARA ANÁLISE CRÍTICA DE REPORTAGENS

RESUMO – O presente artigo propõe a construção de um protocolo metodológico, a Análise Crítica de Reportagens (ACR), para avaliação qualitativa e quantitativa da reportagem, entendida como gênero jornalístico de maior prestígio, mas que constitui objeto de escassas reflexões. No percurso, faz-se uma revisão bibliográfica sobre a consolidação dos estudos em jornalismo e sobre a reportagem, considerada não apenas como objeto privilegiado de pesquisas, mas também como balizador das melhores práticas profissionais.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo. Reportagem. Análise Crítica de Reportagens (ACR). Comunicação. Metodologia.

EL DESARROLLO DE UN PROTOCOLO METODOLÓGICO PARA EL ANÁLISIS CRÍTICO DE REPORTAJES PERIODÍSTICOS

RESUMEN – El presente artículo propone la elaboración de un protocolo metodológico, el Análisis Crítico de Reportajes (ACR), para la evaluación cualitativa y cuantitativa del reportaje, comprendido como el género periodístico de mayor prestigio, pero que constituye objeto de escasas reflexiones. A lo largo del artículo, se realiza una revisión bibliográfica sobre la consolidación de los estudios en Periodismo y sobre el reportaje, tomado no solo como objeto privilegiado de investigación, sino también como referente de las mejores prácticas profesionales.

Palabras clave: Periodismo. Reportaje. Análisis Crítico de Reportajes (ACR). Comunicación. Metodología.

1 Introduction

Journalism studies have gained momentum in recent decades in Brazil, following the consolidation of specific graduate programs, despite criticism from sectors of the broader field of communication and information that feared its fragmentation. The end of this environment of dispute – which relegated disciplinary fields such as journalism, radio and TV broadcasting, and advertising to practical disciplines, stripping them of their reflective dimension (Meditsh, 2012, pp. 105–118) – led to a greater diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives, with a transdisciplinary approach that enriches the field of research. The scope of research expanded beyond press historiographies and discursive, framing, or content analyses of journalistic products, and new conceptual frameworks were highlighted to address its subjects, such as intersectionality and decoloniality (Martinez et al., 2016; Veiga, 2014; Lago et al., 2018;

Melo da Silva & Souza Aguiar, 2023), work and professional identity (Pereira, 2020; Mick & Estayno, 2020; Figaro, 2018; Ruellan, 2011; Adghirni, 2005), constructive or solutions-based journalism (Simões, 2022; McIntyre & Lough, 2019), and narratives (Soster et al., 2023; Soster, 2023).

We argue, however, that there are still many gaps in journalism studies, which, in most of the cases, involve the reproduction of formulas previously endorsed by the field. Among these gaps, in our view, one of the most significant is the scarcity of methodological procedures for analysing the most prestigious genre in professional practice: the reportage.

This may be due to the polysemic nature of the term. What, after all, is reportage? A theory, technique, method, as suggested by Moser (2021), or a methodology? In a classic book adopted by numerous Brazilian universities, Lage ([2001], 2008) treats reporting as a professional practice, not as a textual genre, emphasizing issues such as agenda setting, the selection of information sources, and the conduct of interviews.

This discussion refers to the very process of constituting journalistic discourse, that is, the way in which certain events are represented and recognized as worthy of being reported. As Guirado (2004, p. 27, our translation) observes, “events [...] emerge from reality with certain characteristics that encourage the press to portray their peculiarities”. This perspective helps reinforce an understanding of the interpretive nature of journalistic practice – an interpretive process already discussed by authors such as Guerra (2008) – and is central to understanding the specificities of reportage.

In numerous studies – and even in common sense – reportage has been described as the most profound and authentic form of journalism. Recognized as “the essence of the profession, the truest way of being a journalist” (Traquina, 2013, p. 43), it occupies a position of prestige, serving as a key element in the construction of the professional identity of those who work as journalists, allowing them to “convey, in a more emphatic way, the phenomena that concern, scandalize, or ennoble society” (Guirado, 2004, p. 21).

