

ARTICLES  
ARTÍCULOS

## CRACK IN THE PRESS: journalism's representations and imaginary of the advent and explosion of the drug in Belo Horizonte (MG, Brazil) 1

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Brasileira de  
Pesquisadores em  
Jornalismo

MOZAHIR SALOMÃO BRUCK  
*Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais*

**ABSTRACT** - This article reports research results from an investigation into the coverage given by the Estado de Minas newspaper - reputed to be a leading opinion maker in the state - on crack usage and commerce in Belo Horizonte, the state capital. Theoretical references adopted originated from social sciences and, in particular, from the theories of journalism. In the research, which covered 15 years the daily newspaper Estado de Minas issues, the analytic content configured the constitution of the corpus, as well as its analysis and interpretation. The aim was to understand the way journalism portrays the underworld of crack and refers to the drug, to its actors, and to its complex networks of distribution, usage, power struggles, prevention and treatment. The objective based on the assumption that, in one way or another, the perceptions engendered by the journalistic discourse effectively have an impact on the society in which the discourse circulates.

**Keywords:** Journalism. Crack. Social imaginary. Estado de Minas Newspaper

### CRACK NA IMPRENSA: imaginários e modos de representação do jornalismo sobre o surgimento e a explosão da droga em Belo Horizonte (MG, Brasil)

**RESUMO** - Este artigo apresenta resultados de investigação sobre a cobertura pelo jornal Estado de Minas, considerado periódico de referência da cidade de Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais, Brasil), do uso e comércio do crack no município. Para tal, valemo-nos de referenciais teóricos originados das ciências sociais e, em específico, das teorias do jornalismo. Na pesquisa, que cobriu 15 anos de edições do jornal Estado de Minas, a analítica de conteúdo parametrizou a constituição do corpus, bem como sua análise e interpretação. O objetivo de tal levantamento foi tentar compreender que imagens são construídas pelo jornalismo sobre o chamado submundo do crack - a droga, seus atores e as complexas redes de distribuição, usos, combate, prevenção e tratamento, sabendo que, de um modo ou de outro, tais percepções - engendradas pelo discurso jornalístico - têm efetivamente impacto junto à sociedade que consome e faz circular os enunciados presentes nesse discurso.

**Palavras-Chave:** Jornalismo. Crack. Imaginário social. Jornal Estado de Minas.

### Crac en la prensa: imaginarios y modos de representación del periodismo sobre el surgimiento y la explosión de la droga en Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais, Brasil)

**RESUMEN** - Este artículo presenta los resultados de la investigación sobre la cobertura del diario Estado de Minas, considerado un periódico de referencia en la ciudad de Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais, Brasil), sobre el uso y el comercio del crac en el municipio. Con este fin, hacemos uso de marcos teóricos derivados de las ciencias sociales y, en particular, de las teorías del periodismo. En la investigación, que abarcó quince años de ediciones del diario Estado de Minas, el análisis del contenido determinó los parámetros para la formación del corpus y su posterior análisis e interpretación. El propósito de este estudio fue tratar de comprender qué imágenes construye el periodismo sobre el llamado submundo del crac —la droga, sus actores y las complejas redes de distribución, sus usos, la lucha, la prevención y el tratamiento— ya que, de una manera u otra, tales percepciones tienen, efectivamente, un impacto en la sociedad, la cual consume y hace circular los enunciados presentes en ese discurso periodístico.

**Palabras clave:** Periodismo. Crac. Imaginario social. Diario Estado de Minas.

## 1 TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article presents results of research<sup>2</sup> on the coverage of the use and sale of crack in the city of Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais, Brazil) in the pages of the daily *Estado de Minas*, widely considered to be a reference newspaper<sup>3</sup>. Our initial hypothesis was that the coverage of the crack phenomenon and its social, economic, health and public security impacts which have expanded to the whole of Brazil<sup>4</sup>, has a tendency, precisely because of the specific features and peculiarities of journalistic work and of the stories produced by this field and by the way in which the media are presents itself to society, to tendentiously reinforce certain acute aspects of the issue at certain times thereby increasing the opacity surrounding it rather than contributing to a better understanding and discussion of the drug.

In this sense, the researcher's work was to try to understand what images journalism constructs of the so-called crack underworld – the drug, its actors and the complex distribution networks, uses, combat, prevention and treatment; knowing that, one way or another, such narratives have effective impacts on a society that consumes, circulates and echoes the meanings embedded in the discourse.

In defining the *corpus* for analysis<sup>5</sup>, the objects of observation were texts published by *Estado de Minas* from 1996 to 2011 – notes, news and reports - which, as we will detail in the methodological procedures, were classified according to the mode and the relevance with which crack was treated. Throughout that period, in this set of journalistic materials, the drug was approached from different perspectives, crack users meeting places, known in Brazil as “cracolândias” (crack-lands), the impact of crack in the users' lives police involvement with drugs and the struggles of family and friends for the rehabilitation of addicts.

