

# Precarious Employment and Today's Satirical Press: Representation of Interns in *El Mundo Today*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

From its beginnings, the Spanish satirical press has acted as a concave mirror that caricatures current issues. Thus, the crisis, controversies and changes experienced by society have been channeled in a humorous and burlesque tone throughout the pages of these publications, which have been adapting their contents to the needs of each historical moment. The present work seeks to study the mechanisms used by the current satirical press regarding one of the problems that most concern the contemporary citizenship: the employment precariousness. With this purpose, we addressed the image created by *El Mundo Today*—a publication characterized by fake news— of the interns, a precarious group whose presence in many companies has increased during the crisis due to cuts in their staff. In this way, we studied all the news about interns published in this digital newspaper from January 2009 until March 2017. We submitted these texts to a double analysis: a quantitative content analysis and an analysis of the discourse to extract the force-ideas from our corpus.

**Key words:** satirical press, fake news, employment precariousness, interns, work.

**Summary:** 1. Introduction and State of the Question. 1.1. From *El Duende Crítico* to *El Mundo Today*. 1.2. The Case of *El Mundo Today*. 1.3. Precarious employment, Precarious lives. 2. Research Objectives. 3. Methodology. 4. Results Analysis. 5. Conclusion. Bibliography. Annex.

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## 1. Introduction and State of the Question

Since it began, the satirical press has acted as an acerbic, yet humorous, narrator of current events. Little wonder it is regarded as «discursive elaboration and social communication [both of which are] linked to a society's historical events» (Gómez Mompert, 2010: 9). Thus, with laughter as the backbone of its discourse, this medium has deployed its criticism throughout the years against every age's political and economic actors, and the customs and habits that characterized them.

Along these lines, it is worth highlighting the role humor plays in human relationships, and humor's profound connections to both its historical context and social setting. Peter Berger points to this when he explains «what strikes people as funny and what they do in order to provoke a humorous response differs enormously from age to age, and from society to society. Put differently, humor is an anthropological constant and is historically relative» (Berger, 1999: 11). As Gómez Mompert notes (2010, 9), humor represents a key «to bringing us closer to understanding different cultures, working from the premise that the cultures are historical.» And building on this, as Stuart Hall (1984: 101) explained, culture constitutes «a battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won or lost.»

Focusing our attention on the satirical press, we can pinpoint certain mechanisms that provoke the humor we find conveyed, more or less abundantly, in their messages. These devices, delimited by Goodlad (1982), are namely: exaggeration, inversion, impropriety, substitution, double meaning, limited expression, and repetition.

The aim of the present paper is to conduct an initial study of contemporary satirical press activity vis-à-vis the issues affecting today's society. In particular, we will study how the satirical newspaper *El Mundo Today* (*EMT*) treats precarious employment —one of today's most pressing work-life issues for workers and, especially, young employees— by focusing on a group bearing most of the brunt of this phenomenon: interns.

To this end, our analysis will be based upon three central questions: the identifying features of the satirical press; the establishment of precarious employment as a matter of importance to society (and therefore, an element upon which to elaborate a critical and satirical discourse); and the characteristics specific to *EMT* as an autonomous medium.

### 1.1. From *El Duende Crítico* to *El Mundo Today*

To understand how the Spanish satirical press functions in the present context, a review of this genre's historical antecedents becomes essential. Naming them all and delving into their editorial and thematic questions is impossible given the present space, so we will try to briefly condense some of the most germane titles. Most scholars concur in naming *El Duende Crítico* (1735) as the first in this field. Current politics were the principal subject of its barbs, although as Llera explains

(2003: 204), «it has a stronger foothold in invective than in strict satire.» In fact, according to the same author (2003: 204), «thanks to various historical sources, we know that it frequently manipulated information and its rigor was more than questionable.»

Also in the eighteenth century, *El Pensador* appeared; with a greater didactic and reformist spirit, it often stood out for the quality of its writing. Among the issues it took aim at were the customs and vices of the time: from the society balls to the deep-seated superstitions and the idleness of the nobility. Our review of the eighteenth-century press closes with *El Censor* (1781-1788), which «jumps the fence of epidermal *costumbrismo* and immerses itself, with regenerationist zeal, in contemporaneous problems» (Llera: 2003, 205).

