

Our Child and the Others: Pictures of Children in the News Media

Abstract:

References to children and child-related issues in news media increased in the last decades, and research about how the youngest are presented in the news is a recent field of attention in media studies. Focused on Portuguese newspapers, this article presents analyses from other countries, and points out signs of professional ideology, newsmaking contexts and news media trends. By this, it underlines political dimensions and ideological orientations of these news contents, often framed simply as *soft news* or merely as *human-interest stories*.

Keywords: news media, journalism, news values, children issues

Cristina Ponte
Universidade Nova
de Lisboa
Faculdade de
Ciências Sociais e
Humanas

Bizim Çocuklar ve Ötekiler: Haber Medyasında Çocukların Resimleri

Özet:

Son yıllarda haber medyasında çocuklarla ilgili sorunlardan daha çok söz edilmektedir. Küçüklerin haberlerde nasıl temsil edildiği üzerine araştırmalar ise medya çalışmalarında oldukça yeni bir alandır. Bu makale, profesyonel ideoloji, haber üretimi bağlamları ve haber medyasının eğilimleri çerçevesinde Portekiz gazetelerine odaklanarak, diğer ülkelere ilişkin analizleri sunar. Bunu yaparken, sık sık basitçe *soft haberler* ya da sadece *insani ilgi öyküleri* olarak çerçevelenen haber içeriklerindeki siyasal boyutların ve ideolojik yönelimlerin de altını çizer.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Haber medyası, gazetecilik, haber değerleri, çocuklar.

Our Child and the Others: Pictures of Children in the News Media

Introduction

Media research on children has paid much more attention to its possible effects, particularly in fiction contents, than to the ways in which children are presented in the news, and how it contributes to picturing the youngest members of a society and its future. Few articles and books on *Children in the news* were published before the 1995, but after that, references in articles, books, internet sites and other sources became more frequent.

This article is based on research focused on news-values in Portuguese journalism, through the analysis of children's coverage (Ponte, 2002, 2005). The study was framed by historical, sociological and cultural perspectives on children and childhood, on the one hand, and attention to the ways news media tend to present these subjects, collecting data from international research, on the other.

Despite the different methodologies, studies from other countries on children in the news, stress common tendencies: approaches that oscillate between *demonizing* them or picturing them as the most powerful symbol of victimization and weakness; absence or inadequate circulation of their words and thoughts; emphasis on the singular; charged emotional or moral components; sensationalism.

This highly-charged coverage may be considered a relevant subject to analyse news and its values, contributing to an enlargement of agenda and methods in journalism studies. As Barbie Zelizer points out, journalism studies' agenda tends to reflect only a portion of that which constitutes journalism and allows it to stand for the whole. In her view:

Journalism has been primarily defined in terms of only a small (and decreasing) dimension of newsmaking – hard news, and this has created a bias that undermines scholars' capacity to embrace journalism in all of its different forms, venues and practices (6).

The idea of different *orders of discourse* in the news is used by John Hartley (62), who contrasts the four classical meta-narratives that organise news (conflict, progress, competition and accidents) with *post-modern* narratives, which tend not to be organised around competitive foe-creation and negative relativities. According to the author, these *post-modern* news narratives are constituted by: 1) *secularized homily* (useful knowledge in the semiotic form of the sermon, teaching personal or ethical qualities for self, home or social improvement); 2) *cordiality stories* (promoting "law formation" rather than a "catalogue of anomalies" or "accidents"); 3) *a private sphere* (readerships are addressed as consumers/clients seeking entertainment for satisfaction of wants, not as sovereign citizens

seeking information for political decision-making); 4) *identity* (items about lifestyles not threats, centred on a we community, not on outsiders).

It is interesting to note that different orientations may coexist in the same news media, according to different subjects. Evocating the three spheres Daniel Hallin (1986) distinguishes in the public debate - "the sphere of legitimate controversy, the sphere of consensus and the sphere of deviance -, Michael Schudson (193-4) writes:

Reporters who may adhere to norms of objectivity in reporting on a political campaign will not blink to report gushingly about a topic on which there is broad national consensus or to write derisively on a subject that lies beyond the bounds of popular consensus. It is as if journalists were unconsciously multilingual, code switching from neutral interpreters to guardians of social consensus and back again without missing a beat.

This tensional code-switching is clearly present in the news, picturing children and young people and their related-issues, due to their symbolic references. For instance, crimes committed by children, such as the murder of the toddler James Bulger, in 1993, in the UK, presented an opportunity for a moral campaign, and journalists moved beyond their attack on the 10-years boys who killed Bulger, "to offer a new definition of the very nature of childhood: the *innocent angels* of an earlier social construction of childhood were replaced by *little demons*" (Franklin and Petley, 1996: 134). On the other side, human-interest stories on children victims of catastrophes or wars fill the newspapers and the screens, as the Tsunami coverage showed, creating an emotional consensus about who are the highest victims.