The quantitative survey<sup>6</sup> contributed by revealing an increase in the interest of the press and its coverage of the crack that accompanied the intensification of its impacts on society in terms of user presence on the streets, public health issues, and, especially, the association of the drug to violence and crime.

The approach to the narrative content of *Estado de Minas*<sup>7</sup> was in alignment with our goal of analyzing the newspaper's allusions to crack and to agents that orbit around the drug (users, therapists, health workers, police etc.) and analyzing how, in some way, such narratives help to feed collective imaginary and myths incorporated into common

sense in relation to the drug, providing an effective opportunity for reflecting about the ways in which the press deals with the social reality and its complexities.

## 2 THE EMERGENCE OF CRACK IN BRAZIL

Brazil has lived through distinct moments and cycles in relation to the emergence of drugs in the country and the problems arising from toxic manias. Among the best known and consumed illicit drugs up until today, marijuana is thought to have been first brought to Brazil by African slaves. Another cycle considered important was the use of cocaine and heroin by the Brazilian elite at the beginning of the 20th century (SAPORI; MEDEIROS, 2010, p. 95). With no legal prohibition in place, cocaine was sold freely in Brazil, until its permanent ban in 1938 (RESENDE, 2008).

After the legal ban on some drugs came into force (in other chemical-pharmacological settings cocaine was freely bought and sold in drugstores and other stores in this country at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) Brazil went on to adopt measures of intolerance and the combat against drugs, as did many other countries, especially the United States. It curbed the sales of a series of drugs that the legislation classified as narcotics.

Since the early 1990s, crack has been the biggest and the drug with the worst social impacts in Brazil, both in the aspect of its effects on users and the fact, something new at the time, that it is a relatively inexpensive psychoactive substance relatively inexpensive and therefore easily accessible. In addition, the use of crack quickly became associated to a steady increase in violent crimes and the number of homicides. Another aspect concerns the way in which the drug trade structured itself. Crack, according to more recent studies, is distributed from a wide network of small entrepreneurs. It is this operating in networks, the dynamic connections between multiple components, that reveals the underlying pattern of its organization. In these networks, small entrepreneurs, local managers and “soldiers” act in the sale and movement of drugs so it is not without reason, that the drug is associated to the expansion of social and personal risk situations: increase in violence and criminality, strengthening of criminal groups, increase in the number of homeless and family breakdowns, among others<sup>8</sup>.

Reports of the presence of crack in the most diverse social spheres and social entities, ranging from clinics to police forces, from

social assistance to the media, reveal, in general, highly disturbing situations of institutional rupture, degradation of social bonds and trivialization of life itself. Those involved with crack, the users themselves who are often intermediaries in the traffic, are exposed to a variety of serious risks: the effects of the drug itself, the violence inherent to the crime of trafficking and, as happens with many consumers of crack, exposing their lives to danger by living on the streets. After more than two decades of distribution and consumption in this country, crack is still object of myths and ignorance of many of its aspects.

Launched in 2012, the Brazilian Federal Government site *Crack, you can win*<sup>9</sup> in some of the links on its page addresses some of the most recurrent myths surrounding this particular drug. One is that crack generates dependency in the first user experience. Another frequently mentioned myth is that crack is only consumed by the low-income population. Yet another is that the crack user automatically becomes a violent person. The site, run by the Brazilian Ministry of Health, tries to dispel some of those myths, noting that the drug is present in all walks of life; that despite its intense and quite fast effect, there is no proof that crack creates dependency with a single user experience and that, contrary to what the police authorities themselves often argue and the media announce, violence is not standard behavior among crack users.

It is estimated that crack entered Belo Horizonte coming from São Paulo, in the mid to late 1990s. Up until then, as registered in the research report *O desafio do crack* (The crack challenge) (SAPORI; MEDEIROS, 2010), drug traffickers mainly distributed marijuana and cocaine in the capital of Minas Gerais and there are no significant records of the distribution of heavy drugs such as heroin or LSD.

Sapori and Medeiros (2010) report that, in the early years of the presence of crack trafficking in the state capital, there was a slight increase in the number of homicides, but that in less than ten years after the beginning of the spread of drugs in the city, the annual number of homicides in Belo Horizonte virtually quadrupled, albeit, as the authors themselves point out we cannot attribute that increase solely to crack (SAPORI; MEDEIROS, 2010, p. 44), from around 300 homicides in 1996, to more than 1,200 in 2004. The researchers show that, with regard to the impacts in terms of violence, it is possible to consider three phases of the advent and establishment of the drug in the city: a first moment of arrival and stable evolution (1990 to 1996); a second moment of strong growth of crack-related deaths, called “gradual deterioration” (1997 to 2004) and a third “negative” phase that started 2005 and is still in course.

