Cas médiatiques et mémorie sociale en Argentine après 2001

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Résumé: Cet article cherche définir les cas médiatiques commotionnels, décrire leurs structure et illustrer quelques cas en particulier, a partir du moment où commence la crise économique et sociale en 2001 en Argentine. En particulier, l´article cherche souligner quelques traits de la production de ces cas qui facilitent leur pénétration dans la mémoire sociale. Ainsi, quelques routines sont utilisées pour enregistrer les sorties de nouvelles dans la mémoire. La répétition est une marque de la production des cas: les cas passent d´un média a un autre et d´un jour à l´autre; chaque média répète le contexte de chaque nouvelle et associe une nouvelle avec des cas similaires, ce qui produit des ¨vagues¨ avec d´autres nouvelles du même type, et recoure a l´archive pour éditer la ligne du temps afin de la synchroniser avec la nouvelle. Les journalistes utilisent souvent un cas précédent comme modèle d´interprétation d´un nouveau cas, ce qui donc le fait renaitre. Quelquefois ces cas diffusent des images d´impact qui synthétisent les contenus de la crise à laquelle ils appartiennent.

De nombreux cas jouent un rôle mythique, à laquelle les politiciens appellent pour la construction de leur propre mythe de gouvernement, en nourrissant la mémoire collective. Fréquemment les groupes d´intérêts se créent autours des cas. Il s´agit d´audiences qui sont très informées et affectées par un problème, et qui apparaissent dans l'espace publique afin de défendre une cause. Ces audiences créent des slogans et des formes spécifiques de protestes sociales, et utilisent les

medias activement pour disséminer leur encadrement, en ajoutant son discours du cas sur d'autres discours.

Mots-clés) : Media, Cas, Mémoire sociale, Publique, Journalisme.

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Media cases and social memory in Argentina post 2001

Abstract: This paper seeks to define commotional media cases, to describe their structure and to provide a few examples, for the period following the economic and social crisis in Argentina in 2001. Specifically, the article aims to highlight some features of the production of these cases which facilitate their penetration into social memory. Thus, some routines are used to record news output into memory. Repetition is a mark of the production process of these cases: cases pass from one medium to another and from one day to another, every medium repeats the background in every news story and associates news with other similar cases which generates "waves" with other news of the same type, and appeals to the archive for editing timelines to synchronize with the news. Journalists often use an earlier case as a model for the interpretation of a new case, hence, bringing it back to life. Sometimes these cases disseminate impacting images, which synthesize the content of the crisis they represent.

Many cases serve a mythic function, to which politicians appeal for building their own government myths, thus nourishing collective memory. Frequently interest groups arise from these cases, which are very informed audiences affected by an issue and that appear in the public space to defend a cause. These audiences create slogans and specific forms of social protest, and actively use the media to disseminate their frame, adding their discourse of the case onto other discourses.

Keywords: Media, Cases, Social Memory, Public, Journalism.

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1. Introduction

Occasionally, the Argentine news media disseminate news stories which are presented as being qualitatively distinct from other stories pertaining to the same realm. They are accounts of events that respond to newsworthiness criteria and are

fitted to the media's thematic sections, but, in many ways entail a rupture in news routines. These ruptures occur in the audience routines of consumers of these stories as well as in the production routines of every medium, which must provide extraordinary procedures to cover these episodes better than the competition. These cases are as exceptional as any other piece of news, but are also considered exceptional amongst the news.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the ability that particularly shocking media cases have of becoming embedded in social memory (Olick & Robbins, 1998), due to their permanence in the public agenda and the frequent appeal to their recollection on the part of social actors. Furthermore, the versions of these events provided by the media tend to become a fundamental input used by historians engaged in recent national history.

Commotional media cases have been my object of study in a dedicated research program carried out at the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET) of Argentina. The discourse analysis of journalistic stories covering various dramatic episodes in Argentine political history of the last decade, on the basis of the case-study method (Vasilachis, 2006), allowed me to carry out a case generalization from which to propose a definition and structure of the commotional media case, among other findings. While taking as background Katz an Dayan's theory of media events (Katz & Dayan, 1992), media cultural studies (Carey, 1992; Silverstone, 1999) and recent reception theory (Alausari, 1999), my own hypothesis of the social operation of commotional media cases arises from the empirical study of media texts understood as an archive of several public discourses, in accordance with social representation theory (Moscovici, 1984; Vasilachis, 1997; Raiter et al, 2002) and enunciation theory (Kerbrat-Orechioni, 1999; Mainguenau & Charaudeau, 2002).