Despite its value and relevance, reportage is still the subject of scarce academic reflection, often being reduced to interview and research techniques and, in many other cases, confined to news production. But reportage and reporting news are not synonyms,

warns Magno (2006). The researcher points out that style guides generally “offer a mistaken idea of the feature story”, mystifying the journalist’s role as “a god capable of capturing all the dimensions of an event”, and minimizing the reportage as being “merely a longer, more in-depth news item” (Magno, 2006, p. 24).

For Bahia (1990), a reportage differs from feature stories and news items in many ways:

a) a news item reports the event on the same day it occurs or the following day; reportage explains how it happened; b) a news item is limited to the announcement; reportage expands on it, provides details, and reports the facts extensively; c) a news item does not go beyond notification; reportage goes beyond mere notification and presents the details, the examination of cause and effect, the interpretation, and the impact of the facts; d) a news item presents a single version of the event; reportage constitutes the sum of the different versions of the same event. (Bahia, 1990, pp. 49-50).

Reportage, as we have seen, differs from the news report in its approach, scope, and depth. It conducts a detailed investigation that not only contextualizes events but also allows for the exposition of broader contexts, sometimes drawing from human stories that represent situations of general interest, involving archetypes such as tragedies and heroes’ journeys, or by piecing together puzzles of events from accounts that offer diverse perspectives, seeking to make sense of facts that interest a large number of people, or even by offering scoops – highly relevant information, provided firsthand.

Insisting on constructing reportage in a fragmented manner – considering stages such as source selection, data gathering, editing, and publication – ignores, however, the richness and complexity of the journalistic process. This approach inadequately simplifies what is, in fact, a set of dynamic and interdependent interactions (Schudson, 2010; Traquina, 2005).

This article therefore aims to contribute to journalism studies by proposing the development of a methodological protocol, the Critical Analysis of Reportage (CAR). This effort is linked to a doctoral project by the second author, under the supervision of the first, which seeks to enable the analysis of a large corpus of award-winning news reports, understood as paradigmatic (Vieira, 2024) for the field.

The proposal considers the influence of organizational constraints, professional ethos, and the textual structure and language adopted in the construction of reportage, understood as

a specific journalistic format. It seeks to contribute to academic and professional advancement in journalism, reflecting on its legitimacy as a scientific field and contributing to its qualification as a professional practice and reflective knowledge. This discussion requires a close look at the “paths already traveled” (Resende, 2008, p. 182), with the aim of understanding advances and gaps.

Therefore, in the next section we will discuss how journalism constitutes itself simultaneously as a field of research and professional practice, posing a series of theoretical and methodological challenges.

2 Journalism as a field of research and practice

As a professional practice, journalism seeks to transform fragments of apprehensible reality into narratives, playing a central role in recording events and contributing to making sense of everyday life, which confers upon it historical, political, economic, and sociocultural functions. It is, moreover, a disciplinary field of knowledge, a form of knowledge that draws on reflections from various other areas, such as Sociology, Philosophy, Political Science, Anthropology, and History. These fields investigate journalism from different perspectives, analysing everything from its social and ethical function to its political and cultural impacts, as noted by Zelizer (2004).

One of the challenges faced by the field is to develop its own theoretical framework that, at the same time, engages in dialogue with these related fields. This effort involves rethinking fundamental concepts, such as objectivity and journalistic ethics, as well as developing research methods that articulate the specificities of professional practice with scientific requirements – beyond Cartesian thought and the positivist paradigm.

Until the mid-20th century, journalism faced an epistemological challenge that hindered its academic legitimization. It was viewed in many countries as a professional practice that could be carried out without specific graduate training or the production of systematic knowledge (Machado, 2004).

This scenario began to change when journalism came to be understood not only as a technique but also as a field of study capable of validating knowledge produced through scientific methods – and perhaps, one might speculate, this is where much of its positivist bias

stems from, with an idealized pursuit of values such as objectivity and impartiality.

It is from this approach in search of scientific validation that the understanding of journalism as a form of knowledge production – and not merely as a technique or social practice – is reinforced. In recent years, conceiving of journalism as a field with its own scientific status has become “a prominent issue in the academic routine of the field”, according to Silva (2008, p. 198). However, there remains a certain resistance to recognizing journalism as an autonomous area of scientific research, as Guerra (2024) points out in a recent essay. In academic circles, research in journalism is often considered a practical or technical extension of the professional activity, rather than an area of theoretical and methodological inquiry. And, in the professional environment, academic findings are often ignored or considered of little practical use, which widens the gap between theory and practice.