### 3 PRESS, CRACK AND THE COLLECTIVE IMAGINARY ON DRUGS

Research directed at advancing an understanding of the emergence of the phenomenon and the explosion of crack in Brazilian society point to the records in print, databases and other information and registrations of stories about crack without any formal proof being offered that end up being daily affirmed and reaffirmed by journalists and the press at large through interviews with users and their families, drug dealers, and even police officers and public health workers that provide services to addicts.

Among some beliefs and imaginaries are, for example, reports that "burning a 'rock' just once, is enough to become addicted" or that "crack kills in a few days" or "whoever uses crack feels an urge to kill" and "the crack user can never be cured". Those are perceptions that our observations of the newspapers show to have been used in different moments over the last decade and a half, with an intensity that was not the object of our research to investigate, but which, nevertheless, definitely seem to have contributed to the establishment of a strong collective drug imaginary concerning its users and the ways that public security and public health personnel address them.

In this paper, we take the notion of social imaginary formulated by Castoriadis. The social imaginary is understood as being a set of imagistic relations that act as social-affective memory of a culture, a community-powered ideological substrate. It is a collective production, since it is the depository of the memories that the family and the groups collect from their contacts with their day to day reality.

Once created, the meanings of both the social and the institutional imaginary crystallize or solidify, and this is what I call instituted social imaginary, which ensures the continuity of the society company, and reproduction and repetition of the same ways that thereafter govern the lives of men and which remain for however long it takes for slow historical change or a massive new creation comes about that will transform them or radically replace them by others. (CASTORIADIS, 2004, v. 6, p. 130).

Sapori and Medeiros (2010) call attention to the fact that media often end up feeding and extending some of the myths and exaggerations built on the common sense in recent years, on the sale and use of crack. It is common to see newspaper headlines that feature crack as a character with a life of its own, mobility and destructive power. Interpreted in that way, crack is seen as acting on the person who is then taken over by and endowed with a magical and satanic ability to wreak havoc on society.

The images highlighted by *Estado de Minas* are those that show the urban spaces called "crack-lands", in which many individuals wander around with a disgusting appearance. They are dirty people, living side by side with the garbage. At the same time, the Daily develops another narrative with emotional appeal, highlighting impressive figures; desperate mothers reporting their traumatic individual experiences, focusing on family tragedies and violent episodes. It is not that the reports do not correspond to realities that exist in social life, but rather, as Sapori and Medeiros (2010) put it, the intention of this news seems to be to establish and legitimize a direct relationship with the demonization of the substance and identify the blame and place it squarely on the individual, thus focusing the attention of society on this "social problem" and, at the same time, diverting it from the debates on the structural, socio-economic, political, legal, cultural and clinical dimensions in which crack and other drugs are involved (SAPORI; MEDEIROS, 2010, p. 165-166).

### 3.1 Journalistic discourse and its idiosyncrasies

Studies on journalism narratives have advanced in recent decades not only to question the effective possibility of objectivity in journalistic practice, but also to question how so-called reality-based narratives are subject to constraints and modifications of various orders imposed by the nature of the type of discourse, the way they circulate and reverberate in society, and cultural, ideological, ethical, psychological, ethical and deontological factors, among others.

Based on the relations between the actual events and their versions/news reports/repercussions, the theoretical studies on journalism have tried to gain a more specific understanding of the processes that cause a given to be of interest to journalists and when it is raised to the status of a media event, lead it to be included in the broad, shallow and not always consistent category of "newsworthy". At first glance that might seem to underscore the idea that "news is what journalists think is news", but it is well known that at the intersections of of lines of force, of enunciation and even of escape from the fields of news production and publication (DELEUZE, 2005), that the circumstances, determinants and elements involved, in terms of what will be reported/noted/rejected/forgotten, are far more complex than that.

Alsina (1989), Traquina (2004), Rodrigues (1993), Souza (2000) and Pena (2005), among others, offer common signaling about the

journalistic event: it is everything that breaks out of the smooth surface of reality. Its transformation into news – a construction, as highlighted by Alsina (1989), of a possible world – results from complex symbolic production processes that are defined in the unstable balance of power/knowledge in the journalistic community, but at the same time, have an impact on, and are a result of those very ambiguities, contradictions and conflicts. Traquina (2004) shows that,

Journalism is “stories” about the life of stars, the tragedies and the spectacles of Party Congresses. The strengthening of the economic pole, changes in the economic structures of the companies in multimedia groups and increasing competitiveness, have accentuate the integration of the journalistic field into the wider field of the media at large(sic). In the definition and construction of news, the importance of what is important must not be erased by the imperative of what is interesting. The imperatives of competition and the struggle for professional brilliance in finding “exclusive” news must not make us forget the right to privacy and the power of journalism to denigrate the good name. (TRAQUINA, 2004, p.208)

Rebello (2000) lists what he considers to be the mechanisms for introducing an air of authenticity in the construction of the journalistic text. The author considers that i) redundancy, ii) presentation of parallel stories, iii) delegation of knowledge and iv) temporal flash backs are features that provide the text of news features with an stronger appearance of verisimilitude.