For a good part of the nineteenth century, the liberal bourgeoisie would use the satirical press as a vehicle for its demands and reformist aspirations. We thus find numerous mastheads founded upon mocking criticism, such as *La Abeja Española*, *El Robespierre Español*, and *El Zurriago*. Larra also dedicated part of his career to satirical publications, such as *El Duende Satírico del Día* and *El Pobrecito Hablador*, whose objective was to draw attention to and correct the evils of the times. Other mastheads would join later, such as *Fray Gerundio*, launched by Modesto Lafuente.

Technological advances in printing gave images, and especially caricatures, increasingly greater importance until they eventually became the banner of the satirical press. In fact, the lack of technological alternatives meant that a large part of the population saw their leaders for the first time in these grotesque drawings. Perhaps the best example of this is *Gil Blas*, arising in 1864, and which, according to Antonio Laguna (2003: 116) «confirmed the coming of age of the satirical press illustrated with cartoons.»

Laguna goes on to explain that this «*Gil Blas* model would be widely imitated throughout Spain, even reaching the daily press for the first time, « (2003: 117). The rampant illiteracy at the time made these images a triumphant success, so much so that graphic humor would subsequently find numerous other spaces in which to develop, such as *El Padre Cobos* or *La Flaca* (whose barbs were directed particularly at the monarchy, the army, the clergy, and Juan Prim). Nineteenth-century political satire found one of its last representatives in *El Motín*, inaugurated in 1881 and characterized by its anti-clerical and anti-monarchical stance. For Llera (2003: 213), the 1895 arrival of *Gedeón* represented the «first project of modern humorous journalism» thanks to its «incisive humor».

*La Traca* warrants special mention; it was a great exponent of Valencian satire that moved through different periods since its founding in 1884. The height of this publication's splendor was during the Second Republic, when it became «the first in the entire Spanish market which managed to sell over half a million copies» (Laguna, 2003: 125). The clamorous and demanding character of *La Traca* was undeniable, to the point it became the «scourge of priests and nuns, in addition to, invariably, monarchists and conservatives» (Laguna, 2010: 85).

The arrival of Francoism meant a freeze on the most radical and transgressive satirical press; political criticism was thus displaced by a simple *costumbrista* humor. This is the case of *La Codorniz* in its early years. However, from

1944 onwards, the publication turned to irony «to judge acidically the morality imposed by the dictatorship» in a way that provoked «a laughter born from fear, from the conscience of the edge» (Martínez Gallego, 2010: 36).

*Hermano Lobo*, a «caustic magazine with power» (Martínez Gallego, 2010: 36), arrived on the scene in 1972, followed by others such as *Por Favor* (1974) and *El Papus* (which was bombed, resulting in one employee dead and 17 others injured). None of these publications continued for long. It was not until the arrival of *El Jueves* in 1977 that a satirical magazine would survive to the present day. The first years of the twenty-first century bring us to the medium our analysis will focus upon: the online periodical of fake news *El Mundo Today*.

### 1.2. *The Case of El Mundo Today*

The masthead chosen for this study, *El Mundo Today* (*EMT*), shares numerous characteristics with the traditional satirical press, but it also presents important differences. The essential feature of this medium, begun in 2009, is its use of fake news as a vehicle to provoke laughter. The format thus mimics that of the writing and structure of general-interest articles, while incorporating fictitious and parodic elements.

This contrast favors hilarity and yields a playing with contexts in which misunderstandings, word games, and oxymorons abound. What likewise stands out is its fondness for the absurd, hyperbole, and sarcasm, all of which are used to take everyday situations (such as the office routine) to the extreme. Irony is also one of the pillars of *EMT*'s storylines, a resource that, as Pedazzini (2010, 97) explains, is conditioned by the existence of «a certain reading contract between the newspaper and the reader, because if the latter is unaware that it [irony] might be used, there is a risk that they might interpret the message literally.»

The newspaper thus turns its back on the preeminence accorded to the illustrations, vignettes, and caricatures that characterized its predecessors; it focuses instead on emulating the «serious» press, with mordancy and ridicule. In fact, the graphic elements are secondary and merely there to support the fundamental focus of *EMT*: text. This moves it away from such Spanish models as *La Codorniz* or *El Jueves*, and places it more in line with such American websites as *The Onion*.

