

INTERDISCURSIVITY, METAPHOR, AND POLARIZATION: HOW PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ARE REPRESENTED IN THE EDITORIALS OF FOLHA DE S. PAULO

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- **ABSTRACT:** This article analyzes the discursive representation of the homeless population in Folha de S. Paulo editorials between 2011 and 2020, using Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and metaphor analysis as theoretical support. Editorials are texts that characterize the position of a newspaper, especially during significant and tension-filled moments for society, and are thus an essential object of investigation. The corpus of this article, part of a broader research work, comprises eight texts published over a decade. The analysis considers the following strategies and categories: ideological square (Van Dijk, 2015, 2017), interdiscursivity (Fairclough 2002, 2003), and metaphor analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004). The analyses indicate that the editorials build negative representations of the homeless population by favoring the forced displacement of the group, denying their rights, and disseminating discourses that contribute to the exclusion and naturalization of social inequality.
- **KEYWORDS:** critical discourse studies; homeless population; editorials; metaphor; discourse; polarization.

Introduction

The number of Brazilians living in poverty reached approximately 62.5 million (or 29.4% of the country's population), according to data released in December 2022 from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (*Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística* — IBGE) (BELANDI, 2022). Among them, 17.9 million (or 8.4% of the population) were undergoing extreme poverty. This is considered the most significant increase in poverty since 2012.

In this context, the situation of homelessness in Brazilian cities has deteriorated. In these conditions, the population has been marginalized since the pre-modern

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period (Pereira, 2008). The Institute of Applied Economic Research (*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada*) (IPEA, 2016) reveals that 222,000 people in Brazil are homeless, deprived of basic needs, often living in inadequate shelters, and do not meet the parameters of the National Plan approved in 2009.¹ This population facing extreme vulnerability has been increasing with the country’s economic crisis due to unemployment and the inability of many families to maintain their rent.

This reality is well-known and frequently addressed in the media. This article aims to present the partial research results on the representation of the homeless population in the Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* editorials between 2011 and 2020. It is a segment of broader research that investigates the representation of the population experiencing homelessness in opinion pieces of the newspaper during this period.

The focus on editorials is justified by the fact that they represent the newspaper’s stance, especially during significant moments filled with tension for Brazilian society. According to Mont’Alverne (2017), editorials expose issues, events, and ideas to the public domain for consumption and discussion in the public sphere and represent the newspaper’s ideological line. Researching editorials from *Folha de S. Paulo* allows us to map how one of the country’s leading newspapers engages in the agenda concerning the population experiencing homelessness, thus promoting debate on this issue.²

The analytical object of this article will be eight editorial pieces that are part of our broader study of the newspaper’s opinion production over ten years between 2011 and 2020. We used the search tool on the newspaper’s website to find these texts. We entered the following keywords: “*morador de rua*” (male homeless person), “*moradores de rua*” (homeless persons/people), “*moradora de rua*” (female homeless person), “*população de rua*” (homeless population), and “*situação de rua*” (homeless situation). Ten editorials written in that period resulted from this search; however, two were not included in the analysis as they only tangentially addressed the issue of homelessness.

We present a descriptive table of the corpus below:

Table 1 – Corpus of the research

Title	Date	Weblink
Freedom from the void	01/12/2013	http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniao/2013/12/1379082-editorial-liberdade-para-o-vao.shtml
Double failure	05/12/2013	http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniao/2013/12/1380979-editorial-fracasso-duplo.shtml
Waiting for healthcare	02/12/2014	https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniao/2014/12/1556222-editorial-a-espera-da-saude.shtml

¹ Decree 7,053, published on 23rd December 2009, establishes the National Policy for the Homeless Population and the Intersectoral Committees for Monitoring and Follow-up (CIAMP-Rua) at the state and municipal levels, thus permanently establishing the rights of people in homeless situations on the public agenda.

² It is important to highlight that in 2020 and 2021, *Folha* was the news portal with the highest digital audience in the country. This demonstrates the significance of the newspaper, which celebrated its centenary in 2021, as one of the oldest mass communication outlets in the country.

Title	Date	Weblink
Pre-existing disease	19/06/2016	https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaio/2016/06/1783150-doenca-preexistente.shtml
Safer main roads	18/07/2016	https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaio/2016/07/1792638-marginais-mais-seguras.shtml
Minhocão Park	25/02/2019	https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaio/2019/02/parque-minhocao.shtml
Despair in the open	17/07/2019	https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaio/2019/07/desalentao-relento.shtml
Homeless city	01/02/2020	https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/opiniaio/2020/02/cidade-senteto.shtml

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The *Folha* newspaper often addresses the situation of homelessness in both opinion pieces and news articles, likely because São Paulo is the city with the largest population in this situation in the country. According to a survey conducted by the Brazilian Observatory of Public Policies with the Homeless Population (POLOS-UFMG), using data from CadÚnico (a government database), for every 100,000 inhabitants in the city of São Paulo, 300 people are living on the streets. In the capitals of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo, 120 and 126 people live on the streets for every 100,000 inhabitants, respectively.³

This article is primarily anchored in Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)⁴ and metaphor analysis. According to Van Dijk (2015), CDS is specifically interested in the (critical) study of “social issues and problems, social inequality, domination, and related phenomena, in general, and the role of discourse, language use, or communication in such phenomena, in particular” (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 15).