Guerra explores the challenges involved in establishing journalism research as a scientific field capable of defining, explaining, and grounding professional practice. For the author, the dispersion of studies across various theoretical and methodological approaches “does not converge in a purposeful way toward a coherent, articulated, and complementary set of concepts and methods capable of leading the field to more specialized and verticalized levels of research” (Guerra, 2024, p. 56).

Journalism, as a field of research, thus constitutes an interdisciplinary space encompassing studies on the practices, processes, products, and social impacts of journalistic communication. It enables the investigation of ethical, technological, and cultural issues, exploring their relationship with society, democracy, and the construction of knowledge, as noted by Medina (2006). Learning journalism, which goes far beyond practical experience in newsrooms, becomes a systematic process that requires specific methodologies – not merely the presentation of new theories in the field or technical training, but above all a teaching-learning dynamic that challenges the mythology surrounding the professional activity and fosters reflective practice.

The advancement of these discussions on the autonomy of the field has allowed, for example, an emphasis on the importance of journalism in the context of platformization, in a contemporary society increasingly embedded in a digital and dynamic environment.

The shortening of distances, the expansion of cooperation between markets, increased access to social media, and the continuous and accelerated flows of information, as Becker (2012) points out, have contributed to these reinventions taking place.

Benetti and Lago (2007) highlight that research in the field often relies on methodologies derived from other areas. This frequently results in “research with a low level of explicitness regarding methodological strategies, in addition to the lack of discourse on method” (p. 18).

In an article on methodological strategies in reporting studies presented at major conferences in the field of Communication that maintain active research groups and networks on journalism – the Brazilian Association of Journalism Researchers (SBPJor), the Brazilian Association of Graduate Programs in Communication (Compós), and the Brazilian Society for Interdisciplinary Communication Studies (Intercom) – between 2014 and 2023, the second author (2024) identifies the predominance of methodologies such as content analysis (CA) and discourse analysis (DA). Although new perspectives, such as ethnography and narratology, are gaining terrain, there is a perceived lack of more specific methodological approaches for the objects under analysis – as highlighted by Machado and Sant’ana (2014), as well Silva et al. (2017).

In this context, it is important to situate the proposal presented here within the set of approaches already employed in the field. Although studies in journalism largely rely on established methods, Critical Analysis of Reportage (CAR) seeks to contribute through the systematic articulation of these procedures, guided by the specificities of reportage as a format and an object.

As part of this effort, Strelow (2007), in her doctoral thesis, proposed the Global Analysis of News Periodicals (AGPJ, for its Portuguese acronym), structured around Johnson’s (1999) communicative circuit. This methodology combines social research techniques to address the key stages of the journalistic process: production, texts, readings, and lived cultures/social relations. Similarly, Silva and Maia (2011) present a methodological protocol for the analysis of journalistic coverage, focusing on identifying traces of the production process in the final product and breaking away from fragmentary approaches that isolate production and reception.

It is not possible, however, to analyse the journalism offered to the public without considering the conditions of production,

which have been profoundly reconfigured in recent years, calling into question the very sustainability of the professional activity.

2.1 Journalistic practice: transformations and challenges

The identity of professional journalists – those working in major media companies – is often associated with a set of values, principles, and beliefs that guide their practices, ideally oriented toward serving the public interest and promoting social change. This view is fostered both by society and by the professionals themselves, who often embrace an ethos committed to truth and the public interest, a sort of missionary spirit. According to Oliveira (2005), in the exercise of their role,

[...] the journalist is also classified as a kind of representative of society, a spokesperson for public opinion, a public servant, which would lead them to have a constant commitment to the “other”. That is, in this image – which highlights the profession's high degree of social responsibility and veers toward a missionary aura – the public would be absolutely prioritized at the expense of the private interests of those in the field. Ultimately, imbued with his mission, the journalist would be uninterested in gains other than those related to his commitment to the truth and the general interest. (Oliveira, 2005, p. 19).