This study centers on news stories in the *La Nación* and *Clarín* newspapers, which narrate four particularly disquieting stories of the last ten years, due to the significance of the events narrated or their permanence within the public agenda and the level of debate that they trigger, the latter stemming from a decision made by journalists, that is arbitrary to a certain extent, at least when said media cases are compared to similar events that practically go unnoticed. These include: Argentina's institutional crisis in 2001, the emergence of a public figure as an advocate for citizen public safety demands in 2004, the armed confrontation between labor unions during the transfer of former President Juan Domingo Perón's body to a mausoleum in 2006, and the longstanding conflict between the Government and rural organizations for an export tax increase in 2008. The journalistic texts shall illustrate certain production and reception conditions which explain the great ease with which these cases become embedded in social memory, and thus, remain active and influence the meaning that social actors convey to current public affairs.

The *La Nación* and *Clarín* newspapers shall be taken into consideration since they have the largest circulation and greatest influence in shaping the public agenda in Argentina. This study will also refer to television and Internet, in general, and the newspaper, both in its paper and digital forms, serving as an archive for recent historical memory.

2.   The commotional media case

Aníbal Ford (1994) maintained that in the nineties, these types of journalistic cases in Argentina had created more political debate over social issues than the official instances of public deliberation, such as the National Congress. For example, the Government´s intervention of a province governed by autocratic dynasties for many years or the elimination of the mandatory draft military service,

were only second to highly exposed media police reports. The institutional consequences of these dramatic events turned into media cases did not decline but rather increased during the following decade, with the resignation to office of a Vice President and the hastened fall of a President.

A reason for this is that the media coverage of scandals (Thompson, 2000) and conflicts and public crisis (Elizalde, 2011) situations forces the social actors involved to provide a response, especially to the political power. According to Dominique Wolton (1989), the information-event is the genuine contribution made by the media, one of the three players in political communication. Admittedly, when the media case bursts into the public agenda, the other two actors (politicians and opinion polls) are forced to express an opinion on the issue relating to the case.

2.1. A definition of the commotional media case

A case is established when the representation of certain events in the media makes a latent structural conflict surface in the discourse, which has been hidden until now by a dominant public discourse of politicians or of the same media, which insist on a manifest conflict in a specific moment in time of a contrary nature (Fernández Pedemonte, 2001, 2010). For Ralf Dahrendorf (1979) a conflict is any relationship between elements that may be characterized as an objective opposition -latent-, that is to say, even while conflictive it is taken for granted by the actors, or a subjective opposition-manifest-, that is to say, acknowledged as conflictive by its actors, in relation to an existing social situation. Those that are circumstantial in nature arise from a singular event and give rise to a tension in the political system, but may be solved through adequate political decisions or by the natural extinction of its causes. Those that are structural are inscribed within the social structure as a constituent element. This is a type of contradiction that can only be eliminated by

changing the system or whose consequences may be lessened if the contradiction were to be institutionalized.

This means that news stories with a greater chance of qualifying as cases are those that are most unforeseeable, most contrasting in the hierarchy and valuation of discourse issues and actions of social actors, and more connected with main agendas, but excluded from public discourse.

2.2. The structure of the commotional media case

Therefore, I shall illustrate those cases that took place following the institutional crisis in Argentina in 2001, at which time the debacle of the existing economic and financial model led to the resignation of the president, the social upheaval of hundreds of people and the beginning of a period of institutional fragility. In the examples I shall cite, as well as in others that have been studied but are not included in this paper, there is a common structure made up of the following elements, which shall be illustrated here with news stories referring to the 2001 crisis (Álvarez, Farré & Fernández Pedemonte, 2002).

(1) The first property is that the media themselves present the case as a case. They do this through specific headlines and remarks that highlight the qualitative difference that the current news story has in comparison to previous similar stories. For example, during the crisis of December 2001, in the days that preceded the fall of President Fernando de la Rúa, the news headlines in *La Nación* and *Clarín* on the subject were headed by the following leads: "The social crisis", "The social stampede", "Social turmoil", "Social outbursts" (including the placement of the description of these events from the perspective of the actor-subject, substituting personal pronouns or institutional subjects in headings of the type: "The social explosion caused the resignation of De La Rúa").

(2) The case sets in motion a contrast between two conflicts, one that is circumstantial and another that is structural. Indeed, with the case, a latent agenda erupts which differs from the agenda that had been set by the media and the political power. For example during the crisis of December 2001, only two days prior to the resignation of the president one could read: "Yesterday President Fernando De la Rúa felt for the first time that the looting of supermarkets could seriously compromise the country's governance and he ordered his cabinet to articulate a food distribution plan and to avoid the use of the word looting so as to not cause alarm among the population" (this was published on December 19th and the resignation took place on the 20th). These statements made by *La Nación* anticipated a strong contrast between the situation and the President's tepid response in face of the crisis and the conflict that was developing; a conflict that was much more serious than what he perceived, which threatened the legitimacy of the Executive Power and even of the entire leadership.

