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Contents

Introduction	3
1. 'Mami, you're so hot!' Negotiating hierarchies of masculinity through <i>piropos</i> in contemporary Havana Silje Lundgren	5
2. Justicia difusa. Ordenación y manejo del conflicto en una ocupación de Salvador de Bahía Raúl Márquez Porras	21
3. Stop the presses? Journalistic practices in the face of citizen-created content during pulp-mills protest in Argentina and Uruguay Virginia Melián	35
4. "I think I'm in the middle": Evaluations of living standard in contemporary Havana, Cuba Maria Padrón Hernández	53
5. Argentinean flood management and the logic of omission: The case of Santa Fe City Susann Ullberg	69

Introduction

The 9th issue of the *Stockholm Review of Latin American Studies* brings together the work of five prominent young researchers who examine and discuss different kinds of contemporary struggles in Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and Uruguay.

This issue's articles are based on the findings of recently published doctoral dissertations in anthropology and media studies:

Silje Lundgren's anthropological analysis of the practice of piropos – catcalling, compliments and comments addressed by men to women in Havana street interactions – sheds light on everyday gender struggles, male homosocial communication and the performance of masculinity.

Raúl Marquéz Porras investigates strategies for the solution of everyday conflicts around property rights in an informally occupied neighborhood on the outskirts of the city of Salvador, northeastern Brazil.

Virginia Melián examines the journalistic practices for reporting on the protests against the construction of pulp-mills and the monoculture of trees, taking place between 2005-2009, on both sides of the borders between Argentina and Uruguay.

Maria Padrón Hernández discusses the concept of poverty and the political implications of a poverty discourse as she describes and analyzes the everyday struggles of her Cuban informants in order to make ends meet.

Last but not least, Susann Ullberg examines flooding in the region of Santa Fe, Argentina. Ullberg analyzes how practices of memory and oblivion of past flood experiences clash and collide within the Santafesian public administration.

The present issue was partially funded by a grant from Granholms stiftelse to finance the project "Independence and Dependence in Latin America, 200 years later." In this sense, it completes and dialogues with the 2012's issue of the journal which also forms part of this project (SRLAS No. 8, 2012, ¿Lenguas independientes? Independent languages?) by offering a contemporary perspective on new forms of dependencies and new struggles for independencies in Latin America. Enjoy your reading!

Thaís Machado-Borges, Silje Lundgren and Laura Álvarez López, editors

1 'Mami, you're so hot!' Negotiating hierarchies of masculinity through *piropos* in contemporary Havana

Silje Lundgren

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The article analyses the practice of *piropos* – catcalling, compliments, comments – in Havana street interaction. While *piropos* are often approached as a form of heterosexual erotic interplay, this article argues for an understanding of this practice as a way to negotiate hierarchies of masculinity. The argument is developed through a comprehensive analysis of the emic distinction of *piropos* into two categories, *piropos bonitos* and *groseros*, that is, beautiful compliments on the one hand, and on the other, rude or offensive comments. Taken together, these different kinds of comments shed light on the role of *piropos* as part of male homosocial communication to perform masculinity in relation to other men. Furthermore, the article follows up on the distinction of *piropos* into two categories to explore the classed and racialized connotations of *grosería* or rudeness in street interaction.

Keywords: Havana, Cuba, street interaction, *piropos*, *piropos groseros*, *piropos bonitos*, homosociality, masculinity, Cuban feminist critique, 'cultural level'

This article analyses the practice of *piropos* – catcalling, compliments, comments – in Havana street interaction. While *piropos* are often approached as a form of heterosexual erotic interplay, this article argues for an understanding of this practice as a way to negotiate hierarchies of masculinity. The argument is developed through a comprehensive analysis of the emic distinction of *piropos* into two categories, *piropos bonitos* and *groseros*, that is, beautiful compliments on the one hand, and on the other, rude or offensive comments. Taken together, these different kinds of comments shed light on the role of *piropos* – even though mostly directed to women – as part of a male homosocial communication to measure strength and perform masculinity in relation to other men present. Furthermore, the article follows up on the distinction of *piropos* into two categories, *bonitos* and *groseros*, to explore the classed and racialized connotations of *grosería* or rudeness in street interaction. This argument is then used to locate the role of *piropos* in the current social and historical context as central ingredients to mark unity in national terms, while at the same time establishing hierarchies and differentiations within this framework.