For Grando (2012), ethos determines both the production of journalistic discourse and its reception by society. She explains that this concept “pertains to the images mobilized discursively by the speaker as an argumentative strategy to win the audience's adherence to their discourse. It is, therefore, a discursive resource used for the purpose of persuasion” (p. 98). From this perspective, the missionary ethos of the person acting as a journalist is directly linked to professional identity, understood as a social identity that relates both to individual identity and to that of the group to which they belong.

Organization into specialized groups, such as editorial departments, reinforces not only the existence of a journalistic field but also highlights the social and symbolic complexity of that field (Bourdieu, 1997). This structure, marked by power struggles, norms, and values, serves as a basis for more in-depth academic reflections, connecting directly to the question of journalism's legitimacy as a scientific field, which requires recognition of both its professional practice and its theoretical relevance.

An example of an image built around journalism that, for many years, was able to attract various professionals and young aspiring journalists was that of the hero, as it demands “of the professional a role that goes beyond the limits of journalism and also encroaches on the roles of the police, public authorities, and courts of justice, especially in a country with slow-moving institutions like Brazil” (Oliveira, 2005, p. 46). This representation of the “hero” or “missionary” reflects, in part, the idealized view of journalists, who ultimately bear the commitment to act with social responsibility.

During the first years after the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985), Vieira (1991, p. 36) described a phenomenon he called the “Clark Kent complex”: the idealization of journalists as “superheroes” capable of transforming reality. Traquina (2005, p. 91) corroborates this view, describing it as “the representation of the journalist that most evokes the entire journalistic mythology”. However, it is necessary to reinterpret this image, considering the legitimacy of journalism as a scientific field.

In the face of growing digitization, including the adoption of artificial intelligence tools, new professional routines are being implemented, reshaping textual production, which is increasingly multiplatform. Sodr  (2010) long ago pointed to a problem that remains relevant today: the dominant models of journalistic production are proving increasingly worn out, demanding restructuring. At the same time, initiatives that are alternative and complementary to the traditional press – such as independent agencies and collectives that are gaining momentum – need to establish their own standards of quality and transparency – and in most cases, they do not systematize these in manuals.

It is clear, at this point, that journalism, in establishing itself as an academic and scientific field, has faced significant challenges, but is also opening to a reorganization driven by new social demands and technological advancements.

Combining theory and practice is essential to training journalists who not only master techniques but also critically reflect on the social, ethical, and political impacts of their work, especially in the digital context. Furthermore, in order to address ethical and methodological challenges, it is necessary to develop theoretical frameworks capable of engaging with other fields of knowledge (Resende, 2008). This process of reinvention is essential for journalism to continue fulfilling

its social function and remain relevant in an increasingly connected and dynamic society. This is the backdrop against which we examine reportage as a key journalistic format.

2.2 Reportage as a form of knowledge: time, listening, and journalistic mediation

Medina (2006) argues that, because reportage demands more time for investigation, a diversity of sources, and in-depth contextualization, this format can be analysed through different lenses: knowledge through experience, specialized knowledge, and knowledge through observation. This approach is supported by traditions such as the Chicago School (Park, 2008) and contemporary contributions from authors such as Eduardo Meditsch, in addition to engaging with the New Rhetoric of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, which recognizes argumentation as a central element in the construction of meaning and the validation of knowledge. The reportage thus presents itself as a discursive form that mobilizes arguments, testimonies, and interpretations seeking public credibility, which reinforces its epistemic role in the journalistic field.

Contemporary journalism developed from the mid-20th century onward, as we have seen, on the pillars of objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality. With industrialization and the gradual abandonment of literary journalism, journalism ceased to be a marginalized practice (Machado, 2004) and established itself as a field of research that seeks to validate its knowledge through scientific methodologies.

From there, new pillars were established, such as social responsibility, the public interest, and declared commitment to democracy and citizenship. Historically, these pillars have conditioned journalistic practices to rules, techniques, and values, often used to attempt to erase from the journalistic statement the marks of enunciation inherent to it (Resende, 2005). Epistemologically, this means that journalists began to have incentives to reflect on how journalistic knowledge is generated, what its validity is, and how it impacts society (Meditsch, 2008).