Metaphors are relevant for analysis in CDS since they “are pervasive in all sorts of language and all sorts of discourse” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 241). Charteris-Black (2004, p. 23) argues that they can “influence the way social problems are conceptualized.”

Another aspect of metaphor for CDS is that changes in the metaphorical constitution are “a potent element in the transformation not only of discourse, but also of thinking and practice” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 241). This justifies the centrality of this category for this work, which seeks to answer the following questions: How is the population experiencing homelessness represented? What discourses and polarizations are articulated about the population experiencing homelessness?

In the following sections, the article is divided into three parts, in addition to these initial considerations and final remarks. In the first section, we address the relevance of

³ More in: <https://obpoprua.direito.ufmg.br/boletins.html>. Access on: 6 March, 2023.

⁴ I adopt the designation Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), proposed by Van Dijk (2015), instead of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), although the latter is more widely used. According to the author, CDS is not a method of discourse analysis and may use any relevant method to achieve the research objectives. Discourse analysis is not a method either, “it constitutes a domain of academic practices, a trans-discipline distributed across all human and social sciences” (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 11).

editorials as an object for discourse analysis and justify studying them. In the second section, we discuss the strategies and categories of analysis that will allow us to build answers to the research questions. In the third section, we present an overview of the analysis.

Editorials: A relevant object for CDS

Editorials are characterized as unsigned texts whose authorship is attributed to the journalistic company and which take a stance on several topics. In other words, these texts do not claim to be impartial like news articles. This stance is particularly evident during significant political tension in Brazilian society.

As political spaces seek to establish a dialogue with the country's political and economic elites and to highlight claims they believe should be met, editorials exert the power of influence derived from credibility granted by society (Mont'Alverne, 2017). In line with this idea, Muniz (1999) argues that editorials "engage in the work of convincing, persuading, supporting, contesting, and coercing the state to defend the interests of the business and financial segments they represent" (Muniz, 1999, p. 5).

Mont'Alverne and Marques (2015) argue that, while editorials are used as social capital to pressure political agents, they also need to offer their audience a product that fulfills certain expectations. This creates "tension between private and collective interests in the configuration of journalistic products" (Mont'Alverne and Marques, 2015, p. 122). According to the authors, journalistic editorials strive to fill the role of monitoring political agents while also aiming to represent (a specific) public interest.

For Marques, Mont'Alverne e Mitozo (2018), editorials can underline the corporation's depiction as opinion leaders for their readers, political and economic agents, journalists, or even smaller newspapers replicating content from more prestigious media outlets. Marques, Mont'Alverne e Mitozo (2018, p.226) state that editorials can reveal:

- (a) how the institution's interpretation or perspective on a particular fact is constructed; (b) what strategies the journalistic company uses when claiming authority with the audience and the political field; and (c) the possible transitions of the newspaper's opinions/positions regarding agendas over time.

One hundred years after its existence, *Folha de S. Paulo* stopped publishing editorials between 1972 and 1976 and suspended them again in 1977. In the 1990s, it published three daily editorials. Since 2006, it began publishing two texts and, on some occasions, only one. According to Patu (2019), the opinions expressed by *Folha* in its editorials are shaped through routine internal debates, which are the opinion department's job to promote. Based on contributions from professionals within the

organization and experts from various trends, the Editorial Board, reporting to the company's presidency, defines the position that will be defended.

The meetings that define the editorials, according to Patu (2019), are known as "editorial lunches" and usually occur every two weeks on Fridays, joined by slightly more than twenty people, including editorialists (responsible for writing editorials), editors (in charge of sections and departments of the newspaper), representatives of the Editorial Board and the company, as well as occasional guests.

Therefore, understanding how the newspaper disseminates its opinions and particular worldviews on political, economic, and social issues can help comprehend the values the entire newspaper is guided by. In addition to delving into issues addressed in the news, editorials can set the agenda for matters outside the immediate news coverage. Thus, we believe it is essential to analyze through the lens of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS).

Strategies and categories of analysis: theory

We prioritize CDS strategies and categories of analysis that seek to expand the "lenses" of data observation. Therefore, we work with the analytical strategy of the ideological square (Van Dijk, 2015, 2017), metaphor analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004), and the category of interdiscursivity (Fairclough, 2003).