Among other things, the analysis of notes, news and reports published by the newspaper *Estado de Minas* about crack in a decade and a half — from the time of emergence of the drug in the state capital, in 1996, until 2011 - confirmed the presence of different forms of those mechanisms pointed out by José Rebello (2000) and enabled an understanding of how in establishing its journalistic discourse, the press constitutes and fosters a collective social imaginary in relation to crack or oversimplifications that can lead to effectively obscuring the often complex aspects involved in the issue.

In regard to redundancy, Rebello reminds us that the title, the lead, pictures, captions and texts strongly reiterate the underlying meaning. “Redundancy sets out to capture the reader, inviting him over and over to a meeting with something he already knows”. (REBELLO, 2000, p.110) It is as if the reader, in fact, were looking for official confirmation of elements that are already part of his/her reference universe – a confirmation that, in Rebello’s opinion – “is the key to customer loyalty”. In turn, presenting parallel stories is seen as having the effect of characterizing positively or negatively a character or theme by portraying, in a negative or positive

light, other characters or plots with which the central story has an "evident nexus of causality" (REBELO, 2000, p.110).

The delegation of knowledge can be perceived in the modes and forms of narrative voices within the inscription of the journalistic statement. As Rebelo points out, when the newspaper reports someone's actual words, they occupy a prominent position and are part of an explicit dialogue with the line of approach defined by the reporter. According to the author, the reader occupies an exterior place in relation to the act of communication, merely watching what happens on stage.

Finally, going back in time, according to Rebelo, is a way of updating the past, virtually transporting the reader to the time of occurrence of the event - and because it "occurred" it becomes "undeniable". So once the nexus in time has been established the narrative that follows will conduct the reader along the path followed by the sequence of facts in the course of the event.

#### 4 APPROACH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH CORPUS ANALYSIS

The full research, of which this paper is a succinct report, investigated crack coverage by the newspaper *Estado de Minas*, consolidating its theoretical-conceptual perspectives in the light of different fields of knowledge: on the one hand, communication, emphasizing the most recent studies on the processes of media and the theoretical studies of journalism, trying to understand how it produces the discourse that is distributed to society; on the other hand, social sciences, with emphasis on the studies and field research into drug trafficking and urban violence associated to it.

One of the challenges of empirical research in the field of social communication is certainly the appropriate selection and dimensioning of *corpus* or *corpora*. For this research, our initial approach to the study object was to establish a temporal demarcation set as the fifteen years between 1996 and 2011, taking as zero point of observation the first reports by the newspaper *Estado de Minas* about crack and then up until 2011, since this research began in 2012 and it was considered prudent set the limit as the end of the year 2011. It should be mentioned that our main points of interest were the news texts, focusing attention on the front page and in the *Gerais* section of the *Estado de Minas*, which gathers news about the "city" and police news. Therefore, any other eventual indications about crack in editorials or other sections in the newspaper were not considered.

Bardin (1988) and Barros and Targino (2000), cited by Barros and Duarte (2005), point out that the main rules for the establishment of the *corpus* are the following: i) rule of completeness: all documents related to the subject searched, in the chosen period, should be considered, without leaving out any of them for any reason (access difficulty, loss, uninteresting material etc.) and ii) the representativeness rule, that is, as social research generally approaches a universe of elements, it is impossible to consider them in their entirety and so one must work with a sample.

The *corpus* composition was structured in the following way: in terms of format, notes, news and reports that mentioned crack were collected, classifying them, whenever the drug was perceived as being mentioned, as CITATION, RELEVANT CITATION or MAIN SUBJECT. So, for each news format, we had, already in the collection, the identification of the data collected in relation to the presence of crack in that item, that is, whether that note, news or report on crack was only a Citation, or a relevant element or the main subject.