With this format, *EMT* deals with various news topics as a general-interest newspaper would, but always from a satirical perspective. Therefore, we see such typical sections as International, Culture, and Sports. Within its press activity, we can distinguish three types of information: light or absurd humor (based on exaggerations and puns, with little or no political resonance); current affairs (whether derived from political life or from other spheres); and social criticism (an updated equivalent of the nineteenth-century press' criticism of vices and habits). It is into this last category that we place those texts alluding to the situations of students doing internships; a theme this periodical has been covering since its inception. In fact, *EMT* includes tags such as 'precarity', 'labor exploitation,' and even 'interns' to group together some of their articles referencing these issues.

On the other hand, one of the essential aspects of *EMT* is its online and small-scale nature; it was a medium started and developed entirely on the Internet by

two friends, Kike García and Xavi Puig. It was not until after its digital success that it made the leap to other formats: printed press, radio, theater, and television. Among its different collaborations, the most notable, in terms of volume and influence, is its work among the various media branches of the PRISA group, in particular, the radio station Cadena Ser.

### *1.3. Precarious employment, Precarious lives*

In recent years, precarity —a situation linked «to the uncertainty and contingency of the human condition» (Tejerina and Corcuera, 2012: 15)— has become one of the fundamental concepts used to describe the stage upon which are played out the lives of a segment of today's society. Precarity pervades everything: it sneaks through the cracks of public and private lives, with its influence seeming to extend to every corner of existence. In fact, in its *OECD Economic Surveys: Spain 2017*, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development warns of the dangers of precarious employment in the Spanish labor market.

In this way, precarity is no longer «an intermittent shortcoming, but a structural and generalized element inscribed in social life.» We are therefore dealing with a «generalized or complex precariousness,» of a «life precariousness» (Tejerina and Corcuera, 2012: 11) that frames our existence.

In fact, authors such as Moruno (2015: 159) point to the current tendency to «normalize precariousness as a social model» at a time when «getting a job does not guarantee getting out of poverty.» Thus, Moruno highlights the increase in employment that is «precarious, fragile, unstable, which requires greater adaptability and plasticity on the part of the workforce employment which assumes risk while projecting a desire for a future born from insecurity» (2015: 227). Employment «ceases to be a means to become an end,» given that, in the face of uncertainty and fear, «it does not matter what they pay you, as long as you have a job» (Moruno, 2015: 227).

In the same vein, Santos and Muñoz (2015: 29) speak of «flexicurity, a scenario that implies a redefinition of mobility, normalizing precarity, and incorporating transition as a constant element.» As Martín Criado and Prieto (2015: 12) write, in this context «biographical stability collapses: stable employment throughout one's working life is replaced by a constant precariousness that threatens the possibility of planning»; furthermore, the proliferation of precarious and unemployed workers «hangs as a threat against those already hired, who are now required to work more.» In Sennett's words, «We're all pulling together [...]; on the other hand, if you don't take care of yourself, we'll do without you» (Sennett, 2000: 149).

This therefore produces an «ideological conformity with the protocol of instability. The important thing is to always be looking for a job and accept the new rules of the game» (Santos, 2003: 110). It will be the personal effort and sacrifice that can lead the worker to successfully completing a mission. As part of this discourse, it is essential to take into account the boom in «employability» or, in other words, the conversion of the worker into an «entrepreneur of the self» (Foucault, 2007: 264) and endowed with the necessary characteristics so as to be desirable to companies.

However, becoming an «entrepreneur of the self» is not innocuous: it has repercussions on different life processes that are at the mercy of our capacity to market our abilities. The worker must continually struggle to sell himself in an increasingly unpredictable work environment.

Being «proactive» —being in perpetual motion— is valued as a sign of being willing to work. Thus, workers are obligated to have total availability and employability, with fluidity now imposed against the rigidity that had previously characterized large companies in the first half of the twentieth century (see Alonso and Rodríguez, 2013). «Flow» means constantly adapting and being open to accepting any change—even if this means jumping from one position to another (or even from one company to another) every few months. Any unwillingness to do this is perceived as not sufficiently cultivating one's «employability.»

In this new order of labor relations, you can always work harder and better, you can always demand more from yourself. The concept of personal achievement is thereby reinforced as the engine of the employee who seeks constant approval. For this reason, when faced with whatever demand made upon them by their superiors, the workers must accept it all «with good humor» (Ehreinreich, 2011: 148), following the premises of positive thinking currently in vogue.