The ideological square (IS) is an analytical tool developed by Van Dijk to identify ideologies in language based on the manifestation of relationships between groups. According to the author, those who speak/write tend to signal favorable expressions toward their in-group, thus differentiating themselves from the out-group. As the researcher explains, it is "a strategy of positive self-presentation and negative presentation of the other, where our good things and their bad things are highlighted, and our bad things and their good things are downplayed" (Van Dijk, 2017, p. 43). For analytical purposes, groups are typically represented by the pronouns "Us" (in-group — positive emphasis) and "They" (out-group — negative emphasis).

Thus, the analytical strategy, which considers a variety of textual realizations of polarity, is based on the understanding that there is a polarized ideological structure and ideological discourse can operate similarly (Van Dijk, 2017). According to Van Dijk (2015), the IS allows language users to describe events or characteristics of the discursive object at different levels, depending on how they wish to emphasize the good actions or characteristics of the in-group and the lousy conduct or aspects of the out-group.

Using this analytical strategy, we aim to observe the polarization "Us" (newspaper/communication company/symbolic elite) versus "They" (social groups that the media constructs as the opposition), which can point to the ideological character of opinions conveyed in the newspaper, as these "are not always explicitly manifested. That is, very often they are implicit, presupposed, hidden, denied, or taken for granted" (Van Dijk, 2017, p. 222). The emphasis on the negative characteristics of external groups

can be achieved through various structures and strategies, such as metaphors, which is why they were also chosen for analysis.

Charteris-Black (2004) presents an analytical framework for critical metaphor analysis (CMA), which we adopt in this article. The author combines linguistic, cognitive, and pragmatic criteria, as he believes that only one criterion cannot encompass the complexity of the relationship that metaphor establishes between those who produce and those who interpret metaphors. He defines his framework as “a discourse approach that allows us to challenge existing ways of thinking and feeling about human behavior and its relation to language” (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 252).

The metaphorical mapping proposed by Charteris-Black (2004), primarily based on Lakoff and Johnson (1980), includes the analysis of “metaphorical expression,” “conceptual metaphor,” and “conceptual key.” For the author, a “conceptual metaphor” is a formal statement of what is present in a figure of speech (e.g., metaphor or metonymy). A “conceptual key” is inferred from a series of conceptual metaphors and is considered a high-level metaphor for explaining how various conceptual metaphors are related (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 16). The metaphorical expression, in turn, refers to the linguistic expression of the crossed meanings promoted by the metaphor.

According to the author, “conceptual metaphors” and “conceptual keys” clarify which ideas associated with the source should be transferred to the metaphorical target. They also resolve the semantic tension between the original and the new context of the topic. He also emphasizes that metaphor is a communicative resource through which people can increase the expressiveness of their message through more economical meanings available for sense-making.

Charteris-Black proposes a hierarchical classification through which metaphors are described according to their level of abstraction: starting with particular metaphors (metaphorical expression, textual realization, in CDS terms), then conceptual metaphors to conceptual keys (maximum level of abstraction). In research based on CDS, we have mapped the metaphorical expressions in texts that we later grouped into conceptual metaphors by analytical inference. We subsequently inferred the conceptual keys capable of grouping conceptual metaphors into more abstract meanings. Only the metaphorical expressions have linguistic existence in the analyzed texts; the other analytical steps are inferential groupings resulting from the research work. Therefore, we mapped the following conceptual metaphors:

Table 2 – Conceptual Metaphors

Conceptual Metaphors	Frequency
PEH OR HS IS DANGER	1
HS IS DISEASE	4
HS IS DESTRUCTION	2
HS IS A SENSORIAL PERCEPTION	6
HS IS WAR	4

Conceptual Metaphors	Frequency
PEH IS OBJECT	3
PEH IS IMMOBILITY	1
PEH OR HS IS HELPLESSNESS	3
HS IS SCENE	3
HS IS AGGLOMERATION/ CONCENTRATION	1
HS IS OCCUPATION	2

Source: Authors' elaboration.

In order to collect these metaphors, we read all the texts. In the qualitative analysis software NVivo, we coded words and phrases that we believed could be used as potential metaphors, considering linguistic, pragmatic, or cognitive criteria. The coding was stored in the Metaphor Node. Then, we reread everything marked and sought to identify the target domain, source domain, and metaphorically activated meaning. When there was no tension or it was impossible to map the domain shift, we discarded the coding.

With this mapping, we proceeded to group the *metaphorical expressions* by identifying conceptual metaphors, that is, more abstract metaphorical levels where the semantic tension is resolved. In this way, we detected ten conceptual metaphors. Following Charteris-Black's (2004) proposal of "analytical economy," we sought to group the conceptual metaphors into conceptual keys, as this, according to the author, helps perceive coherence in particular discourses and increases the understanding of the ideological role of metaphors.