It thus became necessary to recognize that “journalistic information is neither purely objective, nor impartial, nor neutral” (Genro Filho, 1989, p. 215).

The concept of journalistic objectivity emerged between the 1920s and 1930s, in a naive interpretation that gave rise to the metaphor of news as a mirror of reality. It was developed as the “most important professional standard”, capable of aiding in the selection of what would become news and of news sources (Soloski, 1999, p. 96) – a context in which the journalist would be merely a mediator of the reality of the facts, committed to the separation between reality and fiction.

What is impartiality? Who is the impartial subject? The person who practices journalism? According to Sá (1980, p. 3), “impartiality is thus centered on the journalist, who is the entity endowed with this quality. And it is centered on the journalist as a reporter of facts or a creator and transmitter of news”. It is based on the myth of impartiality that journalism constructs information with a certain degree of freedom, omitting, exaggerating, and even creating news based on discourses scarcely marked by a plurality of ideas, with content that is more organizing than representative, overvaluing itself as an important mediator of social relations and interests (Prado & Becker, 2011).

Still within the process of industrialization and professionalization of journalistic activity, supported by objectivity and impartiality as a guarantee of commitment to the truth, another myth was created: the supposed neutrality of journalists.

But is it possible to speak of impartial or neutral news? Guerra (2008) points out that the construction of all news is the result of an interpretive process.

And in the case of reportage, is there room for neutrality? It is important to emphasize that, just as in news, there is no neutrality or impartiality in reporting. The making of a reportage, from the assignment to the final product, involves mechanisms of subjectivity that include a political stance toward events and the world, as Moraes (2022) argues.

Criticism of these classical notions of objectivity, impartiality, and neutrality gained momentum with the understanding of journalism as a specific form of knowledge. The tradition pioneered by the Chicago School, led by Park (2008), already suggested that journalists, like sociologists, are interpreters of social reality, albeit without the same methodological tools. Later, Motta (2013) and Machado (2004) helped consolidate in Brazil the notion of journalism as a form of knowledge, revisited by Palacios (2010) and reinforced

by Meditsch (2005), who argues that journalism produces knowledge through the mediation between events and the public. In this context, reportage emerges as the privileged space for this complex mediation.

Producing a reportage requires time, dislocations, interviewing different sources of information, and historical and social contextualization. As both a product and a process, the reportage articulates different types of knowledge: that of lived experience (based on listening and direct observation), expert knowledge (mediated by professional sources), and knowledge through observation (perceptible in empirical data and the traces of everyday life) (Moser, 2024). This dialogical perspective brings the practice of reportage closer to what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (2005, p. 12) call “types of arguments” in the new rhetoric, in which argumentation is constructed through the plurality of sources and engagement with the reader, rather than through the search for a single, objective truth.

Zelizer (2017), in reflecting on the ways in which journalism deals with public events, highlights the relevance of professional and ethical commitments as structural elements of journalistic legitimacy, especially in strengthening the public sphere.

In this context, Ward (2019) advocates for a journalism ethic based on responsible citizenship, with a focus on promoting justice and pluralism. For the author, journalists must assume an active role in society, which implies a critical stance toward inequalities and a commitment to the collective good. Thus, journalistic production must seek not only truthfulness but also equity and democratic engagement.

Based on this theoretical discussion, it can be argued that reportage is more than a discursive genre: it is a journalistic practice structured by the pursuit of knowledge, marked by a professional ethos that values firsthand information, in-depth analysis, active listening, a plurality of sources, and accountability. In this process, reporters act as epistemic agents, whose practice involves choices, interpretations, and framing that help construct narratives – of greater or lesser acceptance – about social reality in the public sphere.

3 The process of constructing the methodological protocol

Considering the state of the art in journalism studies and specifically in reportage (Bittencourt, 2024), this article proposes the development of a methodological protocol, the Critical Analysis of Reportage (CAR), to characterize and analyze the production of this journalistic format, understood as paradigmatic for both the field of study and professional practice.

CAR is organized according to the following stages: a) identification of the medium and circulation context; b) structuring of content and language used; c) sources and citation formats; d) critical analysis.