The figure of the intern is thus raised as a beacon of precariousness in its various forms. We are dealing with a figure midway between being a student and a seasoned employee; one who possesses an internship work contract with conditions that can be of nearly any variety; and who, moreover, aspires to get a first job that will be the gateway into the workplace proper. The careers of these individuals are fragmentary, marked by temporariness, uncertainty, and insecurity. At the same time, the massive company layoffs witnessed during the first years of the financial crisis, coupled with the need (despite this workforce reduction) to maintain similar productivity quotas, have combined to trigger an increase in the number of interns working —with scant or no remuneration— in companies.

## 2. *Research Objectives*

In this study of how precarious employment is approached in the *EMT* articles, we aim to trace the outlines of how the intern is portrayed. Thus, we are not merely attempting to establish and quantify their appearance, but also to dissect the attributes of this presence, the features that are highlighted or ignored, and the other associated actors.

To carry out this study, we began with the following working hypotheses:

First, interns are portrayed as a precarious group, one that must endure working conditions that are poor in terms of structure as well as in terms of their interactions with their superiors.

Second, interns are portrayed as clumsy, inexperienced, and careless workers who cause problems in businesses.

From these two hypotheses, we attempted to sketch out the figure of the intern, as seen through *EMT*'s satirical filter.

### 3. Methodology

This study includes all the news concerning interns published by *EMT* from 2009 (the year it was founded) until March 2017. For the collection of said articles, we used the online periodical's search engine and we introduced the following search terms: *male intern (becario)*, *female intern (becaria)*, *interns (becarios)*, and *female interns (becarias)*. In the case of the last two categories, we obviously discarded any news article that did not refer to students working as interns. In total, we compiled a corpus of 79 articles.

To address the aforementioned question, we conducted a study with two complementary approaches (see Annex). The first consists of a quantitative study that measures the appearance of different variables in the selected corpus through the use of a coding manual developed for this purpose. Thus, we included issues such as the centrality of the intern figure within each text, or the topics dealt with therein.

The second approach of the work is based on a discourse analysis that captures background tendencies in the portrayal of interns along with traits that are more subtle or difficult to measure quantitatively. The brevity and the schematic nature of the articles allowed us to analyze them in their entirety, including the title, the subheading, and the entire body of each text.

### 4. Results Analysis

The study of our corpus allows us to draw a very recognizable caricature of the interns based on the *EMT* stories. We can assume that the standard interns included in these satires present the following characteristics: their employment is precarious; their superiors treat them poorly; they are young; and they have a high level of education.

Of the previous questions, the most explicitly repeated is undoubtedly the one referring to job precariousness, a topic that appeared in 34 of the 79 news items analyzed. Often, it is a superficial reference made in passing: in *Rafa Nadal contemplates charging for playing tennis*, the player hopes to start «charging something symbolic, like an intern.» On other occasions, it forms the central axis of the text.

These poor conditions refer to their low (or absent) salary, to their excessive workload, to the interns' performing tasks not included in the job duties, and to the environment in which those tasks are executed. This is the case in *Anis del Mono [literally: «Anise of the Monkey»: a Spanish brand of spirits] Factory Hires its First Human*: «Humans are cheaper because they accept internship contracts, while monkeys are very demanding and expensive,' the Randstad auditor explained today.» Or in articles such as: *Senior Executive Predicts a Fall in the Stock Market Because His Interns are Nervous and Howling a lot*: «It is incredible what sharp senses they have developed since they were raised under such harsh conditions,'» explains the Spanish director of the company.»

At the same time, allusions to places of precarity are repeated, such as *«pago en visibilidad»* [literally «payment in visibility»], a euphemism that has become

very popular to denote that the work offered will not be economically remunerated. Another is the possibility for interns to «gain experience» from working in a company, as we see in articles such as *Unpaid Intern Dies From Overdose of Prestige*, where they point out that the deceased «lived on air. That youthful and carefree air that we have managed to give the agency by bringing in kids like him, with motivation and desire to *comerse* [literally «eat,» for «take on»] the world,' declared his superior.» We also see them in *Mobile's Predictive Text is Written in Real Time by a Language and Literature Student Intern*: «the young philologist wants to continue in his position 'because working at the same time for today's two great technology companies grants me prestige and my parents are proud.'»