The pre-test signaled that between 1996 and 1999, the notes about crack were still very few, bearing in mind, however, that in relation to the collection available and offered by the newspaper for consultation we only had access for those four years, to the issues for the months of February, June and October. Such circumstance seemed to us a problem for the research, but at least guaranteed a stability and consistency in terms of minimal regularity. So, for this research, in the light of those circumstances and considering that our goal is defined by an otherwise extensive sample - a decade and a half of newspaper coverage - it was decided, in regard to the rule of representation (considering the restriction to news texts only and the impossibility of accessing all editions for the period 1996/99), to determine a sample covering three months of the years between 1996 and 1999 (Table 1) and every month for the years 2000 to 2011 (Table 2), in the light of our initial specific objectives of paying special attention to observing changes in the modes of addressing crack in the journalistic coverage. It is important to state that in all news texts where there was any mention of the word "crack" were consulted and computed - 55 editions of newspapers in the first phase (1996 to 1999)<sup>10</sup> and 807 issues in the second phase (2000 to 2011)<sup>11</sup>. Once the appropriate selection and categorization had been completed, we obtained the results indicated in the tables on the next page:

**Table 1** Crack citations – Newspaper *Estado de Minas* 1996 a 1999: February, June and October

Type of Insertion/ Year	Notes			Total per News Format			Total per Reports Format			Total per Format		
	Citation	Relevant Citation	Main Subject	Citation	Relevant Citation	Main Subject	Citation	Relevant Citation	Main Subject			
1996	1	-	-	1	2	-	-	2	-	5	2	7
1997	5	-	-	5	6	1	-	7	-	-	-	-
1998	6	-	-	6	13	-	-	13	2	1	-	3
1999	6	1	-	7	10	-	-	10	-	-	1	1
Total	18	1	19	19	31	4	-	32	3	8	5	16

**Table 2** Crack Citations – Newspaper *Estado de Minas* 2000 a 2011: all months

Type of Insertion/ Year	Notes			Total per News Format			Total per Reports Format			Total per Format		
	Citation	Relevant Citation	Main Subject	Citation	Relevant Citation	Main Subject	Citation	Relevant Citation	Main Subject			
2000	21	-	-	21	42	6	-	48	8	9	-	17
2001	12	1	-	13	48	-	-	48	4	-	-	4
2002	7	-	-	7	50	2	1	53	11	7	-	18
2003	6	-	-	6	58	-	-	58	20	-	-	20
2004	25	-	-	25	26	2	-	28	5	2	1	8
2005	39	-	-	39	20	-	-	20	3	2	-	5
2006	56	-	-	56	29	1	-	30	1	1	-	2
2007	23	-	-	23	37	-	-	37	13	1	-	14
2008	13	-	-	13	41	1	-	42	13	1	-	14
2009	16	-	1	17	35	2	-	37	1	2	3	6
2010	7	-	1	8	35	2	-	37	7	1	2	10
2011	6	3	2	11	19	5	1	25	13	9	9	31
Total	231	4	4	238	440	21	2	463	99	35	15	149

The tables allow us to gather relevant information about the extension of the coverage presence about crack in the *Estado de Minas*. One of them is that this increase coincides with the period in which the drug came to be more strongly associated to crime and violence, especially the occurrence of murders. As Sapori and Medeiros (2010) point out, homicides linked directly to crack – disputes, debt hits and clashes between users/vendors – showed an upward trend from 1996 on, reaching a peak in 2004.

Also according to Sapori and Medeiros (2010), the number of deaths linked to crack started to drop off again from 2005 on. In their understanding, the growing drug-related violence referred to the consolidation of crack's presence in the city, group disputes and the "instability" of drug distribution.

Despite the reduction in the number of deaths linked to crack, the drug, as can be seen in Table II, continued to be emphasized, especially in the case of the "news" and "report" formats, which denotes the interest of the press in the effects of crack not only in regard to the aspects of public safety, but also to questions of health, social welfare and behavior.

When the newspaper is analyzed in relation to the incidence of allusions to crack, it is observed that in both periods and all three types of format – notes, news and reports – the reference to the drug as a mere mention is a constant. In the case of notes, the mere mentions between 2000 and 2011 totaled 231 occurrences.

In the case of news, the mere mention is present in 440 of the analyzed texts and, in the case of reports, in 99 registrations. As a relevant Citation, in twelve years (2000 to 2011), crack appears in only four notes; in news, 21 and in reports, the relevant citation appears in 35 texts. As a main subject, also considering the period 2000/2011, in relation to notes, crack appears in four editions. In terms of news, it appears in only two texts and, in the case of reports, crack was the main subject of 15 texts.

In relation to the formats, it is important to point out the large number of news items (463), as compared to (238) and reports (149). The upward trend in the report format from 2009 on suggests that the drug intensified its presence in the newspaper coverage accompanying the exacerbation of the processes of expansion and growth in sales of the drug in the state capital and society's identification of the theme as relevant debate.