The ten mapped conceptual metaphors were grouped into six conceptual keys:

Table 3 – Conceptual keys

Conceptual keys	Conceptual metaphors
Conflict/Territory	HS IS WAR PEH OR HS IS A DANGER HS IS HELPLESSNESS/ DESPAIR HS IS AGGLOMERATION / CONCENTRATION HS IS OCCUPATION
Biological	HS IS DISEASE
Sensorial	HS IS A SENSORIAL PERCEPTION HS IS SCENE
Nuisance	HS IS DESTRUCTION
Physical	PEH IS OBJECT
Denial	PEH IS IMMOBILITY

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The conceptual key *conflict/territory* is related to the issue of public space. It highlights the occupation, crowding, and dispute over places where the population experiencing homelessness (PEH) can be found, as well as their situation of helplessness. This key highlights who should be allowed to enjoy (crowd, occupy) the streets and squares. Conflict arises if social groups are occupying these places, being considered “enemies” or dangerous. Therefore, it relates to the rights and defense of the city.

The *biological* key is linked to the association of homelessness with the disease, inferred through the dichotomy of health — good versus disease — bad. On one side of society are the healthy people, who were born with some privilege and are considered good. On the other side are the sick, who have no rights and are seen as evil.

The *sensorial* key activates the senses of spectacularizing and visibility of people experiencing homelessness. As they become more visible in public spaces, they can provoke fear and insecurity in the general population due to the stigma they convey, such as being perceived as “dangerous,” “violent,” and “addicts.” Thus, it is a key that triggers the discourse of fear, reinforcing the portrayal of homelessness as threatening.

The *physical* key is related to the objectification of the person experiencing homelessness. This dissociation of the human person contributes to violations against homeless individuals and the normalization of forced displacement actions against the group. The *denial* key, finally, is linked to the condition of living on the streets, where not only people’s rights are denied, but also their very existence.

By exposing their misery in public spaces, the homeless population activates senses associated with the key *nuisance*. Issues such as the destruction of public spaces are raised, creating the conditions to infer that urban situations take precedence over social concerns. In this way, hygienist discourses succeed, whose main objective is forced displacement, because there is a desire to eliminate the “nuisance” and discomfort that this population represents.

On the other hand, the interdiscursivity category is linked to particular ways of representing aspects of the world. It “refers to discourses articulated or not in the texts, as well as the ways they are articulated and blended with other discourses” (Vieira; Resende, 2016, p. 144). The exact text may include various discourses, which may conflict with particular discourses being contested or promoted. In this perspective, discourses are defined as particular positions regarding the themes addressed in the texts and are associated with social disputes, ideologies, and interests.

It is possible to identify different discourses by observing how aspects of the world are “lexicalized.” Discourses can also be differentiated through semantic relationships, vocabulary, and grammatical aspects, among others – because the wide range of (conscious or unconscious) decisions made to portray aspects of the world and represent them in texts are derived from the meanings one wishes to attribute. Interdiscursive analysis can use a series of textual features to reconstruct these significant relationships. These choices depend on particular interests and practices/positions emphasized in the representation.

Thus, the analyses conducted in the next section address the editorials using a variety of analytical clues to answer the motivating issues of this article: how the homeless population is represented and what discourses and polarizations are articulated about them in the editorials of *Folha de S. Paulo*, which addressed the topic during the decade between 2011 and 2020.

Editorials under analysis: Interdiscursivity, metaphor, and polarization

In this section, we present the analyses of the eight editorials in which *Folha de S. Paulo* addressed the situation of homelessness as a central theme between 2011 and 2020. The analyses will be presented chronologically, starting with the editorial from December 2013 and progressing to the one from February 2020. For each analysis, we used the categories presented in the previous section.

In the editorial published on 1 December 2013, which discusses the possibility of building a fence around the open space in front of MASP (Museum of Art of São Paulo), the newspaper states that the open space around the Museum was being used as a shelter for people experiencing homelessness and was a place in which psychoactive substances were being consumed. According to the newspaper, this presence had created an “unsafe environment,” leading to the dismantling of an exhibition stand ahead of schedule. By using the expression “unsafe environment,” coded in the conceptual metaphor PERSON EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS OR HOMELESSNESS IS DANGER, it can be inferred that people experiencing homelessness are seen as dangerous and pose a risk to the “general population” (“Us,” assimilating the editorial’s speaker). There is a polarity that understates that “We” are affected by the presence of “Them,” who represent a risk. In other words, people experiencing homelessness are seen as a group that poses a threat and not as people in a vulnerable situation.

Therefore, one notices a discourse implying unsafeness, which justifies the newspaper’s proposal for “effective policing” instead of fencing the Museum. Thus, this text also aligns with the discourse of public order. It is worth remembering that Wacquant (2007, p. 23) considers it a scientific and civic mistake to believe and make people believe that police and prison management is the real solution to contain social and mental problems caused by the fragmentation of wage labor and the polarization of urban spaces. This opinion is highly significant considering *Folha*’s influential power due to its wide-ranging audience and relevance as a national media outlet. Therefore, the news agency can influence the political debate on the topic by impacting public opinion and including this issue on the national agenda.