Michael Schudson notes also that dominant perspectives in the news media studies, focused on national agendas, tend to be

indifferent to comparative and historical viewpoints: "The motive for research is normally conceived in isolation from comparative concerns. If this strengthens the immediate political relevance of media studies, it weakens their longer-term value as social science" (194). Jenny Kitzinger, who has given a continuous attention to the ways British media frame children sexual abuse, focuses also the need of long term research: "Analysis confined to the peak of media concern with a particular problem is inadequate, since it is important to interrogate the historical frameworks and *common sense* assumptions which inform public discourse" (208).

After a brief contextualization, this article presents pictures of children in the news from different regions, in different moments and social spaces.

A rediscovered issue

There are several reasons for the growing presence of children and related issues in the news. UN Convention on Children's Rights, approved in 1989, became a universal standard against which society's attitudes towards children can be judged. Carelessness and poverty experienced by millions of children in the world, emphasized by recent global exchanges, also contributes to put children and child-related issues in the international public agenda and arena. Newsworthiness of social problems involving children doesn't tire out other potentialities from the presence of children in the news. Children and young people are a strong symbolic reference, for a nation as for a family, a distinctive and significant cultural grouping, and a sizeable market segment.

Articulating modern and post-modern news narratives, Hartley presents three broad points for this increasing reference to children in the news media:

1. The news media use juvenation *positively* as an indispensable part of their audience and readership building strategies. Children are the semiotic carrier of visualisations of *Wedom*. Juvenation is a *communicative* strategy designed to oil the works of journalism.

2. Simultaneously, the news media retain the *hard* news values of *negativity* in relation to *truth-seeking* stories about juvenation. Children are now increasingly subject to the same tactics of negative reporting as adults in stories featuring unruliness (boys) or sexuality (girls) in particular. Children are *fair game* as newsworthy targets in ways that were unthinkable just a few years ago. So while they become more visible in the news as juvenated metaphors for *Wedom*, children have also been more thoroughly fenced off from it, in a semiotic move that appropriates their looks for the requirements of the news media as a textual system, but which excludes their *actions* not just as threatening/vulnerable, but as outside of the boundary of the social altogether.

3. News stories about children are almost always about something else. The explanation for the intensity of coverage in any particular instance comes from the *mediasphere*, not from the event. The stories with highest prominence tend to focus on issues not of fundamental importance to children, while stories in which the treatment of children is a life-or-death issue tend to be relatively downplayed, for attention is focused on epiphenomena or on demonising *evil* individuals, rather than on the care and recovery of the children involved. (51-2)

A similar perspective is introduced by Susan Moeller, appreciating the emergence of children in US news in the last two decades:

Children are a synecdoche for a country's future, for the political and social well-being of a culture. Stories about

children are sentimental. They employ the same emotional hooks that *tearjerker* movies do. Stories about children goad adults into a response. The media feature children because many people cannot seem to help but to read or watch such pieces. The image of an endangered child is the perfect *grabber*. It is so powerful that it short-circuits reasoned thought. Children dramatize the righteousness of a cause by having their innocence contrasted with the malevolence (or perhaps banal hostility) of adults in authority. Finally, a focus on children serves a logistical function. Since children are ubiquitous in societies across the globe, they are always, and quickly, accessible news pegs (39).

In a public sphere where child-related issues became more present and following the UN Convention, ethical questions in children's coverage came to the front. An international survey of 55 Codes of Conduct (54 countries which signed the UN Convention and the US) showed that few of them specifically mention children's rights or provide guidance on how child-related issues should be dealt with. Many professionals consider common sense enough to deal with ethical issues. As a result, and reproducing cultural stereotypes, children tend to be represented in the news as victims, villains or as "cute" attachments to adults.

IFJ and the British media charity Presswise produced reports, studies and guidelines on these issues, working together with UNICEF and grassroots organisations advocating children's rights. For instance, the report *Information and Child Rights, the Challenge of Media Engagement* (1998) points out the need of accessing "good stories" and the "human interest story" as a dramatic device to capture people's interest, anger or sympathy and so explain a wider truth. This way, the content should go beyond common sense feelings:

If stories about children are to illustrate a *truth*, journalists need to know what lies behind the experiences they are

writing about. That includes appreciating the rights of the children involved – their right to security and (even) anonymity, knowing about the laws and conventions that exist to protect them and being free to investigate any breach of those rights.

The Media and Children's Rights (1999, revised in 2005) is a practical introduction for media professionals, with suggestions of storylines on children's rights, from basic needs and protection to their social participation. It is designed to make journalists question themselves what types of stories they could write about children and how they can test whether their copy respects children's rights. These guidelines were formally adopted by journalists' organisations from more than 70 countries, but stay relatively unknown by the professionals.

A low public attention to the children's rights, namely to the right to a civic participation in social life, may have negative effects for the present and future of contemporary democratic societies. As Carter and Allan point out:

Young people must be made to feel actively connected to the events taking place around them, and empowered to make their voices heard. Not only must people be encouraged to play their part in public decisions, their opinions also have to be seen to count.