Within this satirical corpus, the budgets of the «culture of effort» are also taken to an extreme; these vulnerable workers are exhorted to «give the company their all.» Thus, in *Executive Fined for Commuting on the Back of an Intern*, we find the following paragraph: «Ibérica Confort (...) regrets 'there was a misunderstanding about the close link which unites this company's management with those who are just starting out' and criticizes that in other sectors, the interns 'spend hours doing nothing, feeling useless, and having no interaction with positions of responsibility.' Antonio Fibla insists that 'the path to learning is taken step —by-step, with effort and sweat.'»

Regarding the treatment received by their bosses —alluded to in 28 news items— we divided these into three principal groups: physical violence, absurd requests, and contempt. In the first, we find situations in which the interns face physical abuse sometimes even leading to death, a resource undoubtedly used as an extreme exaggeration of the habitual experiences of these individuals in companies. Thus, for example: there is a mention of impaling the head of the intern upon a stake to «encourage the marketing department to stop making more mistakes»; there are reports that «the ceremonial pyre of interns augurs a bullish quarter for Banco Santander»; or it is announced that they have found «intern meat in the meatballs of Ikea.»

The absurd requests focus on issues of a personal nature, as in the article *Television: The Week's Most Watched* where the comment arises that «the franchise interns bring breakfast to the bed of senior executives;» or in *An Executive Misses the Intern He Used to Sit On and Who Already Had the Indentation of His Rear*. Indeed, the acts of disdain refer to questions about the interns' lack of importance, their short stints in the company, or their work's meager value. This is what we see in *Company Fined for Dumping Interns Into River*.

These results lead us to consider that our first working hypothesis is supported by the data, and the representation of interns as a group is indeed that of a precarious and mistreated group.

In addition, *EMT* paints the intern as: a person with little or no ability to protest or criticize the abuses suffered; a conformist; or a being simply paralyzed by the bad treatment received. In fact, 58 of the 79 news items analyzed presented problematic workplace situations for the interns, yet not a single article offered a possible way out of this situation. Though some of their complaints are compiled, these still find no recourse. For example, in *The Economic Downturn Forces CEO to Share Flat with the Intern*, we read «Victor Rosales, the young man who



welcomed the executive, 'because I did not have the guts at the time to say no,' grumbles about having to call his roommate 'Mr. Zarzalia,' and that even in his free time, he cannot enjoy a more informal treatment.» In this regard, the words of Santos are worth recalling (2003, 109): «The blackmail and fear wielded by unemployment hangs over the weakest in the labor market and hinders any voicing of demands whatsoever.»

In contrast, we find the discourses of positive thinking implicitly ridiculed in the news concerning employability, such as in *Ariel Presents a Detergent Reinforced with Interns Who Scrub Inside the Washing Machine*. In this article, we read: «'I have a degree in chemistry, so this is a dream for me,' said one of the brand's interns, who today introduced the new Ariel Interns Active at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, with whom a collaboration agreement has been reached.»

This mockery is also seen in the presentation of 'happy events' in the interns' careers. So in the only five occasions in which luck smiles on the interns, it is done, for example, with this premise: *Intern Becomes CEO and Manages to Hire Himself*.

Along these lines, we can point out that while the satire concerning precarious employment does criticize company abuses and the vulnerability of the weakest groups, it points neither towards a paradigm shift nor towards the articulation of an answer on the part of the victims. Thus, we can say that *EMT* carries out some social criticism through its exaggerations and humorous hyperboles, but it does not develop a subversive tale or present a fictitious scenario in which the excesses represented can be reversed or answered. We can accept that *EMT* points out ills that beset our society, but it does not display a reformist spirit in this regard. Perhaps, as indicated by Laguna (2003, 128), «jokes are made because you cannot do anything more directly aggressive.» On the other hand, this conformist and passive vision coincides with the narrative of the financial downturn as an inevitable evil at which, at least, we can laugh aloud, as a way of «laughing so as not to cry.»

Despite our expectations —given its common space in public discourse—we did not find a special emphasis on the figure of the intern as an inexperienced or clumsy figure who causes problems. In fact, this portrayal was found in only 5 of the 79 news items, for example: *Last PISA Report Includes Data Copied From Wikipedia*, where we read «the OECD explained that the PISA reports, as well as this last exam, were prepared by two interns.» Thus, we can conclude that hypothesis 2 remains unproven; on the contrary, more than the guilty party, the intern is presented almost unanimously as the victim of a situation without any ability to influence it.