Four days after this publication, *Folha* again addressed the homelessness situation in downtown São Paulo with the editorial titled “Double Failure,” referring to the duo Geraldo Alckmin and Fernando Haddad, respectively, the state governor and city mayor of São Paulo during that period. According to the newspaper, both were failing to manage the situation. The text uses several metaphorical constructions to represent

the circumstances of homelessness. In it, homelessness is represented as one of the “*ills*” that are characteristic of large urban centers.” According to dictionary definitions, “ill” means “wound, soreness.” Therefore, it is a metaphorical representation in which the abstract concept of HOMELESSNESS (target domain) is understood in terms of the more concrete concept of DISEASE (source domain), which means a change in health through the manifestation of symptoms like a wound.

According to Resende (2008, p. 202), this conceptual metaphor “person experiencing homelessness and/or homelessness is a disease” operates as a dissimulation of human responsibility because, culturally, a disease is perceived as something that happens regardless of will or action. It can be inferred that this “event” can disrupt social organizations and become a “threat” to society. This conceptual metaphor is also mapped in the passage: “unbearable *wound* to the social fabric” from the exact text.

In “The scenario of utter *human degradation*,” there is a representation in the conceptual field of “homelessness is destruction”, where human degradation points to the source domain of destruction, attributing a very negative trait to the group. Moreover, the conceptual metaphor “homelessness is sensorial perception” is observed and mapped due to the identification of the following metaphorical expressions: “clearly revealing,” “scenes and events that intensify,” and “daily perception,” where the situation of homelessness is represented as a sensorial impact on the group “Us/We,” who do not experience being on the streets.

Next, the meaning of homelessness is constructed based on the semantic field of war, using the term “invasion.” Thus, the newspaper employs the conceptual metaphor “homelessness is war”. According to the Online Portuguese Dictionary, “war,” among other definitions, means a declared battle against something harmful: war against dengue. In this case, the harm would be people experiencing homelessness, who are transformed into “enemies,” a war metaphorically waged against “people experiencing homelessness.”

In this excerpt, the representation of the out-group as “invaders” of an area is noticed. The interpretation suggested by the newspaper in the generated effects of meaning is that “We” would be “affected by the invaders.” Moreover, for “our protection,” “a solid wire fence was erected” (literal fence, in this case). Even so, “They” occupied the space: “About a hundred shacks were set up there, sheltering crack addicts, paper pickers, and homeless residents.” In other words, “They” invaded and occupied the location. Here, one can observe the construction of an oppositional group, “Them,” assimilating homelessness with chemical dependence.

Another activated interpretation is the fact that “They” are evaluated as “undisciplined” since they still invade and occupy the area despite the use of a device to prevent this action (“a solid wire fence”). Interestingly, the agent who implemented this tool to prevent the presence of people experiencing homelessness is undetermined: Is it the government, local residents, or business people? On the other hand, the damaging action of “theirs” of “putting up their shacks” was emphasized by the numerical expression “about a hundred” to suggest the number of people living there.

Furthermore, the choice of “about a hundred shacks” personifies “shacks” by using it instead of people, objectifying them (conceptual metaphor “homelessness is an object”).

The newspaper included the voice of the city government, which spoke through a “laconic note” about the emergence of the “*favelinha*” (small slum). The author placed the term “*favelinha*” in quotation marks and depicts a negative representation associated with people living in precarious housing in suburbs or city centers. Another passage also uses the same graphical resource, “which resulted in 341 referrals,” referring to the approaches of social workers in the region. The quotation marks refer to the text that the city government must have used in the “note” sent to the newspaper. Their use in the editorial mitigates the newspaper’s commitment to the information provided and can also be read as an indication of irony.

Folha demands more transparency from the city government regarding the “expense” of assistance to vulnerable populations since it only disclosed a value related to constructing a cultural complex, positioning itself as a watchdog of the public administration. The editorialist’s writing suggests that social assistance involves an “expense” rather than an investment. The text ends with the metaphorical construction “to recover the dignity of those who vegetate in that region,” which refers to a concrete domain of immobility, configuring the conceptual metaphor “homelessness is immobility”, with a negative representation of this group.

In this text, therefore, the newspaper is part of the in-group “Us” and negatively represents the out-groups, composed of the public administration that allegedly acts with “neglect” concerning homelessness, in addition to not being transparent about expenses in the field of social assistance. Moreover, people experiencing homelessness are represented through metaphor or assimilation as invaders, undisciplined, dependent on psychoactive substances, and lazy. The social problem is represented in terms of disease, sensorial perception of third parties, and the destruction of public space.