#### 4.1 Discussions about crack framing and their impact on society

As we considered that the quantitative observation of entries about crack in the newspaper *Estado de Minas* offered important inferences with regard to the focus of interest of this study, namely, the ways in which the press addresses the question of crack, we went on to another stage of research to try to understand more clearly how, through journalism, the construction of modes of social imaginary and representations about crack has taken place, since its emergence on the scene until the explosion of the drug in recent years. Our focus was also to try to understand how journalistic discourse in relation to the drug has changed in recent years. A first look at the empirical object suggested that at the time of the advent of the drug, what prevailed was not only misinformation about crack but also a tendency, readily perceivable in the contents conveyed, to reinforce some of the existing myths and collective imaginary in relation to crack, its users and issues such as distribution, marketing and pharmacological effects. Later, the discourse conveyed by the *Estado de Minas* established a pendulum movement that ranged from this initial vision and perceptions to attempts to understand the phenomenon of crack in the amplitude of its social, economic, health and public safety complexity.

In this qualitative perspective, two observation parameters, orientated and driven by content analysis, were adopted. With that methodology, it was intended to penetrate the very non-transparent field of meaning production in of journalism get to see how many of the representations and much of the imaginary about crack were formed in the years between the emergence of the drug and the years that followed, marked by the rapid spread of its popularity, especially among the members of low-income and marginalized groups.

For the content analysis of the aforementioned reports, besides observing the four points highlighted by Rebelo (2000), classified by that author as authentication mechanisms, we also decided to define other observation categories, such as: the qualifications associated to the term crack, the predicates and adjectives used, evidence of fetishization of crack, highlighting in this last aspect, situations in which the drug is related to a supposed “power” that goes beyond the consequences that objectively it can cause and, finally, possible inferences in terms of the imaginary regarding the drug.

In general, the reports from *Estado de Minas* about crack trade and consumption in Belo Horizonte tried to present to the reader,

on one hand, with objective data such as how drug trafficking has expanded in the State capital. On the other hand, and at the same time, they sought to show the serious personal and social consequences of drug consumption: implosion of family relationships, unemployment, extreme impoverishment of users, rising crime and violence and early death. It is important to consider that in different editions in the period analyzed, either through impressions passed by individual reporters or by interviewees, some of the myths and imaginary listed in this article were definitely reinforced.

This research does not suspect *a priori* that the press systematically exaggerates in its news and reports about crack. It is in the public domain, of course, as the proliferation of drugs in Brazil - some authors already speak about universalization, which would give it the status of an epidemic condition - already presents very serious consequences. What drove the research was the assumption that narratives that substantiate the newspaper coverage, often not only fail to explain but, sometimes in an emotional/ alarmist tone, ultimately reinforce myths and misunderstandings about this serious social problem.

In the analytical work, we sought to observe, in all news texts, the aspects mentioned above. From the group analyzed, we consider the following particular mentions as deserving to be highlighted and the ones which are associated to crack with the following qualifications and predicates that were the issues that this article pointed out as hypothesis:

**Adjectives**<sup>12</sup>: damn rock; death rock; delusional; threat of the moment; poor cousin of the brightness drug; poor cousin of white powder; cemetery rock; violence drug; killer drug; epidemic villain.

**Predicatives**<sup>13</sup>: (the excerpts presented below have been extracted from the reports analyzed):

- i) "Crack invades classrooms in BH". (*ESTADO DE MINAS*, 25/08/1996).
- ii) "(...) crack has already invaded the slums and urban centers and consumers cannot drop the habit, even though they know the evils caused by the drug." (*ESTADO DE MINAS*, 19/05/1996).
- iii) "Drug forms traffickers army and increases crime rates" (*ESTADO DE MINAS*, 23/10/1996)

- iv) "Sub product of cocaine, it is usually smoked in a pipe. The effect of the rock goes to the brain. The drug over excites (sic) the nerve impulses and gives the addict a feeling of euphoria. In a short period of time the person can die from cerebral hemorrhage, seizures or myocardial infarction." (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 23/10/1996*).
- v) "Crack creates 'super-men' ". (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 27/10/1996*).
- vi) "In urban guerrilla warfare, the battle may be for the possession of a few rocks of crack. Moreover, the drug is identified as the leading cause of many murders, because its trade is disorganized, and the young people emerge as unprepared soldiers. " (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 12/03/2000*).
- vii) "On the other hand, the police seem powerless in the face of the avalanche of crack, the strongest currency in the world of crime and the one that sponsors most of the tragedies that have hit many families in the Capital over the last six months." (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 11/06/2001*).
- viii) "Crack arms gunmen." (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 25/09/2005*).
- ix) The drug that discovered Brazil. Formerly restricted to large urban centers, crack has now come to small towns. (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 25/11/2009*).
- x) In less than 20 years, the drug has invaded the country, without distinction of social class, age group or geographic location. (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 25/11/2009*).
- xi) Crack invades the countryside. (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 25/11/2009*).
- xii) A third of homicides in Belo Horizonte occur because of drug trafficking. And the villain of the epidemic has a name: crack. (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 27/08/2010*)
- xiii) All because of crack. (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 15/12/2011*)
- xiv) Under the dominance of crack. (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 08/11/2011*)
- xv) "Formerly limited to the central area, the street population multiplies throughout the capital, becoming a challenge boosted by crack. Despite the perception that phenomenon is worsening, BH has no updated official figures." (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 05/10/2011*).
- xvi) The rocks are the threat of the moment. (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 05/10/2011*).