(3) The social representation of the institutions and social groups involved in the case may change during the media coverage. While the case remains under the focus of the media, aspects of the institution or social group that are unknown by the public are brought to light. This intense media exposure of the institution generates the leveling of knowledge between expert audiences or that are close to the institution and non expert audiences or that are remote from the institution. In the 2001 crisis, for example, the media specifically distinguished the protagonists of the "*saqueos*" (lootings, in English) of December 19th from protagonists of the "*cacerolazos*" (pot and pan banging, in English) of December 20th. The former appear as depersonalized through statements made in the passive voice, impersonal constructions, headlines where events are the subject of a sentence, and actors are depicted as massive and politically manipulated. The latter, who protested in the downtown city streets of Buenos Aires hitting pots and pans, however, are defined

as "persons", "citizens", "neighbors", cited as sources, and are identified by their names and origin.

(4) In the coverage of cases, the media put into play two types of hypothesis. On the one hand, the first news stories, where it can be seen to which extent journalists are surprised by the case, all types of hypotheses are juggled, as if they did not want to lose the hypothesis that ends up being corroborated. At that point in time the media have more questions than certainties. On the other hand, among these conjectures, one of them stands out and signals the causes and central conflict that arise with the case. The media indicate that they support this hypothesis which we may call long-term hypothesis.

For example, in the case I have discussed regarding the fall of President De la Rúa in 2001, *La Nación* hinted that it supported the hypothesis of the exiting Government, which held that the institutional crisis had been triggered by the Justicialist Party, the opposition at that time, and was not due to a spontaneous social protest caused by the dramatic social conditions assailing the country. This is clear in the following statements:

"Government officials pointed to Carlos Ruckauf and José Manuel de la Sota (two important justicialist leaders) as conflict agitators".
"De la Rúa handled two alternatives: a government of national unity or the accusation of those guilty of destabilizing activism".
"The advocates of the unrest are Carlos Ruckaufand factions of Menemism".
Hence, in these statements of *La Nación*, among others, it is clear that the newspaper reproduces the government's accusations of the existence of a plot against President De la Rúa, a hypothesis that the newspaper upheld.

(5) As a result of the case, the media seem to capture a public opinion atmosphere that exerts pressure on the institution to drastically rectify the pernicious effects of the crisis. This can be considered an alliance between the media and public opinion against the institution, which, under this exceptional context is often asked to take precautionary measures beyond its capabilities.

Let us see the following examples in the *Clarín* newspaper of December 2001:

"The looting and food demands cannot only be explained by political manipulation. In fact, the nature and scope of events show that there were many spontaneous and uncoordinated behaviors in different places."
"A propitious scenario for the rise of violence".
"Mobilizations reveal that popular discontent can manifest itself without resorting to traditional political groups or institutionalized petition channels" (editorial dated December 20th).

These statements made by *Clarín* prior to De la Rúa's resignation, show the newspaper as being distant to the Government's interpretative model (which, however, is embraced by *La Nación* as I pointed out in the previous paragraphs) and, in contrast, in the role of a public opinion spokesperson, it interprets what the protest -broad and spontaneous-seems to convey: "the discontent of the population". They constitute a demand placed on the political power.

(6) As the case prolongs and the different media (print or digital) continuously narrate the story, the same coverage is frequently subject to the description or commentaries of the same media. Inasmuch as the media -public actors yet invisible- which frequently have an influence on the decisions made by political institutions, but do not publicly make know their lobbying efforts -through their

own media- in cases, by contrast, they not only act as witnesses but also protagonists, visible actors.

With regard to the fall of De la Rúa, the media may be considered the only setting in which protest events, which took place at different times and locations throughout the country, are depicted as a single scenario in real time and are labeled on a unified basis. Some segments in live broadcasts of cable news or open television news flashes about the supermarket pilfering seem to be invitations for joining the so called "lootings". *La Nación,* for example, stated that: "The population witnessed police passivity on television". Additionally, these high impact images that were consumed throughout the entire day could have possibly had an impact on the *porteños* that decided to protest with pots and pans that same evening after hearing Fernando De la Rúa's tepid speech.

(7) Finally, another constant feature of the coverage of cases is the choice of a storytelling format to narrate episodes, by means of three strategies: the focus of news placed on the subjectivity of specific protagonists who frequently assume the role of a subject or an object of a narrative program (Greimas, 1979); the organization of information according to a narrative structure, with the inclusion of plot points and secondary intrigues and suspense; and the use of literary devices. During the "2001 crisis" journalists resorted to storytelling to account for the myriad exploits that made up the events. The sequence is as follows:

(1) The "looting" which spread exponentially on December 19[th]2001.

(2) Spontaneous "*cacerolazos" (*pot and pan banging, in English) following the speech of De la Rúa on the night from the 19th to the 20th.

(3) Demonstrations by activists and police repression that started at daybreak on the 20th and lasted through to the resignation of the president on that same afternoon.

(4) The testimonies of business owners whose shops were ransacked.