A discourse of social inequality is mobilized in the editorial “Waiting for healthcare,” published on December 2nd 2014. The text points out the flaws in the health management of the municipal government under Mayor Fernando Haddad, who allegedly made several unfulfilled promises. The newspaper positions itself once again as a watchdog of the public administration by fulfilling one of the communicative purposes attributed to editorials, as seen in Mont’Alverne (2017). Regarding the healthcare provided to people experiencing homelessness, the newspaper suggests that the administration “shows progress” in the delivery of mobile healthcare units, the “Street Clinics.” The battlefield metaphor in “in the *attack* against specific issues, such as healthcare provided to the homeless” suggests that “homelessness is war”.

Although the editorialist acknowledges the government’s initiative to provide medical assistance to people experiencing homelessness as important, the text ends with the passage: “The entire population is still waiting for the solution to basic problems.” From this fragment, it is possible to infer that there is a demand for better results for this “entire population” (“Us”), thus highlighting the “Us/Them” opposition in the argumentation. The polarization is also evident in divided representations: “owes to

the population” vs. “dedicated to the homeless”; “traditionally underserved group” vs. “entire population”; “systemic problems” vs. “specific problems.”

When the newspaper includes itself in the in-group “entire population,” whose right to healthcare is claimed, it excludes those experiencing homelessness (out-group) from the population entitled to rights and thus evokes a discourse of inequality, reinforcing the division between the dominant class (entitled to rights) and the impoverished class (deprived of rights). Although not explicitly expressed, this discourse is built through successive reinforcements of polarity throughout the text, as previously highlighted.

The editorial “Pre-existing Disease,” published on June 19th 2016, resonates with the death of five people experiencing homelessness after days of intense cold in the city of São Paulo, based on the discourse of then-mayor Fernando Haddad. According to him, the confiscation of blankets and cardboard by municipal guards had occurred to prevent “favelization,” and the deaths were due to pre-existing illnesses and not continued exposure to the cold weather. The editorial objectifies the people who died while experiencing homelessness by using the term “abandoned on the street,” as if they were objects left and forgotten on the street (conceptual metaphor HOMELESSNESS IS AN OBJECT).

Thus, this time, the newspaper commits itself to a discourse on the need for public assistance to people experiencing homelessness. It mobilizes a welfarist discourse, as seen in passages like: “Whether sick or not, with temperatures dropping to 3.5°C, they need food, shelter, and blankets to avoid the risk of dying on the sidewalk. That is what shelters are for” and “This emerges as a step in the right direction — that of unconditional humanitarian reception — that the city, after initial embarrassment, promises to convert existing tents in Sé, Anhangabaú, Glicério, and Mooca to accommodate the homeless by the end of the month.”

By addressing the precarious situation of the shelters, the editorial presents the issue from the perspective of people experiencing homelessness: “The dissenters point out the lack of spaces for families, couples, carts, and dogs. They complain about the food, the treatment, the rigid schedules – being urged to leave the premises early in the morning.” This rare approach places the people experiencing homelessness as social actors with an active role. In contrast, most media texts represent this population with a passive role, either as recipients of an action or being submitted to an activity.

In the editorial “Despair in the Open,” published on 17 July 2019, the newspaper draws attention to the increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness during cold periods throughout the country and the lack of data about the group. The title already reveals a metaphorical representation that understands homelessness as helplessness/despair (conceptual metaphor “homelessness is helplessness/despair”). In other words, the population experiencing homelessness is the one suffering the consequences of the state’s inaction. This representation occurred on other occasions, such as “it is estimated that there are 32.6 thousand people exposed to the elements” and “sheltering those who find themselves in the open.” This metaphorical representation

recognizes the need for assistance to the homeless population and presents it as a demand to the state.

However, this is another text in which *Folha* employs metaphors that address the issue from the illness perspective: “homelessness or the homelessness situation is a disease”: “swelling of the population” and “social wound.” This construction creates a polarization where “We – society” are affected by this “disease,” that is, by “Them,” by their presence “on the street.” We also find the conceptual metaphor: “homelessness is a sensory perception” materialized in terms like “apparent increase,” “the progression is evident,” “as perceived by the city residents,” and “has imposed itself in conversations in Brazilian metropolises.” Once again, homelessness is represented through the sensory perception it generates in bodies that do not live on the streets but see it and perceive its ‘evident appearance.’ There is also the metaphor that sensationalizes homelessness, mapped in the conceptual metaphor “homelessness is a scene”: “to the spectacle of helplessness on every corner.” All these metaphorical expressions denote negative representations of the population and the social issue.

The editorial refers to the voice of the State Movement of People Experiencing Homelessness to estimate the number of people in vulnerability, whose numbers contrast with the city surveys every four years. While the city indicated 15 thousand, the movement estimated 32.6 thousand people experiencing homelessness. The voice of the movement legitimizes the argument of the increase in the population experiencing vulnerability: “It seems more likely, however, that the homeless population is indeed growing, as perceived by the city residents,” contesting the municipality, which, according to the text, claimed that the higher number was not due to population growth but rather to the organization’s outreach efforts (“The progression is evident, but the authorities prefer to attribute it to an alleged greater effort by the city”).