As recent electoral turnouts have shown, a significant percentage of young people fail to exercise their democratic rights as citizens. Low level of interest by public life may have much to do with narrow perspectives on what citizenship is. It has also to do with children and young people placed outside social life, apart from adult's world, without voice or capacity to self-express experiences, feelings, perspectives. This idea may be seen in the lack of informational resources for younger audiences by news media organisations (namely by public media), noted by Buckingham, as well as in the dominant trends in the main newspapers. Let us see some of these trends.

Children in the news in American journalism

In the 1970s, two media researchers noted the near absence of news stories covering the lives of children (Dennis and Sadoff, 1976: 51). This scenario radically changed in the 1980s and afterwards, when *kidsbeats* became common in newsrooms.

Visibility of children in the news is associated with the increasing commercialism in the US media, affecting traditional ways of thinking journalism and its professionalism. As Daniel Hallin points out, a different concept of press emerged in the 1980s, the *total newspaper*, in which circulation, sales and editorial efforts would be integrated, all directed towards the project of "marketing news-information". This includes shorter stories, colour and graphics, a shift in the agenda, away from traditional "public affairs" and towards lifestyles features and "news you can use" (Hallin, 1996: 221) in order to capture also the attention of female readers, traditionally out of these readings.

Other contributions certainly came from the so-called public or civic journalism and its notion of journalists "reconnecting" with communities and becoming participants in public problem solving. Arguing for an alternative news practice, public journalism set up a number of premises for thinking differently about how journalism might better serve the public. Among others, the movement aims breaking with old routines and dependencies from official sources, reconnecting with citizens and focusing on them as actors rather than spectators of media agendas.

We will not explore relationships between civic journalism and commercial trends oriented to the audience, but both may have contributed to this new phenomenon. The move toward civic journalism within many news organisations has created a focus on at-risk children; the financial imperatives of many media institutions make them eager to attract women, who are,

as a group, considered to be interested in children and related issues; the baby-boomer generation in power in many newsrooms has been attracted toward stories that resonate personally, and the many major journalism awards won by stories featuring children have encouraged other journalists to also take up children's issues (Moeller, 2002: 38).

In the beginning of the 1990s, US print news and broadcast projects focusing on children popped up everywhere, on the front lines of pivotal national issues and on the front pages. The *Casey Journalism Center for Children and Families*, at the University of Maryland, noticed that some of the noteworthy new models of reporting on children included front-pages projects documenting children's problems for a year or more; full-time beats and teams covering issues of families, violence and other social concerns; solutions-oriented journalism; and full-scale "crusades" where newspapers advocate for change and work for improvements (Trost, 1996).

Some of these children-oriented projects tapped into the "public journalism" notion of reconnecting with communities and becoming participants in the public problem solving. For instance, in 1993, *Killing our Children*, a *Chicago Tribune* long-term project, tried to go beyond the problems to highlight model programmes, in a solutions-oriented journalism. During the project, 75 journalists and 35 photographers and artists worked on series of reports about the under-15 victims of urban violence. *Chicago Tribune* editorials on this issue received the respective Pulitzer Prize in 1993. However, due to the ways the coverage was done, children's advocates consider it as "paternal journalism, covering kids without given them their own voice" (55).

In the 1990s, other newspapers presented crusades and long-term projects on child poverty, violence, abuse and juvenile justice. In 1995, *New York Times* presented a front-page 10-part series, *Children of the Shadows*, focused almost

exclusively on children of colour. This campaign, from a newspaper with power and prestige to set the agenda for other publications, was criticised for its over-representation of young people as delinquents and their sub-representation as victims, for the absence of contextualisation of violence in social and economic factors, along with absence of alternatives to jail, recurrence of a single perspective story, and stress on race as a factor of differentiation. These critical perspectives were presented in *In Between the Lines: How the New York Times Frames Youth*, a report by the New York City Youth Media Study, a collaborative project involving media researchers and a youth-led South Bronx organizing group¹.

In a balance of these years, stressing how the beat contributed to discuss ethical questions on child reporting and presenting examples of media training, Trost (56) underlines that "deadline constraints, shrinking news holes and increasing pressures from tabloid-style television and newspapers to highlight the sensational aspects of stories all play a role". Some media projects have been criticised for creating pressure for misguided public policy solutions, while polls show the public has scant understanding of the factors that contribute to the headlines on violence, teen pregnancy and child abuse.

Allowing a comparative analysis between two periods in the 1990s, the project *Children Now*, coordinated by Dale Kunkel, University of California, Santa Barbara, presented "the news media's picture of children" in 1993 (the year of the crusades) and 1998. Collected stories should contain a primary focus on children or related issues, children were defined as those less than 18 years, and stories designed specifically for children were excluded.

The study examined a one-month sample of contents of national leading newspapers (*Atlanta Constitution*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*) and the evening news content delivered by three major broadcast networks, ABC, CBS and NBC. Six thematic categories

¹ <http://www.interrupt.org/inbetweentheLines.html>
(accessed 11.05.05)

were defined: *Crime/Violence*; *Education*; *Cultural Issues* (involving social groups, religion, television, fashion, and performances); *Health/Safety*; *Family*; *Economics* (child poverty, abandonment, homelessness, child welfare programs).