3. The memory of post-2001 crisis cases

During the period that followed the institutional crisis, after a provisional government was set in place by the National Congress to fulfill former president De La Rúa's mandate, the presidency was assumed by a new Justicialist leader, Néstor Kirchner, who governed the country between 2003 and 2007 (and died in 2010) and was succeeded by his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. He led a new economic and political model which started off weak, and had low electoral support and alliances. In this era of Kirchnerism, the crisis of 2001 was a fundamental part of its foundational government myth (Riorda, 2008) that took power in the midst of a social emergency, with the questioning of the entire political leadership and an ever increasing social protest that took on new forms of expression.

The memory of the "2001 crisis", hence, is continuously repeated in President Kirchner's discourse who must build his power while already in office and contain social mobilizations which is what caused the fall of his predecessor, without the use of repression, given that his forerunners received the most severe criticism for the deaths of demonstrators at the hands of police. In like manner, journalistic discourse permanently alluded to the "2001 crisis". In this initial phase of Kirchnerism, one may in fact refer to a convergence, at least under a general framework, between journalistic discourse and political discourse in the model of diffused crisis.

The media case stands out in the public agenda. It has an influence on social memory to the extent in which its representation is kept active, which from the perspective of communications media suggests its connection with the current media agenda (Raiter et al). A decisive factor in the permanence of these media cases and entrance into the long-term memory of audiences during social cognition is the repetition of similar contents in the media concerning the cases. The

prevalent model being promoted by the media is obtained from the inference of this similar situational structure and interpretation of the event, even though it is not necessarily adopted by audiences (Van Dijk). The media have a greater means of disseminating representations due to their massive reach and the credibility vested in them (Raiter et al, 2002), at least over the privileged access they have on public affairs. However, we speak of textual representations and not yet of social representations (Vasilachis, 1997), so long as their incorporation by audiences has not been proven.

3.1. Repetition and memory

3.1.1 Repetition across the media

Repetition, therefore, is a condition of possibility for media cases to be inserted into social memory. The first type of repetition that takes place in the production of cases is from medium to medium, that is, the fact that diverse communication media talk about the case simultaneously, giving them similar space and frames.

In order to illustrate this type of repetition I shall refer to a new case that took place during the first year of Néstor Kirchner's government, who, as mentioned earlier, wanted to avoid the repression of social protest and criminal activity at any cost, for political and ideological reasons. Concerned with building his own power and with the complex network of fractions that hindered this goal (Justicialist Party, labor unions, social protest groups such as the picketers, the legislative and judicial branches of government, etc.), he received criticism from the media, who claimed to reflect citizen concerns about the lack of a safety policy in view of an increase in violent crimes.

Starting on March 24, 2004 the media started to report on the kidnapping and subsequent murder of a young man called Axel Blumberg. In the following days

two exceptional political news stories reached the front covers of *La Nación* and *Clarín* and are covered at greater length: a commemoration ceremony of the 1976 *coup d´état* held at the Naval School of Mechanical Engineering (ESMA, Spanish acronym) was held to inaugurate a Space for Memory in remembrance of the illegal repression that took place during the military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983, and the celebration of the first congress of the Justicialist Party since the assumption of president Kirchner. According to Kitzberger (2005) the episodes raised that week dispel any phase of relative harmony that existed between President Kirchner and the media. "This week, then, marks a turning point as the relationship between the government and public opinion is modified. It was a short lapse of strikingly intense ideology that heated up and refueled old antagonisms and political categorizations which had lain dormant in the public sphere for a very long time". Meanwhile, the news that the young man called Axel Blumberg, who had been kidnapped for five days and found murdered is published on the cover page of *La Nación* dated 24 March. It was only for two days that the Blumberg case managed to get a quarter of the lower section in the newspaper´s front page whose leading topic was the cited political news story featuring the president. The father of the murdered young man, Juan Carlos Blumberg, had already started to make statements to the media with criticisms leveled against the police, the law, and the government (for example: "Blumberg: 'There are contradictions in the investigation'. The father of the boy says that he has 'doubts'. He complained that the case fails to mention that his son was tortured and had his finger nails pulled out. He said that 'there is impunity' and 'a terrible lack of professionalism'. He asked for tougher laws", taken from *La Nación*).

Suddenly, on Friday, April 2, *La Nación* dedicates the upper half of its front page to a public mobilization towards Congress convened by Juan Carlos Blumberg, with a six-column headline: "A great popular outcry for safety", accompanied with a photograph of an estimated crowd of 150 thousand people. Curiously enough the

exceptional nature of the news story, determined by the size of the public demonstration, was not pre-announced or assigned page space earlier by *La Nación*, while it had been a medium covering Blumberg´s controversial statements (for example, it had published an interview with him the preceding Sunday). The same is true of *Clarín* which on the day following the march reported the news on the cover page with catastrophic headlines: "The people have said enough", while the report took up almost the entire page.