The editorial also disseminates that homelessness is an individual issue: “Several factors contribute to a person reaching this extreme state of destitution, from the inability to find work to drug dependence and family conflicts,” omitting the broader historical and economic context. It is essential to consider that difficulty in finding employment, besides being a result of broader economic conditions and access to education, also stems from the prejudice against employing people who bear the historical marks of abysmal inequality in Brazil.

The editorialist mentions the newspaper’s effort to count the number of people living on the streets (“dispossessed,” in the editorial’s terms) in other Brazilian cities: “A survey by this newspaper, reported on Sunday (14), found that the homeless population is increasing in several capital cities.” Through this construction, a positive representation of the “Us — newspaper” emerges, which quantifies the increase in the population experiencing homelessness, supporting the argument of an “apparent increase” in the number of people experiencing homelessness. On the other hand, public authorities are negatively represented for not generating standardized statistics on the homeless population (“Each municipality counts them if, however, and whenever they want”). The text argues that the public authorities must accurately perform this count with a

single methodology for all locations – carrying out a census of the homeless population has been a demand of the National Street Population Movement since 2010.

Based on the metaphorical and polarized representations, the newspaper conveys a discourse reinforcing the understanding that the situation is threatening. In response, it commits to a welfarist discourse, as it emphasizes the need for government action in terms of counting and providing assistance (“Identifying the destitute is obviously not enough”).

In the editorial “Minhocão Park” published on February 25th 2019, the newspaper *Folha* takes a favorable stance on deactivating the viaduct João Goulart, popularly known as *Minhocão*, to build a park in its place. Otherwise, the modalization of this opinion is structured in statements such as “It is an initiative that deserves support, *albeit conditioned*” and “*if it acts diligently*, the city government will be contributing to a city that is less arid and hostile to its inhabitants”.

Polarization is observed in the structure of the text in which the newspaper mentions that an advantage of the Park’s creation is that: “*the space has already been embraced by the citizens of São Paulo*. For a few years now, the park has *successfully* been open for public visits on weekends”. When the newspaper mentions that the space has already been embraced by city dwellers who visit the area during the weekend, it excludes the homeless people who use the viaduct as shelter daily. This polarization, therefore, separates “*Us-paulistanos*,” São Paulo inhabitants who supposedly have the right to the space because they have embraced it “*successfully*,” from “*Them*,” the vulnerable classes whose right to the city is denied. Hence an inequality discourse is present, which separates the groups: *paulistanos* who embrace and vulnerable classes which should not be embraced, according to the following representation.

In “The promised transformation, however, cannot be reached without measures that help revitalize the area, which concentrates homeless people, drug users, and a degraded commerce,” the metaphorical conceptualization “street situation is agglomeration/concentration” is mapped through the structure “concentrates homeless people, drug users”. The description of the place as one that concentrates homeless people, drug users, and degraded commercial activity occurred after defending the “revitalization” of the area. It is essential to point out that this excerpt also makes up the fine line (addition to the title), demonstrating that this is one of the main pieces of information in the text. Commonly, hygienist actions deemed as revitalizing urban public spaces typically involve the forced displacement of vulnerable populations.

The forced displacement of vulnerable populations is part of a “new urbanism” or urban form in which gentrification plays a central role. Gentrification is a term attributed to R. Glass, who used the expression to refer to the expulsion of low-income populations from central neighborhoods to make them more attractive to the middle and upper classes.

The term was also used by N. Smith, who studied the urbanization process in New York. The author points to the dimension that the process took from 1990 onwards, calling it the generalization of gentrification, in which the central actors in urban renewal

are no longer the middle and upper classes. “The agents of urban renaissance are linked to the government and businesses, or the participation of corporate-governmental partnerships” (Smith, 2006, p. 59).

According to Smith (2006), the generalization of gentrification is related to the abandonment of the progressive policies of the 20th century and the victory of neoliberal policies. The researcher argues that gentrification is now presented by some city planners and urbanists as “natural,” that is, as part of an urban policy that values centers in order to make them more attractive — hence the name of the process by metaphorical euphemisms such as ‘revitalization.’

The problem is that these interventions do not consider the fate of the impoverished population, who are the primary victims of this process. The architect and researcher Paolo Colosso, in an article published in the USP News Agency, refers to this situation as “inevitable consequences of good business.” According to the author, using the modernization narrative, the “public enemies” are victims of an obscured “social cleansing” (Mendonça, 2020).

The editorial also acknowledges the issue of gentrification: “The foreseeable increase in rents in the region and the consequent expulsion of the poorest strata who live there cannot be ignored.” Recognizing gentrification as a problem, the editorial suggests, “There are public policies capable of mitigating this effect.” These policies, however, do not acquire relevance in the agenda of any of the editorials that deal with the homeless situation in *Folha de S. Paulo*.