In 1993, newspapers presented 690 reports. *Crime/Violence* led the categories (40%), with crimes committed by children or against them, investigation and trials. *Education* came in second place (25%), followed by *Family* and *Health/Safety*, both registering 11%, and *Cultural Issues* (9%). *Economics* got 4%, signalling the lack of interest or incapacity to address youth problems that depicted a negative image of the country and its economic structures. Apparently illustrating the crusade tone, the majority of the items (45%) appeared on the front page, in small texts: 71% with fewer than 100 words.

In the same period of 1998, items rose from 690 to 946. There is a significant reduction in *Crime/Violence* stories (from 40 to 23%), a relative stability in *Education* (from 25 to 23%) and a notorious rise in *Family* (from 11 to 21%) and in *Health/Safety* (from 11 to 19%). *Cultural Issues* rested with 9% and *Economics* stay again in the end, with 6%.

The most significant change is reduction in the media's emphasis on *crime/violence* stories in 1998. From 1993 to 1998, while the *delinquent child* or the *violence victim* went down, the *child of the family* rose up and the child at school stayed high. The focus on adults as parents, and on home, replaced the focus on streets. This came with the high degree of consistency in the approach to these stories in 1993 and 1998: predominance of short texts, institutional and specialized sources (statistics, healthcare professionals, and researchers), and scarcity of information gathered from parents and children.

On the legal front, a study by the media INTERRUPT.ORG, on more than 1.500 items of juvenile delinquency in California's five major newspapers (including news, comments, editorials and letters to the editor) revealed that positions of information

sources favourable to harsher penalties for youth controlled the terms of the debate². While American statistics pointed out that juvenile crime had dropped 36 percent since 1994, the notion that youth crime was out of control, and increasingly violent, dominated the news. The current description of the juvenile justice system as not working, "out of fade" or too "lenient" to deal with "today's violent youth" contrasted with the infrequency of themes such as the decline in juvenile crime, its social roots, such as poverty, availability of guns, lack of social assistance services, and the success of prevention and intervention programs.

As the study stressed, the advocates of harsher penalties were aided by the news outlets restricted to the *who*, *what* and *when*, but rarely covering the *how* and the *why* of a story. This practice frames youth crime in terms of individual responsibility and provides a context that promotes a focus on punishment, while the voices of youth, youth advocates and legal defenders are marginalized.

Children in Asian newspapers

Children in the News, edited by Anura Goonasekera, assesses the presence of children and related issues in 13 Asian news media (Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam), in 1999. Children were defined as persons under the age of 15, a group that comprises around 40 per cent of the population in many of these countries. The study sought to determine the extent to which media professionals incorporated in their practices the guidelines set for the UN Convention on the Child's Rights.

In all the countries, the study followed a common methodology: content analysis of the main newspapers and TV channels during two weeks, interviews with journalists and social organizations advocating children's rights.

² <http://www.interrupt.org/inbetweenthelines.html>
(accessed 11.05.05)

One of the most notable findings of the study concerned the reality of millions of children living in cultural, political and economic environments that ignored their most basic rights, and where the absence of news coverage was justified by media professionals through references to news values. News about children is a minor component of social issues, and these are generally very low in a news hierarchy of importance dominated by politics, crime, governance, business, international affairs and sports.

Despite the social and cultural context of each country, this study contributes to point out reasons why children and child-related issues are usually disregarded by the media, evocating arguments based on professional criteria. According to journalists and editors, media policies are to cover events considered newsworthy in relation to readers/viewers, government policies and advertisers, and children's coverage is contingent upon their involvement in other newsworthy event, namely in sports, education or human interest stories.

So, while more than 15% of Bangladeshi urban children from 5 to 14 years are part of the labour force, mostly working in the private informal sector, none of the older journalists, with editorial responsibilities, pointed to the child labour as a main socio-economic problem, and this issue was only referred by – of the younger professionals. In Pakistan, where children take active part in the familiar economy, journalists don't look at child labour as a major public issue. Reasons for newsworthiness appear opaque and out of question. A female journalist says:

We are always on the lookout for subjects of interest to readers. On the problems of Pakistani children, we do not know whether our coverage is adequate or not. We go on writing and publishing and that is our part of the deal (261).

In poorer economies and closer political systems, the most common topics tend to present mostly advice on health care or education, reproducing the *secularized homily*. When children are victims of abuse, violence, rape or murder, mass media tend to sensationalise the story. Full identity of the suspects and victims (including photos) is considered to show the "accuracy of the facts". This news culture focused on the *story as fact* on the right to inform overrides other rights, such as the right to privacy.

In richer countries, such as Japan, Indonesia or Singapore, the main topics coincide with those found in US media: crime involving children and education. Crime is mostly a foreign event, while education is focused on the national child and associated with the future of the nation and children were frequently used to market products for both children and adults.