To operationalize the protocol, each stage is presented based on the following main elements: objectives, guiding questions, analysis criteria, methodological procedures for data collection, and possible auxiliary instruments. This systematization aims to ensure applicability and analytical rigor, allowing the method to be replicated in different journalistic contexts. The following describes the stages that comprise the CAR methodological protocol.

- Step 1: identification of the medium and circulation context

Objectives: to contextualize the production of the reportage in institutional terms – in which outlet is it presented? In which organization (private, public, nonprofit social organization) was it produced? What are its circulation features?

From a theoretical perspective, the identification of the media outlet is grounded in approaches that recognize journalism as a social and institutional practice. Authors such as Zelizer (2017) and Ribeiro and Sacramento (2020) have focused on this topic. Zelizer understands journalism as a cultural practice, shaped by conventions, routines, and institutions that legitimize its social role. Ribeiro and Sacramento, on the other hand, highlight how media outlets act as mediators of the public sphere, conferring symbolic authority on certain discourses and topics. These theoretical contributions allow us to understand journalistic outlets as actors that occupy specific positions within the media landscape, directly influencing the form and content of news reports.

Guiding questions: in which media outlet(s) was the reportage published? What is its reach?

Analysis criteria:

- Name of the outlet, medium (print, digital, audio, audiovisual).

- Reach (local, regional, national; market data on circulation or audience).

Procedures:

- Gathering information about the media outlet and its institutional affiliation (data provided on the outlet's website and that of its parent organization, literature review on the media outlet and its owners, documentary research).

Auxiliary tools may be adopted based on the specific nature of the corpus under investigation. These include, for example, mapping audience interactions with reportages published on digital platforms, keyword searches in large *corpora*, or the creation of word clouds of expressions used.

- Step 2: structuring of content and language used

Objective: to characterize the textual organization and the target audience for which it is intended.

The architecture of the news report is directly related to how its content is structured and presented to the public. Based on the concept of the "object of reality" (Seixas, 2009), it is understood that the news report not only informs about a fact but also constructs it from an editorial point of view, through choices ranging from thematic organization to the graphic and textual resources employed. Thus, analysing the structure of the report allows us to observe how editorial elements – such as leads, subheadings, images, infographics, and hyperlinks – influence journalistic mediation.

Language is understood here as a structuring element of journalistic practices. Berger (2003) highlights how certain vocabulary choices construct specific visibilities of events, potentially intensifying or attenuating their public impact. The author points out that even in texts intended to be informative, lexical selection functions as a positioning strategy, directly influencing how events are represented. Language analysis, therefore, allows us to identify how the verbal construction of the report can contribute to reinforcing or mitigating certain interpretations of the facts addressed.

Guiding questions: how is text, audio, or video organized? What presentation techniques are used? What kind of language is

adopted, and what target audiences is it addressed to?

Analysis criteria:

- Characterization of the text (expository, narrative, use of first or third person).
- Use of graphic elements (subheadings, boxes, images, infographics, animations) or audio elements (sound bites, background music, historical audio clips, pre-recorded interviews).
- Forms of presentation (single broadcast or series of episodes; division into thematic blocks or sections).

Possible procedures:

- Content analysis, discourse analysis, framing analysis, rhetorical analysis, critical analysis of the narrative.
- Identification of editorial techniques used.
- Observation of the relationship between structure and thematic development.
- Identification of the use of adjectives and the choice of verbs that carry evaluative connotations.
- Classification of the vocabulary used, based on a system of valences (positive, neutral, negative).

- Step 3: sources and citation formats

Objective: to evaluate the diversity of sources featured in a news report in terms of gender, race, age, and the reasons for their selection (experts, authorities, witnesses, or key figures in events, as well as individuals who illustrate specific situations).

In the process of analysing the sources gathered in a reportage, the methodological approach is based on the classification presented by Chagas (2020, p. 57), which compiles various categorizations such as official, corporate, institutional, expert, testimonial, popular, and notable sources, allowing for the identification of patterns of recurrence and inequality of representation in the journalistic material. This systematization offers an objective basis for measuring the degree of diversity and the balance of perspectives present in the report. Beyond formal categorization, the protocol also considers the role played by sources in the construction of content, as proposed by Chagas

(2020), who analyses how certain types of sources are called upon more frequently in specific situations, based on the productive logic of newsrooms. This methodological articulation between classification and function helps us understand how source choices influence the text's informational structure, allowing us to assess the centrality or marginalization of certain social agents in the coverage analysed.