The successful mobilization organized by Juan Carlos Blumberg, which led him to become an important political figure, constitutes a case to the extent in which it bursts into a media agenda concerned with other issues and brings back to the surface a structural conflict regarding citizen insecurity in face of increasing violent crime. The media synchronize their timing and framing to address the topic.

3.1.2. Repetition within each medium

A second type of news repetition that influences the relationship between media cases and social memory is that found within each medium, regarding the series produced by journalists reporting on a case. This is particularly true in a series of police reports referring to the same crime where every fresh news item synthesizes the framework established by preceding information, and is an indispensable process for understanding the added information. During this information processing, it is quite common that the effort of synthesis end up transforming the framework into a stereotyped situation.

A "wave of violence" is a specific context in which commotional news stories appear. Just as the media segment the reality continuum through an ideological and corporate interpretation matrix called news, they usually store several violent events in news packages that are distributed throughout the life cycle of the

information agenda. Much more than a form in which violence occurs in society, waves of violence are a matrix employed by journalism institutions to categorize and group together violent events. If violence in society is constant, it is however concentrated in these relatively discrete units by these media (Fernández Pedemonte, 2008).

This specific context for the appearance of dramatic news characterized by the "wave of violence" occurs when a type of crime demands the attention of news media editors in a privileged manner, thus relegating news coverage of other types of criminal offences. This usually happens when a criminal episode – a kidnapping, for example – creates special impact due to its particular cruelty or the peculiarities of its protagonists. In general, in the days following the commotional event, editors appear to have a specially designed sense for detecting other similar developments. At the first coincidence of two disquieting events of a similar nature seems to encourage the search for other similar developments.

The editor has a dual temporality in mind for the selection of news. The closing time, along with the information gathered at the moment of publication, which gives news its daily relevance. Yet the editor also anticipates the probable life cycle of news referring to the same event. Certainly, this second temporality exerts its own pressure at the time of looking for similar information.

3.1.3. Repetition within a single news item

The episodes connected by the association-making habits of journalists may serve as background information in a story for a new episode they wish to report on. This is evident in the *La Nación* article published on October 25, 2020 about the kidnapping of the father of Argentine actor Pablo Echarri:

"Pablo Echarri suffered his father´s kidnapping ten days after police arrested a woman that threatened to disfigure his face and that of his wife, actress Nancy Duplaá, unless he accepted to date her".

"Furthermore, the actor was nervous and concerned because two months earlier Duplaá and her former boyfriend Matías Martin reported a perplexing phone call in which they were allegedly being alerted about the possible kidnapping of their son".

"In the same vicinity where Antonio Echarri was kidnapped, Fernando Nicolás Menem, the son of national senator (PJ) Eduardo Menem, and businessman Alfredo Ulfre, were also kidnapped months earlier".

"Several relatives of famous celebrities were kidnapped this year, as is the case of Cristian Riquelme, brother of football player Juan Román Riquelme, and Jorge Milito, father of Diego and Gabriel, players of the Racing and Independiente football clubs, respectively".

Through said associations, the journalist, in a single news story, gathers violent episodes that are different in nature and have occurred at different times, and in so doing, brings them back into the public´s memory. Repetition then happens between different media, different news and within each piece of news, due to the forced association between diverse events that have already been reported, and that are recalled because of their relationship with new developments, according to different criteria, relating to the protagonists, the time or place of events, and sometimes, as illustrated in this case, all of these at once.

News in itself is a redundant discursive genre that reiterates the event in the headline and the body of the text and, in the latter, is generally narrated twice, if the structure used is that of the inverted pyramid, which narrates the story in the lead and repeats it chronologically further ahead. Major news stories that are

introduced in the front page and are developed inside the newspaper have greater levels of reiteration. The same applies to television news, which are generally anticipated in headlines several times and then developed during the newscasts. The televised news broadcast comprises an introduction by anchormen in the studio floor, the voice-in-off or live calling in from the field with the chronicler's news story, the overprinted texts, and subsequent comments made by other journalists from the newsroom, with each of these phases reiterating the contents that have already been broadcasted.

3.2. Memory and archives

Another component of the production routine of journalistic cases consists of the use of medium news archives, among other resources, to contextualize information with chronologies, background data on protagonists and similar situations that may contribute to the interpretation of the new episode. The material published on previous events that are somehow analogous to the new case and were filed according to criteria matching journalistic newsworthiness make these events or their representation in the media current.