A general conclusion of this Asian research is that the poorer the country, the lower the priority given to children by the mass media in the news.

The role of ANDI in Brazil and Latin America

In Brazil, after the fall of the military dictatorship, in the end of the 1980s, children and child-related issues were recognised as a main social topic and this enabled the elaboration, in 1990, of the Statute on the Child and Adolescent. In this context, journalists, started to become aware of the problems involving youngsters, such as prostitution, street kids and lack of education in a country with almost 1/3 of the population under 14 years and only 32,6 per cent of children finish schooling.

Since 1993, ANDI, a news agency for children's rights, promoted by former journalists and inspired by the ideas of the civic journalism, has been acting as a "centre of reference where

journalists can find the best stories, the best ways of telling their stories and the most up-to-date sources of information, thereby establishing connections between the press, innovators and specialists" (Vieira, 2002: 16). ANDI works with media journalists to appreciate child-related issues and *solutions oriented news* are aims of this Agency, as well as with grassroots movements for understanding the logic of news work, its times and routines.

Solutions-oriented items as those that present: 1) successful social projects; 2) denunciation of situations, but including facts or ideas that lead to reflecting about solutions; 3) debates among different sectors; 4) explanations of legal issues or laws approved at local, state or federal level; 5) results from field research, from civil or governmental entities; 6) cooperation with social assistance campaigns; 7) focus on the existent solutions or their searching, in editorials and articles. Police interventions, governmental promises or projects without assured financial support are excluded.

One of the most effective strategies developed by ANDI to increase awareness of the problem in newsrooms is the promotion of two annual evaluations of 50 of the most important Brazilian newspapers and magazines. This public evaluation may have contributed to a competition among the various newspapers. The number of stories dedicated to themes related to the children's rights has increased from 10 thousand, in 1996, to 65 thousand, in 2000. Moreover, 41 per cent of these stories focus not only on social problems, but also on their possible solutions.

In 1999, the most prevalent topics were: *Education; Rights and Justice* (promotion and defence of children's rights, penal condemnations and life in prison, socio-educative interventions, and adoption); *Health* (namely nutrition, AIDS, pregnancy, sexuality); *Violence* (robbery or murder involving children as victims or as agents); *Third Sector and Public Policies* (news and

information from NGO, foundations, institutes and other vehicles of supporting).

Among all the categories used by ANDI, Violence presents the lowest level of "presenting solutions" news. The longitudinal view of this topic shows even a reduction in its values: news with solutions were 11,6% in 1998; 12,5% in 1999; 7,3% in 2001; 6,9% in 2002. This shows the particular difficulty of introducing alternative news frames in this area, as the Californian study had showed.

Due to their social impact, allowing a growing participation in the news from root movements, a more sensitive attention to the Brazilian children issues, ANDI monitoring, and training models is now adopted in other Latin America countries (Argentina, Paraguay, Colombia, Venezuela, Costa Rica and Guatemala), with the support of UNICEF and other public funds. A virtual web of communicators and journalists interested in debating this issue and promoting new practices is also starting, under the name *Acción 17*, the article of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on accessing appropriate information.

Children in European news media

Based on this Latin America experience and its results, Mike Jempson, director of *The PressWise Trust*, considers that:

Contrary to journalists from less well-resourced countries, who seem to have taken up the challenge of engaging with children's rights with more alacrity, in Europe, many mainstream journalists are sceptical about the value of paying so much attention to the needs of children.

This picture may not be disconnected from the political and cultural regard to children's rights in Europe. The usual self-praise about childhood welfare policies in European countries

undermines social problems involving children, such as discrimination, abandonment, child poverty, sexual abuse or sexual traffic. Again, poverty and related issues tend to be out of the national news agenda, in these countries as well as in the US or in Asia. This may be illustrated by the analysis of Portuguese newspapers.

Children and related issues in Portuguese newspapers

The research has worked on two axes of analysis:

1. A historical view, allowing an intersection between news and societal changes. All the news published in 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995 and 2000 referring to children under 14 years, and published by *Diário de Notícias* (DN), a newspaper strongly connected with Portuguese society and its dynamics, were collected and analysed.

2. A comparative synchronistic view in 2000, among different newspapers. DN was compared with another Portuguese quality newspaper (*Público*), over the year. During a week, another comparison was made with *The Guardian* (UK), *El Pais* (Spain), and *Le Monde* (France).

Quantitative and qualitative methods were to analyse the 3614 news items collected. Analyses on news content were followed by interviews with journalists and media professionals, in order to gauge their perceptions on the issue and contexts of news production.

The longitudinal study, from 1970 to 2000, covers political, economic and social contexts in Portugal and their relationships with newsroom cultures, practices and changes. These three decades present dramatic changes, from the dictatorial political regime, to a democratic EU state, from a pre-modern country, to the achievement of some modern living standards. A brief illustration of the social change in health care (Barreto): In 1970, only 37,5% of births occurred in hospitals; in 1994 they represented 98,9 per cent; Infant mortality rates was 42/1000 in 1970, in 1994 it was under 10/1000.