Guiding questions: how many and what types of sources were interviewed? Is there a balance between different perspectives?

Analysis criteria:

- Number of sources.
- Classification of sources used: official, corporate, institutional, expert, eyewitness, popular, and notable.
- Relevance of the selected sources to the topic addressed.
- Degree of identification (full name, qualifications, position, institutional affiliation).
- Frequency and prominence of the sources' statements.

Procedures:

- List all sources mentioned.
- Classify them by type and function.
- Check for balance among viewpoints.

• Step 4: critical analysis

Objective: to produce a well-founded analysis of reportages based on the recorded data, enabling their evaluation in terms of both qualitative and quantitative aspects.

Procedures:

- Compile the partial results from all stages.
- Identify patterns in the treatment of information.
- Prepare a critical synthesis based on the collected evidence.

Tool: analytical report based on the completed forms

These forms serve as the basis for preparing the final report, with arguments grounded in objective criteria. Based on the collected data, it is possible to evaluate the practices adopted in the production process, determining whether there was a guarantee of a counterpoint to the opposing view, whether multiple points of

view were considered, whether care was taken to protect victims' identities, whether stigmatization and generalizations were avoided, and whether the reportage circulation resulted in widespread impact.

4 Concluding remarks

This study sought to systematize a methodological and multidimensional protocol for the analysis of reportage, allowing for an understanding of the complex interactions that permeate the construction of a privileged journalistic production. The proposal of the Critical Analysis of Reportage (CAR) protocol, currently under development, aims to offer tools that serve both academic research and professional practice, contributing to the understanding of a field in constant transformation.

Based on the proposed stages, the process of developing the Critical Analysis of Reportage (CAR) methodological protocol outlines a structured approach to rigorously and thoroughly evaluate the different elements that are gathered in a reportage. The protocol begins with the institutional identification of the media outlet, examines the internal organization of the content, analyzes its linguistic and narrative elements, and scrutinizes the balance and function of sources of information. Each stage offers specific insights into how the reportage is configured as a journalistic product and how it functions in mediating contextualized information in the public sphere. The systematization of the analysis allows for the identification of recurring patterns, the highlighting of best practices, and the identification of weaknesses, contributing both to professional development and to the production of knowledge in the academic field of journalism.

It is important to emphasize that this discussion does not aim to propose a methodology that covers every type of research in journalism. Our goal is to build an open protocol for the critical analysis of reportage, in order to evaluate this format of content based on a series of parameters. It does not, however, address issues related to ethical commitments, editorial line, the credibility earned by media outlets, the construction of meaning by the audience, or a reportage's contribution to the setting of a public agenda of debate.

Furthermore, understanding the dynamics that affect the sphere of production may require auxiliary procedures, such as

conducting interviews with reporters, news editors, and those in editorial positions, even though these instruments also have limitations, such as the frequent use of self-indulgent and misleading discourse by journalists. On the other hand, in the realm of reception and consumption, focus groups, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews would be valuable complementary tools for triangulating data, enabling a more comprehensive critical analysis of news reports.

Based on this proposal, it is argued that a reportage should not be understood merely as a final product, but as the result of factors that shape its production in different contexts. By focusing on the analysis of elements such as production structures, institutional ties, textual architecture, and analytical procedures, the methodological protocol serves as a useful tool for highlighting professional dynamics. By integrating multiple dimensions, the proposal contributes to enhancing academic reflection on journalism and reinforcing its legitimacy as a scientific field, articulating analytical procedures that seek to establish bridges between theory and practice.

This is an initial effort to systematize a flexible protocol, which will be applied to a corpus of reportages considered paradigmatic, enabling future reflections that contribute to the field of journalism research and help guide professional practices.

NOTES

- 1 To face structural sexism in society, the first names of female authors will be presented in the body of the text whenever they are cited for the first time. The exclusive use of last names has ended up reinforcing the male-dominated nature of science. For the same reason, the references at the end of the text include the first names of all persons cited.
- 2 All Portuguese texts cited in this article were translated by the authors, except when specified.

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