Another aspect to take into account in this analysis is that the figure of the intern appears more frequently as a secondary character than as the protagonist in the text (47 versus 32). Moreover, we observed in a multitude of the analyzed pieces that the intern was employed like any other rhetorical device intended to imbue the text with greater comic effect; but whether the character was an intern or not had no bearing on the plot. This is what occurs in *Antena 3 Intern Wounded When the Big Film of the Week Falls on Him* or in *The First Gym Opens for People Who Will Never Go* where the establishment «is run by a young intern who is in charge of processing invoices and attending clients who enter.»

In fact, on many of these occasions, the term «intern» could be simply replaced by «employee» with no loss of meaning. However, the implications of the intern in the firm's structure lends an extra humorous element. It is not even necessary to specify what is happening to the intern in a news article; certain characteristics inherent to the figure's character are already assumed, and these make it laughable *per se*. The currently articulated community of shared meanings surrounding the figure of the intern gives even a simple appearance in a story that added touch of parody, absurdity or irony that the writers seek. The intern thus becomes an all-purpose term, one easily dropped in for convenience, but applied here to the construction of contemporary social satire.

In this sense, numerous studies have noted that the less-obvious allusions—i.e., implicit references— engender an increased complicity with the readers. Or put another way: «the pleasure that such recognition can generate is all the more stronger in those cases where the allusion is less obvious. The instantaneous interpretation of the approved codes can lead to the reader seeing him —or herself as a member of an exclusive club. Each act of interpretation produced under these conditions renews this sense of belonging in the member of this club» (Pedazzini: 2010, 97).

This lack of centrality of the interns is also seen in the use of direct quotes. We must bear in mind that *EMT* uses the blueprints of general-interest newspapers when writing its pieces, so it includes numerous quoted voices as fictitious testimonies. However, in the case of interns, their direct quotations are scarce, even when they feature as the main character in the piece in question. In general, the predominant voices are those of the spurious journalist who records the facts, or of those of the bosses who value the potential and actions of their subordinates. We also find the voices of other employees, often expressing their dissatisfaction with the presence of those interns who are so cheap for the firm that they pose a threat to the other employees. Thus, in *A Squid Strike Causes Supply Problems for Epson Cartridges*, we read that employees «criticize the intrusiveness of the interns, whom the firm forces to sweat ink in order to meet demand.»

Regarding the bosses, we observe a clear tendency towards confrontation between the two figures —the intern and the manager-executive— as a means of caricaturing the relationships of power and domination at the core of a company. This is therefore a Manichaeism with humorous ends. In this way, the bosses are painted as cruel beings, overwhelming and disconnected from reality, while the interns are portrayed with a submissiveness taken to the limits of grotesque *tremendismo*, of the *esperpento* of docility. We see it, for example, in the news title «*Underground Intern Fighting Should Be Legal*,» which recounts how several executives engage their interns in bloody contests.

This situation leads us to a new characteristic within the satirical representation of the interns: their otherness. Thus, they are always represented as an outside group, as one of the «others» whose misadventures are narrated in the neutral and distanced tone that is often assigned to general-news journalism. This otherness is also represented in the articles recounting how an employee is fired and replaced by interns, i.e., this group is presented as a second-tier worker who displaces the «legitimate» salaried employee. Thus, in the article *Photographer Anne Geddes*

*Considers Issuing Pink Slips for 86 Babies*, a worker grumbles that «baby interns are beginning to be hired with the excuse that they are babies and need to be promoted.»

We also observe a similar tendency in the reification or animalization of the interns who are stripped of their human condition. We see this, for example, in: *Company Includes Interns in Executives' Christmas Gift Baskets*; *Social Services Rescue Hoarding Executive Who Stashed 300 Interns Away in Office*; *First Circus to Exchange Animals For Interns*; and *Whiskas Launches Special Food for Interns*.

In the vast majority of the articles (74 of 79), the plot revolved around the workplace, that is, interns were discussed in matters related almost exclusively to their work performance, routines, and schedules. Only three of the news items alluded to personal or family life, and four addressed other issues such as leisure time. The vast majority of the texts analyzed herein addressed only one of these topics, but we also found, to a minor extent, an occasional text that combined two of them.

Among those that principally refer to the working world, we find a clear prevalence of texts located in the tertiary production sector (60), especially in office environments. On the contrary, we find very few mentions of interns in manufacturing or in agriculture: barely eight for the former and none for the latter. Interns are «office fauna» appears to be the message *EMT* conveys through its articles.