Looking briefly to the news content, in 1970, under censorship, 45 per cent of the news items reported domestic accidents where (mostly) working-class children were "victims of the fate". Education was a very secondary topic, with no references to a situation where 37,5% of children failure their first year of school and only 18% conclude the first cycle of schooling in its four years (Barreto).

After April 1974, the "gillyflower revolution", 1975 shows the lowest number of news items on children, mainly out of the priorities of the national political agenda that dominated the news. Ideological references to the child as the "new man (sic) in progress" went with the absence of references to the child labour in Portuguese industries. The most common topic concerns initiatives on caring, either from neighbours commissions focused on "children and oldies", or newspaper's campaigns among readers, for medical interventions. A public media, owned by the state, most of the year, DN leadership was affected to the Communist Party. In the end of 1975, a new direction redefines the newspaper's orientation and contents and in 1982 UNESCO considers DN as the Portuguese reference newspaper.

In the 1980s, health care policies and other basic needs were the main subjects, either in short news in the main corpus focused on public declarations or in dramatic events such as epidemics. Longer text, in Supplements oriented to women, evocated the homily style, advice and cordiality stories on childcare and education. These items went with short stories picturing childhood as a time of happiness and innocence. Since the end of the 1980s, a new generation of journalists have arrived to the newsroom, from the universities, and more women work in social subjects.

In the 1990s the newspaper became part of the most important private media group, and this was accomplished by new editorial decisions: smaller texts, larger photos, a focus on

3
Polemics about what is "the best interest" to the child in legal decisions. The controversial case of Elián Gonzalez, the young Cuban boy disputed by his parents and mixing familiar and political decisions strongly contributed to the high position of this topic in both the newspapers.

the reader as a consumer. If *New York Times* was the reference in the 1980s, now the image is closer to the *USA Today*. News agenda shows the emergence and consolidation of topics such as paedophilia, consumption, juvenile delinquency and the affirmation of different orders of discourse. The majority of items were written by female journalists, the majority of journalists in Public Affairs section. DN vies for the title of "newspaper of reference" with *Público*, a new daily that appeared in 1991.

Main news topics in 2000

The 1195 news items collected in *Diário de Notícias* and *Público*, show a strong similarity in their news agenda on children. In both newspapers, the leader categories were: 1) *Education*; 2) *Disputed child*³; 3) *Social policies*.

Abandonment and juvenile delinquency were the following topics in *Diário de Notícias*, *accidents*, and *paedophilia* in *Público*. Most of the news content of these five main categories came from in-country events, with the exceptions of *disputed child* and *paedophilia*. In the whole, in-country news items represent 53%, stressing the relevance of geographic and social proximity with the readers.

Excluding *Education* (16% in *Público*, 11,5% in *Diário de Notícias* due to a daily section in *Público*), differences in other categories were minimal, under 1%. As the events do not coincide in many cases, this may be read as a *shared professional image* of primary or secondary news-values on children-related issues. Again, events and issues associated with *economics* (poverty, child labour in factories or at home) are almost absent here, a common trend with American or Asian newspapers, as has been witnessed.

Children from different worlds

Looking at the out-country 554 news items in these Portuguese newspapers, 47% of the whole news, we may compare children's newsworthiness according to different geographic areas.

More than 2/3 of this out-country news deals with Europe and the US⁴, while only 1/5 deals with Africa, Middle East/Asia and Latin America. A few news items (around 7 per cent in both newspapers) cover international conferences, UN resolutions and the like. This contradiction between geographic dimensions and number of items is an example of the social construction of news (Table I):

Table I — Origin of foreign news

Origin of news	Público	%	DN	%	Total	%
Europe	97	41,5	113	35,0	210	37,7
USA (including Elian case)	81	34,6	91	28,2	172	30,9
Latin America	5	2,1	13	4,0	18	3,2
Africa	7	3	35	10,8	42	7,5
Middle East and Asia	17	7,3	35	10,8	52	9,3
Confences, UN resolutions	17	7,3	24	7,4	41	7,4
Others	10	4,3	12	3,7	22	3,9
Total	234	100,0	323	100,0	557	100,0

Irregular distribution of European news is common in both newspapers (Table II), with most of the news coming from the UK. This prominence results from different factors and influences, such as the presence of Reuters in the newsrooms, the British tabloid campaigns in 2000 against paedophiles, the existence of permanent correspondents in London or the number of English scientific journals quoted in Science pages. Italy is the second origin, mainly due the topic of pornography in Internet. Germany is the third presence, followed by Spain, France and European institutions.

4
A relatively large proportion of the US news treated the Elian Gonzalez story, the Cuban boy disputed by his father, in Cuba, and his remote familiars in Miami.

5
Two items referred the decision to forbidden Pokemon by Turkish TV, in December 2000. The others were about street children.