An example of a case with strong historical resonances in Argentina was a fight with stones, clubs and firearms between antagonistic Peronist labor union fractions on October 17, 2006, the day that the remains of Juan Domingo Perón, leader of the Peronist movement, were transferred to a mausoleum erected in the city of San Vicente in the Province of Buenos Aires. For the interpretation of the violence between these fractions of Peronist extraction, journalistic comments drew from the recollection of the grave incidents that occurred in 1973 at the Ezeiza international airport when Perón returned to the country after eighteen years in exile to initiate the process that would elect him to the presidency for the third time. That is why the newspapers that we are reviewing gave almost identical headlines to their

respective news analysis: "The phantom of Ezeiza flew over San Vicente" (*La Nación*) and "After 33 years, the shadow of the Ezeiza tragedy flew over San Vicente" (*Clarín*). There was also a battle back then between left-wing and right-wing Peronist fractions, although with deadly victims that time, and it became the first of a series of armed incidents that continued throughout the decade of the 70´s. Reference to the "Ezeiza massacre", as the event was labeled, in addition to reviving the event, reclaims it as an interpretative device and a as framing tool for today´s events. The currency of the "Ezeiza" model may connote that the analysis of incompatibility between the right and left wings of Peronism and the latent violence inside of Peronism over the dispute for the legacy of Perón and the place of each fraction within the power scheme are still valid.

We mentioned earlier that repetition is a key factor in the sedimentation process of news events in social memory. We now add the possibility that the reiteration of news stories from the recent past refreshes them in the collective imagination as a precedent of what is happening today and, in a more or less conscious way, as a hermeneutical key of the present. For this to happen, it is necessary that the news story being recalled be filed in media archives, which is an essential input for contemporary journalists and historians. The retrieval of archive material is possible through the labeling work conducted by the media. As I discussed previously, the first distinct characteristic of commotional media cases is that the media themselves present them as cases, and that the first step in that direction is to give the case a name. The job of writing headlines which journalists are accustomed to take on special importance at the moment of loading digitalized news of hard copy newspapers or their online versions for later retrieval. Thus, for example, commotional national news stories labeled as a "case", "tragedy", "massacre", etc., are easily retrievable for enquiries made from Argentina. This makes these cases immediately accessible to users, which depend on the Internet for retrieving details about the events whose recollection they need. However, it must

not be forgotten that when one searches the Internet for information on an event, the most easily retrievable information is that provided by the news media. News headlines are extremely pertinent given that it is the media themselves that give a name to the events in the news.

The San Vicente episode is easily brought back to memory because of a striking image that circulated among the media from the very first moment it was captured, and was repeated in television, and later recorded in the graphic and digital media. A 24-hour cable news broadcast recorded a man firing several shots into a crowd, who was later identified as being a close friend of the central labor union leader (General Confederation of Labor of the Republic of Argentina or CGT, for its Spanish acronym). The shot of this individual pulling the trigger with his arm outstretched was widely distributed and somehow served as an iconic synthesis of the confrontation, and in time became a marker of memory, a visual label, from which to recover the context of this image. As we remember episodes of recent history, certain images of photojournalism come to mind, which have similar roles to texts in visual memory, including the ability of being labeled and recovered by image search engines, increasingly relevant in the semantic web. This return from images is well known by the social actors that produce messages or gestures to be captured by cameras or circulate images in the media. An example is Juan Carlos Blumberg, mentioned above, who temporarily became a leader in the protest against insecurity following his successful public call. He went to every public venue with folders, allegedly containing documents related to the judicial case for murder of his son, whose smiling photograph he circulated countless copies of. Both of these icons are immediately found upon performing a Google Images search from Argentina for "Juan Carlos Blumberg".

4. The memory of social actors

EliseoVerón (1988) has argued that the production and reception instances of media contents respond to various logics, separated by insurmountable ideological, semiotic and institutional gaps. Consequently, the reading that audiences will make of the prevalent models disseminated by the media cannot be anticipated, even if there are no alternative models. In other words, textual representations do not determine social representations, whose consolidation is considerably influenced by social conversation. Without going outside the media analysis, the validity of interpretative models transmitted by the media can be identified because they are taken up by those social actors that have access to the same media. The social actors make them reappear in public discourse when they intervene as the privileged enunciators they truly are.

5.   1. The Government

A noteworthy example is the set of speeches delivered by President Cristina Fernández de Kichner during the confrontation between the national government and the Argentine rural organizations resulting from the increase of export taxes on agricultural production. In the same manner that she faced this crisis with the rural sector in 2008, her deceased husband, former president Néstor Kirchner, also had a media case that resulted in a public crisis with the social mobilization against insecurity, which he had to manage from a communicational as well as political and technical perspective.

The presidential speech on the rural situation begins with a lecture against the long strike carried out by the sector´s entities. As a part of her framing of the conflict, the President confronts the media believing that they have taken sides with the privileged rural sector that, having benefited from the policies implemented by herself and her husband, refuse to yield part of their privileges to benefit the rest of society. She proposed to make a comparison between this rural owners "lock out"

and the "pickets" following the crisis of 2001 that fully define the Kirchner´s rhetoric and policy. Taking the image of demonstrations carried out by poor people and the unemployed during the Argentine institutional crisis of 2001 and 2002, she stated: "(…) from that real tragedy to this comedy drama" "(…) the pickets of abundance, the pickets of those sectors with higher profitability margins". According to the President, the media were more acquiescent with the rural protest than with the protests of the poor and unemployed. She affirms that the media scorned "those Argentines that were thrown into the streets, desperate for the lack of jobs and the misery", and even, "asked the Government to put down the demonstrations and restore order" (Fernández Pedemonte, 2011).