In “Homeless city,” published on February 1st 2020, the *Folha* newspaper once again addresses the increase in the number of people in street situations. We observe a discourse of fear articulated when the newspaper emphasizes the critical dimension of the number of people living in vulnerable environments, using metaphoric expressions such as “the street population reached its mark” and “it is a leap.” These expressions in the structures “city dwellers routinely observe, in the naked eye” and “city of homeless people” reinforce the sense of visibility (conceptual metaphor “homeless situation is sensorial perception”), as well as occupation (“homeless situation is occupation”), respectively. Therefore, we can interpret the threat and danger associated with the situation.

By using terms like “social drama” and “drama of the homeless” (mapped in the conceptual metaphor “Street situation is a scene”), the newspaper chooses to sensationalize the street situation, describing it as a “drama.” Furthermore, there is an intertextual articulation of opposition between the numbers presented by the government and the Movement of the Street Population of São Paulo, which claims that the number of people living in street situations is higher. This intertextual articulation reinforces the argument about the quantitative increase (“salto”) of the “social drama.”

The newspaper justifies this scenario by referring to the economic situation when mentioning the “severe economic recession,” “slow growth recovery,” “increased unemployment,” and “economic setbacks.” However, it also incorporates a social discourse by mentioning raising concerns about the conditions in shelters, such as

“shelters,” “insufficient investments in social housing,” and “regulating the article of law 17.252, which provides shelter for people in these situations by companies contracted by the city,” “approaching a homeless person,” and when making a critical assessment of the homeless shelter situation: “they often adopt hostile rules, such as inflexible hours and forbidding wagons that collect recyclable material — in addition to poor quality food.” *Folha* thus oscillates, balancing its editorials between hygienist and gentrifying discourses and demands for intersectoral public policies.

Final Considerations

As a part of a broader project, this article aims to respond to how the population experiencing homelessness is represented in terms of discourses and polarizations articulated within the editorials of the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* on the topic of homelessness published between 2011 and 2020. The aim was to understand how the newspaper disseminates its stance on this social group in its editorial space.

We found that metaphors helped reveal implicit meanings, as shown by analyzing metaphors and conceptual keys in the previous section. The ideological square allowed us to perceive *Folha*'s choice to emphasize the representation of negative actions and characteristics of the population experiencing homelessness while concealing their positive aspects.

The editorials portrayed the homeless population as invading, undisciplined, dangerous, objects, and disease, among other labels mapped through metaphors and polarizations. These negative representations favor actions of forced displacement of the group. Thus, the newspaper aligns itself with the “social cleansing” policy historically practiced by the São Paulo government. However, these very explicit meanings are not openly shown in the editorials but can be revealed through analysis.

Folha's position is consistent with the discourses of insecurity and fear disseminated by the editorials, which call for action. We also noticed discourses that naturalize social inequality and adopt a welfarist approach. Through welfarist discourses, the newspaper uses its privileged position to demand necessary public policies from the government, policies also demanded by movements representing the population experiencing homelessness. Paradoxically, the editorials often deny the rights of the population experiencing homelessness, especially their rights to healthcare and enjoyment of public spaces. One may question the types of assistance these editorials advocate for and what they prefer to silence or openly criticize.

It is worth noting that in all editorials, *Folha* chooses not to address the problem from the perspective of the people experiencing homelessness but instead based on its interests. The longitudinal analysis of the *corpus* allowed us to observe that the newspaper's opinion on this issue has not changed over the years, indicating continuity in terms of agendas and points of view.

We know that discourses propagated in the media can have broad social reach. When they present negative evaluations of social groups, they share discriminatory perspectives that find a path of reification. The *Folha* editorials about the homeless situation are discriminatory and potentially spread harmful prejudice against this population.

MENDONÇA, D; RESENDE, V. Interdiscursividade, metáfora e polarização: como a população em situação de rua é representada nos editoriais da Folha de S. Paulo. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v. 68, 2024.

- *RESUMO: Este artigo analisa a representação discursiva da população em situação de rua nos editoriais da Folha de S. Paulo entre 2011 e 2020, tendo como aporte teórico os Estudos Críticos do Discurso (ECD) e a análise de metáfora. Editoriais são textos que caracterizam o posicionamento de um jornal, principalmente em momentos marcantes e de tensão para a sociedade, por isso, são um importante objeto de investigação. O corpus deste artigo, parte de trabalho de investigação mais amplo, é composto por oito textos publicados ao longo de uma década. A análise considera as seguintes estratégias e categorias: quadrado ideológico (Van Dijk, 2015, 2017), interdiscursividade (Fairclough, 2001, 2003) e a análise de metáfora (Charteris-Black, 2004). As análises apontam que os editoriais constroem representações negativas da população em situação de rua favorecendo o deslocamento forçado do grupo, negam seus direitos e disseminam discursos que contribuem para a exclusão e naturalização da desigualdade social.*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: estudos críticos do discurso; população em situação de rua; editoriais; metáforas; polarização.*

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