Five countries (UK, Italy, Germany, Spain and France) represent more than 3/4 of all the European news (Table III). It is important to refer that Germany and France are countries with large Portuguese migrant communities, as well as Luxembourg and Switzerland. There are several European countries without news and news from others represents 17,6%.

Table II — News from Europe

Europe	DN	%	Pblico	%	Total	%
United Kingdom	44	38,9	52	53,6	96	45,7
Italy	13	11,5	8	8,2	21	10,0
Germany	14	12,4	5	5,2	19	9,0
Spain	7	6,2	6	6,2	13	6,2
European institutions	5	4,4	8	8,2	13	6,2
France	5	4,4	6	6,2	11	5,2
Others	25	22,1	12	12,4	37	17,6
Total	113	100,0	97	100,0	210	100,0

Table III - News items from other European countries

1 news item	Austria, Belguim, Bulgaria, Ireland, Latvia, Romania, Ukraine
2 news items	Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Sweden, Vatican
3 news items	Poland, Switzerland
4 news items	Turkey ⁵
6 news items	Luxembourg, Russia

Main topics from Europe and from Asia, Africa and Latin America present relevant differences in their content.

Main topics among European news items related to children were: 1) *Paedophilia*; 2) *Child at risk*, accidents and risk situations such as street insecurity, dangerous toys or toxic food; 3) *Education*, 4) *Child and the science*, focused on scientific discoveries, mostly from Psychology Studies; and 5) *Olympic*

child, focused on children whose parents are public figures, politicians, artists and so⁶.

Main topics among news items concerning Africa, Asia and Latin America were: 1) *Children victim of war, persecutions or catastrophes*; 2) *Medical careless*; 3) *Child soldier*; 4) *Children's poverty*; 5) *Abandoned and neglected child*. As we may see, whereas the first two European topics focus on events or situations commonly perceived as prejudicial to children's welfare in these societies, all five main topics about Africa, Asia or Latin America were characterised by negativity. Children from these continents were presented mainly as victims of "remote problems" from a European perspective, often in short texts, without contexts. Again, the absence of relevance of Economic issues and poverty associated with children living in European countries contrasts with a strong focus on it, outside that place. This contrast is also visible in photos: the *European child*, mostly alone in the picture, is usually a white middle-class child, while children from Asia and Africa are portrayed as poor.

Children in five European newspapers

Using the same criteria, three newspapers from European countries (*Le Monde*, France; *El Pais*, Spain; *The Guardian*, UK) were analysed and compared with *Público* and DN during the first week of October.

The 97 child-related items collected in this week in the five newspapers were fairly evenly distributed amongst them. A quantitative content analysis showed that education, about one quarter of all news items, was the main topic in all the newspapers, similar to findings in Brazil, the US and in the richer Asian countries. Educational news was mostly domestically oriented, covering curricula, organisational problems, school violence and students from social minorities.

6
In 2000, this is the case, for instance of news about the birth of Leo, Tony and Cherrie Blair's son or the daughters of Prince Andrew going to school.

Only one singular event was common: the birth of Adam Nash, an US test-tube baby with the right cells for him to act as a donor to his seriously-ill older sister. This science news, published in the front page of *The Washington Post* at October 3rd appeared in all the newspapers October 4th, and its ethical questions were discussed in editorials and opinion articles the day after.

A qualitative discourse analysis, according to different socio-semantic categories, sought to understand how the 97 headlines in the five newspapers constructed children's social position in the news discourse.

This analysis showed that *exclusion* of children from the headlines was a common option in news items related to children. When children were *present* in headlines, they were mostly passive targets, directly or indirectly affected by external actions. Presentation of children as social actors, i.e., people who are able to do things and doing them, was rare. The few headlines presenting children as *active persons, doing things* or as *speakers* were connected mostly with negative actions, such as delinquency or ignorance in scholar learning.

These and other tendencies, putting children's problems and issues low on the public agenda, were similar in the five newspapers, despite their editorial and cultural differences. Children are again presented as the paradigmatic *other*.

Conclusions and continuities

News on children provides different kinds of discourses, according to the way it is framed. Secularized homilies and cordiality stories, oriented to private experiences and to the readers' direct identification, go side by side with stories focused on conflicts, polemics and accidents, particularly presenting young people as wrongdoers or in risk.

Education, a tensional and contradictory field in contemporary societies, clearly placed in the "sphere of

legitimate controversy", presents a high newsworthiness in different countries. Mainly framed by the domestic agenda, education deals with the idea of children as the future of a nation and with unsolved political, economic, social and cultural questions. In different countries questions about access/abandonment, public/private systems, curricula, failure, rankings, integration/discrimination, basic and secondary skills and so are topics in the news, due to the controversy they stimulate. Education also permits the homily style, in news oriented to the reader *as parent*, with the focus on the singular and the private. Children as students are rarely heard and tend to be pictured as more ignorant than their parents were in their childhood, losing competencies without references to new achievements.