What is interesting here is to realize how the actors, and not just the media, can make a media case present again. The media do not have hegemony over the social discourse. Furthermore, in contrast with the beginnings of her husband´s administration, the confrontation of Cristina Kirchner´s administration with the media´s versions of events became systematic, regardless of whether they happened during her term of government or in the past. Moreover, her version of the 2001 crisis feeds her government myth, where she presents herself as the continuator of an epic re-foundation of the nation after a process that almost took society to the verge of social disintegration.

4.2. The Public

4.2.1 Definition of a public

On the opposite side of symbolic power are audiences. An audience reception study is required to ascertain the influence that the media have on their memory of events. However, audiences have a growing participation in conventional media and especially in the new digital media. When an audience appears in the public sphere through its own discourse and bursts forth in the public space through some

mobilization form, it publicly emerges as a social actor as well, leaving behind a testimony of its memory that can be reconstructed in the media.

I follow two authors on the delimitation of the concept of public: Sonia Livingstone and Daniel Dayan. Already in 1998, in her article *Audience Research at the Crossroads. The 'Implied Audience' in Media and Cultural Theory* (Livingstone, 1998) Livingstone drew attention to a dimension of the audience that at the time remained practically unexplored. In order to characterize the ´implied audience´, which is the conception of audience used in the political, economic and cultural fields, five sociological methods are utilized to link the "micro" level of social analysis of contingent individual acts, with the "macro" level analysis of collective forces. Out of these five methods are derived another five approaches on the individual. (1) *Instrumental individualism* emphasizes the analysis of investments, costs and opportunities; therefore, its conception of an audience is that of an audience as a consumer. (2) *Interpretative individualism,* emphasizes social position from a constructivist perspective, represents the micro level as a source of social order and the audience as an active actor. (3) This is follow by a *less active version of social constructivism* that perceives the audience as a public, in which the micro level is autonomous but more dependent on the social structure than the previous approach. (4) Then there is an approach that *emphasizes socialization* as an internalization of the macro level, a blend of the conception that favors the collective position about social order with a subjective instrumental position of the action, and perceives the audience as potentially resistant. (5) *Objective structuralism*, that links a collective position of order with an objective position on individual action, considers the audience as masses.

Since for Livingstone option 3 remains unexplored, the work is: "to capture the force of the micro-macro relation as conceived within democratic theory, for despite

significant limitations, both structural and contingent, the political system is built on the informed consent of the thinking citizen".

In his paper "The peculiar public of television", Daniel Dayan (2001) intends to conduct on the field research through an experimental study, about what television viewers form a public. To that end, he begins by asking himself about the relationship between an audience and a public. He responds by stating that the term "public" is both a noun and an adjective. As a noun it presupposes the existence of a real society, and as an adjective it implies public conversations or behaviors in contrast to those that are private. Hence, the public is ostensible: it sees and it is seen, which is the result of its particular style of performance. A public emerges from the act of taking a position and affirms its loyalty to the rest of the group. According to Dayan (1) the public offers a certain type of sociability, (2) it emerges from the practice of internal debate, (3) it has performance capacity: it expresses itself through presentation to other publics, (4) it is characterized by its loyalty to certain values related to a common good, (5) it is capable of transforming its tastes into demands and (6) only exist in are reflexive manner. In 2005, in a subsequent paper, Dayan (Dayan, 2005) widens his characterization of publics which he describes as simultaneous cultural constructions and social realities. In fact, instead of widening the concept, he proceeds to make it more precise by contrasting it with a series of close entities. The first of these entities are the viewers, who are audiences that don't know they are audiences, and whose representativeness, if they have it, is foreign to them. The "public" is not the sum of viewers. It is a coherent entity of collective nature characterized by a shared sociability and identity, and a sense of that identity. While the attention of the viewer is open and prepared for surprise, the attention of the public is concentrated: *issue driven*. They know beforehand what they are looking for. Viewers become involved in texts, while publics become involved in collective performances.

Publics are not crowds either, because they are in the public space and in the public sphere. Instead, the crowd is just in the public space. Bodies circulate in the public space and speeches circulate in the public sphere. In the public space there may be physical violence, while in the public sphere violence is symbolic. The crowd only exists when it congregates, whereas contiguity is no longer an essential defining feature of the public with the Internet. The public is community. To join a public implies taking political, ethical or aesthetical decisions. The public also differs from the activists or militants that are affiliated to a specific group. A public is perceived as being potentially endless, whereas an activist is a part of an institutionalized entity with defined hierarchies, rules, and decision levels. Lastly, the public also differs from witnesses. A witness is an individual and his/her temporality is retrospective. Instead, the public experience has a prospective temporality and is a crucial actor of the social process of *agenda setting*: an activity steering public attention.