Performance as an «intern» becomes an absolute category here; that is to say, the characters represented bear this circumstance as an element basic to their identity. They are not something else and «also an intern» but rather this piece of their lives overruns the other areas. This occasion contrasts with work's current loss of centrality in an individual's moral dimension: if a wage earner's career becomes fragmentary and superficial, that identity as a worker will become «fragile» (Senett: 2000, 77). We are no longer talking about having a job for life, but rather about paying bills and subsisting «by any means.» Thus, we can point out that it is not the work the interns do that gives them their identity, but rather their own status as interns, their precarious role in the company organization chart.

In spite of the fact that, as we have mentioned, articles are predominantly set in the workplace, it becomes paradoxical that a very small number of them make reference to trade-union activity or to the tools of protest available to organized labor. In particular, only four articles alluded to any type of situation related to these issues and, in most cases, it is a reference to strikes in the company in which the interns act as scabs. Thus, it seems that, at least with regard to satire, interns and trade unions move in different spheres and their respective actions do not habitually converge.

We additionally find this universal being of the intern is overwhelmingly male; the female intern appeared in only 7 of the 79 stories in this study. Along these lines, it is noteworthy that while the character of the intern as a generic male appears in a variety of topics, the intern as a differentiated woman emerges especially when talking about sexual harassment in the workplace. This is the case in, for example, *Businessman Has a Female Intern Make Him a List of Flirty Compliments for Female Interns*.

## 5. Conclusion

After conducting this study on the representation of the interns in *EMT*'s fake news, we can point out that this online newspaper constructs an archetype of the intern that is as laughable and it is easily recognizable. Thus, through hyperbole and irony, the writers construct a satirical parody of the working conditions these individuals move about in during their initial experiences in the labor market.

The archetype of the intern appears as a beings exploited by their superiors, thrown into a precarious life that begins perhaps in the workplace, but which comes to pervade other spheres of their existence. At the same time, despite the abuses that they suffer—or perhaps precisely because of them—the interns represented here behave as helpless victims, who accept their fate more or less resignedly, but who neither stand up for themselves nor try to introduce change. The interns appear isolated from the activities of collective groups, such as labor unions: their suffering is individualized and they find no echo in the social fabric.

In the *EMT* articles, the intern becomes a kind of antihero without the option of successfully overcoming the tribulations faced. The figure does not cause problems, but endures them; the intern is not the one who provokes crises in the office, but the one who should solve them. In this sense, this fake news could encourage two phenomena. On the one hand, there is a stirring of compassion for and complicity with the intern as a suffering soul: we all know or have been that employee lacking experience (and authority) within a work organization. But, simultaneously, the exaggeration of the ills that afflict this figure could also lead to estrangement, converting the status of intern into an otherness vis-à-vis the readers. «We're not as bad off as that guy who was thrown into a pyre,» one could say. In this sense, it should be noted that the interns lack their own direct voice in the texts, with an occasional exception, versus the ironic loudspeaker the bosses are provided.

Thus, by caricaturing the labor setting found in the aftermath of the economic crisis, *EMT* sheds light on the abuses and excesses committed against workers; nevertheless, the periodical also reinforces a certain conformist narrative of the crisis in which cutbacks are endured as an inevitable toll. We can conclude that *EMT* denounces the current precariousness through satire, elaborates a type of precariat, but presents neither reformist zeal nor explicit clamoring for change.

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*Annex*

*Coding Variables:*

*1. Importance of the Intern in the Article's Text*

- 1.1 Principal character
- 1.2 Secondary character

*2. Article Topic:*

- 2.1 Workplace
  - 2.1.1 Primary sector: Agriculture
  - 2.1.2 Secondary sector: Manufacturing
  - 2.1.3 Services
    - A. Sales/Hospitality
    - B. Office
    - C. Others
- 2.2. Personal/Family Life
- 2.3 Leisure and Others

*3. Problems addressed in article:*

- 3.1 Poor working conditions
- 3.2 Treatment by the boss
- 3.3 Others

*4. Proposed Solution to the Conflict:*

- 4.1 From the intern
- 4.2 From another actor

*5. Cause of the Problems:*

- 5.1 Victim
- 5.2 Guilty Party

*6. Labor Union Activity*

*7. Experiencing Positive Situation, Situation Improves:*

- 7.1 Pay increase
- 7.2 Promotion
- 7.3 Recognition by bosses
- 7.4 Others

*8. Female Intern as a Differentiated Female Character*

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