We may also identify overlaid logics: the logic of *news as facts* and its rhetoric of factuality, without questioning which facts are almost always absent and why; the logic of *marketing news-information*, mixing homily style with conflict and competition stories; the logic of *civic journalism*, evoked by moral crusades or enlarging news topics and voices on the basis of children's rights.

On the less-visible side remain economic issues involving children at national level, such as poverty or child labour, common to the coverage in Asian newspapers, as well as in the US, or in Portugal. Bad news about poverty involving children is mostly from without; the trend to singularize an event out of its context and just denounce it is justified by the hard news logic.

Placing these trends in the public sphere, and comparing practices and results, may contribute, we believe, to a greater degree of rigor, on the part of the news professionals, as well as by the public, contributing to enrich the debate on children's rights and necessary policies in contemporary societies.

This way, in 2005 this research is being updated, based on contributions in media research, and focused on again in the Portuguese media. Popular newspapers and TV news contents are included for the first time, in order to compare topics and narratives with the agenda of the so-called quality newspapers. The board of categories aims also to enable possible comparisons with those used by ANDI, therefore enlarging comparative results.

The project aims to promote a research along the "circuit of communication", discussing results with media professionals and social organisations and children and youth advocates, frequently with tensional perspectives about this news, as well as listening to children and young people, and incorporating their perspective in the critical reading of these news contents.

References

- Barreto, A. (ed.) (1996). *A Situação Social em Portugal, 1960-1995*. Lisboa: Instituto de Ciências Sociais.
- Buckingham, D. (2000). *The Making of Citizens. Young People, News and Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Carter, C. and S. Allan (in press) "Young People's Voices: Citizenship, Media Education and Online News." in *Communication in Adolescence: Perspectives on Language and Social Interaction in the Teenage Years*. A. Williams and C. Thurlow (eds.). London: Peter Lang .
- Dennis, E. and M. Sadoff (1976). "Media Coverage of Children and Childhood: Calculated Indifference or Neglect?" *Journalism Quarterly* 53: 47-56.
- Franklin, B. and J. Petley (1996). "Killing the Age of Innocence: Newspaper Reporting of the Death of James Bulger." in *Thatcher's Children?* J. Pilcher and S. Wagg (eds.). London: Palmer Press. 134-154.
- Goonasekera, A. (ed.) (2001). *Children in the News: An Examination of the Portrayal of Children in Television and Newspapers in 13 Asian Countries*. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre.
- Hallin, D. C. (1986). *The Uncensored War: Media and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford.
- Hallin, D. C. (1996). "Commercialism and Professionalism in the American News Media." in *Mass Media and Society*. J. Curran and M. Gurevitch (eds.). London: Edward Arnold. 243-264.
- Hartley, J. (1998). "Juvenation: News, Girls and Power." in *News, Gender and Power*. C. Carter, G. Branston and S. Allan (eds.). London: Routledge. 47-70.
- Jempson, M. (2003). *Children and Media - A Global Concern*. (retrieved 28.09.2004)
- Kitzinger, J. (1999). "The Ultimate Neighbour from Hell?" in *Social Policy, the Media and Misrepresentation*. B. Franklin (ed.). London: Routledge: 207-221.
- Kunkel, D. (1994). "The News Media's Picture of Children." in *The News Media's Picture of Children*. Kunkel, D. (ed.). Oakland: Children Now.
- Kunkel, D. et al. (1999). *The News Media's Picture of Children: A Five Year Update and A Focus on Diversity*. publications.childrennow.org/publications/media/newsmedia_1999.cfm - 18k - 13 Jun 2005
- Moëller, S. (2002). "A Hierarchy of Innocence. The Media's Use of Children in the Telling of International News." *Press/Politics* 7 (1): 36-56.
- Ponte, C. (2002). *Quando as crianças são notícia. Contributo para o estudo da noticiabilidade na imprensa escrita de informação geral (1970-2000)*. PhD thesis, Universidade Nova de Lisboa: 650.
- Ponte, C. (2005). *Crianças em notícia. Tratamento jornalístico da infância na imprensa (1970-2000)*. Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.
- Schudson, M. (2000). "The Sociology of News Production." in *Mass Media and Society*. J. Curran and M. Gurevitch (eds.). London: Arnold. 175-200.
- Trost, C. (1996). "From Unseen and Unheard to Kidsbeat." in *Children and the Media*. E. Dennis and E. C. Pease (eds.). New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers. 47-56.
- Vieira, G. (2002). "Reporting on on by children. Journalism on children's rights in Brazil." *News From ICCVOS* 1/2002: 16.
- Zelizer, B. (2004). *Taking Journalism Seriously*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Sites on children in the News

ANDI: <http://www.andi.org.br/>

PressWise: <http://www.presswise.org.uk/>

IFJ: <http://www.ifj.org/>

Columbia University Youth Beat: <http://www.ccsnline.org.uk/mediacentre/main.html>

We interrupt this message: <http://www.interrupt.org/>

Empowering children and media:

http://www.mediamonitoring.org.za/ecm_2005/face.html