In summary, according to Dayan, performance unites the public with the public sphere. The public exists in a reflexive manner: it is a collective subjectivity that emerges in response to the mirrored image of itself. Loyalty is a condition for belonging to a public. A public is stable, itgoes connecting issues, since it is characterized by issues and not by its responses to words, texts, manuscripts, or media. The public is a reverse dichotomy of the audience, and first needs to be an audience for the following three reasons: (1) when it responds to an *issue,* dealing with mediated situations in which it is exposed as a audience, (2) the public needs the media to reach more members, (3) the necessary skills to become a public are acquired in the media.

4.3. Publics and cases

Since the crisis of 2001, different subjectivities or groups of individuals emerged in the public space of Argentina that were not aligned with the Government, or with labor unions which are usually the great articulators of Peronist social entities (Sidicaro, 2005), or with the political parties. They constituted self-convened groups that mobilized and developed new forms of protest against the power, without following the slogans of political leaders.

I am also interested in considering the testimonies of these publics regarding how media cases are imprinted into collective memory, which can be reconstructed from the media. Through their appearance as a source, enunciator or protagonist, also analyzing the representation of these publics provided to us by the media, as we saw in the case of the agents of the 2001 crisis looting and *cacerolazos*. In such a way that publics utilize media material on cases as an input, and are incorporated by the media into the coverage of these same cases or new ones.

Where there is a case, there is a public. Said public has a confrontation strategy with the media for attracting their attention and being able to disseminate their messages through attractive forms of protest (silent marches, blocked roads and bridges, occupation of city central squares, surrounding headquarters of Government power branches, etc.). These strategies are designed on the basis of memory so as to keep the attention of the media and to position the structural conflict connected with the case in the public agenda. There are multiple examples of these groups´ performances, from neighbors resisting the installation of a pulp mill on the opposite bank of their city´s river to the families of victims and survivors of a fire in a party hall or of a train accident where hundreds of people died.

The role of publics is precisely to recollect the media case which is at the onset of its cause in order to keep an issue in the memory of audiences, to invite them to

protest alongside them, and in the memory of the political power, to demand a solution. Due to the sympathy they obtain from audiences and their aptitude to relate with the media, these publics grant much attention to public mobilizations. As I already mentioned, frequently, an alliance is created between publics and the media in order to place pressure on the political institution for it to provide a solution to the issue. Hence, the social protest of groups mobilized by these commotional media cases also serve as a social function to maintain the memory of the case alive, and this is made evident in all of the demands for justice in a crime on the basis of the memory of its victim.

5. Conclusion

One of the qualities of news that the new media have strengthened is that of ongoing updates. The audience that follows a news story does not wait to see it on the evening news on broadcast television, or much less wait until the next day to read how the newspapers reports on it. Instead, it searches for information at brief intervals from a mobile phone at the office or while traveling. Hence, from the point of view of its duration, it would seem that news tends to be ever the more ephemeral. An event succeeds another event and every incident remains in an interim version, always waiting for new data that can be added at the last minute.

However, the format of media cases works in the opposite direction of oblivion. Because of the importance that the media give in unison to a resonating case and the impact it produces on public opinion, it tends to last a long time. The different forms of repetition among the media and within every medium in particular, as well as other news elicited by the story, help maintain the anchoring of the case to the public agenda, with respect to the present time. Furthermore, with the use of journalism archives of texts and images, new media cases render past events current, which can also regain their interpretative capacity over new events.

In addition to repetition, the journalistic work of headlines plays an important role in the preservation of journalism cases in social memory. This is so because the media name and give a headline to cases, which are archived and later recalled by means of these labels. Just as Internet has accelerated the flow of information, it also allows searching for information that is vaguely remembered, perhaps with the name that the media gave the case.

Other social actors, in addition to journalists, contribute to the relevancy of news stories. As a paradigmatic example we referred to the case of a leader who retook a journalistic case from the recent past, in favor of or against the version of the media, as a resource to nourish his/her own government myth.

The collective memory of events from the recent past seems foremost to be based on journalistic versions, which tend to be stereotypical and to increasingly lose nuances with the erosion of time. A relevant question is posed when publics are made to enter the scene. They are audiences which turn information into a political resource, which are activated by the commotion that a case affecting them produces in the public opinion, and fight to keep their cause under the attention of the media so as to interpellate the population and the authorities.

These publics are generally experts on the issues that mobilize them, and they share information from many sources, nowadays through the social media, and they are not only active audiences but manage to get their messages to the media and provide their own versions of the facts. The possibility that the narrative of these publics be made to prevail over the stereotyped versions of the media and defeat, with their communication strategies, the oblivion which tragically threatens the news, may only be raised here as a problem for future investigation.

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