It should be noted that the excerpts i, ii, iii, ix, x, xi, xii, xv and xvi, while it is understood that the construction example is structured as a figurative “way of speaking”, we cannot ignore the fact that the drug, even with its known serious effects and causality links, receives, through the narrative, the status of social actor, a process of fetishization, the idea that crack – the rock itself, has the power to cause terrible social effects. In addition, the drug is associated to the tragic and wrong, in the sense of possessing “devilish” powers– offering the reader a satanic image. That is, crack, in terms of narrative construction, receives the treatment of a social actor - a journalistic “character” – not being treated as an integral part of a complex chain of causal links and a network of events and circumstances, which would be more correct.

Another fact that calls attention is that the reports make strong use of Rebiolo’s (2000) authentication mechanisms referred to earlier in this article. In the case of those narrative events in which redundancy is perceived, the reports show a curious reaffirmation aspect, at all times, of the main idea they cover. Retrieving here what Rebelo (2000) said, the reader is invited to a meeting with what he already knows. Good examples of this are the excerpts of paragraphs i, ii, vii, xi, xiii and xiv, where it is readily observable how the statements utilize a redundancy approach not only in relation to intelligence, but also with a clear general content, and to prove such arguments, the text also uses, reports of respondents and their respective stories.

In that aspect, a reflection that is very relevant, but that the limitations of this article do not allow us to develop further concerns a type of narrative occurrence which is not so uncommon in journalistic texts - whether they are printed or electronic: a certain trend, to generalization, that in the course of news/reports is supported by examples/evidence described by the reporter. As an example, we can cite, from among the reports reviewed, statements like: “Drug recruits an army of dealers and increases crime rates”. (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 23/10/1996*); “All because of crack.” (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 15/12/2011*) or “Crack invades classrooms in BH”. (*ESTADO DE MINAS, 25/08/1996*).

Knowledge delegation is another recurrent feature in the reports reviewed. The sources/respondents report their experiences as users or as members of addicts’ families. A process that obviously follows the standard narratives and structures common to the journalistic texts in this category, i.e. reports, usually in third person, making use of witnesses, whose statements are appropriate to, and articulated with the reporter's own discourse, resulting in a new journalistic discourse that

materializes, by means of specific formats, such as those analyzed in this study: the note, the news item and the story/report. The report "life isn't worth anything in the world of drugs", published on April 2nd, 2000, is a good example of this mechanism to present the testimony of the mother of an imprisoned drug dealer. Identified as "Maria", the mother exposes her drama to the newspaper:

"I would not despise my son for anything in this world", confides a drug dealer's mother, from fear, prefers not to reveal their names or where she lives. "Maria" took the hard line among the mothers of sons involved in drug dealing. She knew what her son was mixed up in and admonished him, and she refused to allow any drugs in the home and never made use of money from drug dealing in spite of being ill herself and living off an allowance from her ex-husband. (ESTADO DE MINAS, 02/04/2000)

In the report "Crack: the drug violence", published on May 30th, 2004, a user identified as PAT, 29 years old, "reinforces" the idea that you have just to use crack once to become a drug dependent and also a certain perception of a "power" that the drug has:

I was caught in the middle of Lojas Americanas (a Brazilian department store) trying to pick up a CD, I exchanged shots with police and even jumped the walkway from the bus station. I've always been quick and this guaranteed my addiction. But before becoming a pickpocket, a beggar, I worked as a dealer to sustain the sensation that started the first time I put the pipe in my mouth (ESTADO DE MINAS, 30/05/2004)

Finally, the turn back in time, according to Rebelo, updates the past, virtually carrying the reader back to the time of occurrence of the event - and why what "occurred, is unquestionable". It is like leading the reader to "zero time" - the instant separating the past from the future, which, for Rebelo, is important in operating a "qualitative change which the narrative would not otherwise contemplate" (REBELO, 2000, p.111), and, for that reason, "the reader plunges, in fact, into a world, no longer of the past but construed as something capable of happening and which the narrative has already anticipated and made the reader aware of". An example is the interview given to the newspaper by a Judge of the Belo Horizonte Juvenile Courts, Gerard Claret. In the report "Threatened with death", published in the edition of October 13th, 2001, the judge reveals in an interview how young people end up being co-opted by drug traffic:

During the day, they are left to their own devices in the poor outlying neighborhoods on the slopes; not sent to a school offering decent education, or a chance of work that might qualify them professionally, or a sport to practice. When the cooking gas runs

out at home, or they need some cash to buy a pair of trainers, the Dealer appears to lend them some money. The moment the teenager does his first job for the dealer, a mortal bond is sealed. (ESTADO DE MINAS, 13/10/2001)

## FINAL REMARKS

The comments on a decade and a half (1996-2011) of the reports and items on crack in the newspaper *Estado de Minas*, in the state capital of Minas Gerais, confirmed the initial hypothesis of the research entitled "Crack representations in Minas Gerais press: journalism imaginary about drug, dealers, users, policemen and public health agents" and showed itself to be dependent on the specific features and peculiarities of journalistic work and of the stories produced by this field and by the way in which the media are presents itself to society, to tendentiously reinforce certain acute aspects of the issue at certain times thereby increasing the opacity surrounding it rather than contributing to a better understanding and discussion of the drug.

It is important to consider, however, as was the case throughout the research, that the points of view and perspectives portrayed in regard to the underworld of crack should always, for correction and care's sake, be relativized insofar as, in spite of the press's discourse - which often gets embroiled in operations that are more mythical and sensationalist, to the detriment of insightful information - one cannot lose sight of the fact that the drug produces severely damaging effects to its users and, effectively, also effectively constitutes serious threat to the integrity of family relationships and the social fabric as a whole.

It is also to be highlighted that if, on one hand, and paradoxically, that same coverage of crack features, at certain moments, discussions and debates that effectively contribute to illuminating the subject, on the other hand, the drug receives allusions that conjure up an air of fetishization and a way of addressing the problem that draws back from the factual processes and occurrences in themselves. Crack is treated, as has been said, as if it were a social actor in its own right, endowed with devastating superpowers. A coverage that causes the views offered by the newspaper, many times in subsequent editions, to swing like a pendulum from the sensational and the mythical at one extreme to an objective and even reflective coverage at the other.

## NOTES

- 1 Translated by Prof. Mario Viggiano, PUC Minas (Belo Horizonte, Brazil)
- 2 The research “CRACK IN THE PRESS: journalism’ representations and imaginary of the advent and explosion of the drug in Belo Horizonte (MG, Brazil)” has been supported by the Fapemig (Research Support Foundation of the State of Minas Gerais) and conducted from March 2012 to March 2013.
- 3 “Reference newspaper” is understood here to be one of the newspapers that has established itself firmly in the Brazilian press as a traditionally respected media entity with undeniable power of influence on the the general public, and those terms, regarded as a reference daily by society at large.
- 4 According to the National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM), crack is already present in 98% of Brazilian cities.
- 5 The work of collecting and tabulating news items and reports was made possible by the valuable collaboration of scholar and journalist to be at the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, Jeane Caroline de Oliveira Moreira.
- 6 See tables on pages 10 and 11.
- 7 The newspaper Estado de Minas was founded on March 7, 1928 in Belo Horizonte. The daily, known as the great miners ' newspaper, has the standard format and is also available to subscribers in digital version. Its current circulation is around 112 thousand copies for the Sunday edition (Source: IVC).
- 8 At the end of 2010, a survey conducted by the National Confederation of Municipalities (CNM) on the situation of crack in the Brazilian municipalities, revealed that 98% of the surveyed cities faced problems with the presence of crack and other drugs. A study s run by the National Institute for Public Policy Research on alcohol and other drug (Inpad) of the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp) released in September 2012, showed that smoked cocaine (crack and oxy) has already been used at least once by 2.6 million Brazilians, representing 1.4% of adults. Teens who have experienced this type of drug were 150 thousand, equivalent to 1% of this group. Brazil, according to Inpad, was responsible for about

- 20% of the world consumption of cocaine and crack.  
9 <http://www.brasil.gov.br/crackepossivelvencer/home>
- 10 Per year, the numbers of texts examined were as follows: 1996 (9);1997 (10);1998 (18) e 1999 (18).
- 11 Per year, the numbers of texts examined were as follows: 2000 (79); 2001 (68);2002 (75);2003 (77);2004 (60); 2005 (59); 2006 (78); 2007 (69); 2008 (71); 2009 (58); 2010 (52) e 2011 (61)
- 12 The adjectives that were identical as well those with very similar semantic effects were disregarded.
- 13 The same principle was used for the predicates.

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**Mozahir Salomão Bruck** is a journalist and researcher from the Graduate Program in Social Communication at PUC Minas (Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais). PhD in Portuguese Language Literatures at PUC Minas and Master in Communication and Culture at UFRJ (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro). E-mail: [mozahir@uol.com.br](mailto:mozahir@uol.com.br)

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