The material for this article was collected during 11 months of fieldwork in Havana during the period 2005-2010 (see Lundgren, 2011), through individual and group interviews, participant observation and a questionnaire on *piropos* (see end note i). The questionnaire proved to be pivotal to the research process. When the rumour spread that I was conducting research on *piropos* this provoked an interest that far exceeded any earlier reactions to my research on gendered and sexual ideals in contemporary Havana. (For a discussion of the ethics and reflexive challenges of the methodology of this study, see Lundgren, 2011: 42ff.).

Piropos

The term '*piropo*' is sometimes translated as 'compliment' or 'flattery'. As I will show throughout the article, '*piropo*' is a broad and negotiable term with clearly situational and contextual interpretations, but it generally refers to verbal comments by men to women in street interaction. In contemporary Havana, '*piropo*' occasionally also refers to sounds, gestures (such as kneeling down to give a woman a flower) or jokes to catch a woman's attention in the street.

Piropos are interesting since, in Cuba, they are commonly understood and talked about as part of 'Cuban idiosyncrasy'. Journalist Dalia Acosta writes that *piropos* are 'ingrained in Cuban popular culture' (Acosta, 2005), and historian Abel Sierra Madero suggests that *piropos* 'are part of our everyday life and idiosyncrasy' (Sierra Madero, 2006: 159, my translation). Using the term 'idiosyncrasy', *piropos* are portrayed as a national particularity. The term creates

an image of a game with familiar rules that 'we all know'. 'Cuban idiosyncrasy' also has strong positive connotations of national unity and pride. In this context, presenting a good *piropo* becomes a sign of belonging. Beverley Skeggs argues that national belonging creates a particular form of legitimacy – 'to belong is to be legitimate' (Skeggs, 2004: 19).

A recurring comment among some of my female interlocutors was that a day without a *piropo* was a wasted day. Nelia, a middle-aged single woman living in Vedado, said:

I tell you that if I go out and that day, during the whole day, no one says anything to me, I feel very sad. Because then I think that they don't find me attractive, that I didn't have positive energy. You're used to them saying things to you. Even if they don't say 'How beautiful you look'. Even if it's your friends, and they say 'How fine you look', then you feel that you're looking good, that they liked how you look, from the most sound and friendly point of view.

As mentioned above, *piropos* were distinguished between two categories, *piropos bonitos* and *groseros*, beautiful ones and rude or offensive comments. I took this distinction as the point of departure of the questionnaire on *piropos* that I conducted during my fieldwork in 2006 (see Lundgren, 2011: 97, 176ff) that inquired about the respondents' experiences of *piropos*.¹ When asked about the most beautiful *piropo* they had received, female respondents gave examples of comments that they had received by unknown men in the street, such as 'How beautiful you look today' or 'You look radiant today'. They also gave examples of *piropos* that were more complex or witty, such as 'What a beautiful flower, which garden did you escape from?' or 'If she cooks like she walks, I'll eat even the scrapings'.

The examples of *piropos* above examples illustrate that some men made great efforts to come up with beautiful, witty, or clever *piropos* and to present them in graceful ways. I argue that such elaborated *piropos* effectively work to express a specific form of masculinity that consists of being funny, innovative, and smart, in Cuban *chévere* (see Tanuma, 2007: 54). When asking those of my female interlocutors who identified as heterosexual what characteristics their ideal man would have, they gave examples such as cheerful [*alegre*], funny [*divertido*], charismatic, and extroverted – all characteristics that are synonymous with the Cuban term *chévere*. Elaborated *piropos* worked well to display such characteristics of quick-wittedness, humour, and grace, and street interaction thus became an important arena to perform such an ideal masculinity.

Homosociality and hierarchies of masculinity

Of course, not everyone was successful in the effort to present witty *piropos* gracefully. In an interview with Sandro, a man in his late twenties, we came to discuss *piropos*. I asked him if he usually gave women *piropos*. Sandro replied:

Yes, I have given *piropos*, but... I am not among the most intelligent, to be honest [laughs]. I have noticed that it doesn't work for me [laughs].

Silje: How, because of how the woman has reacted, or...?

Sandro: Because, no, because I feel ridiculous. Well, you need some talent to pull that off [*hay que tener alguna gracia para eso*]. At first I tried to do it, because, I don't know, I didn't have a girlfriend [laughs]. So, I was like, trying to find someone to be with, to talk to, and to somehow find a girlfriend. I don't know, those were the well-trodden paths that you had to walk, so I walked them, but they didn't work, they were not made for me. To give *piropos* was not among my gifts. So, I tried to find other ways [laughs] to find girlfriends because I was not very good at it. I'm not very good at it.

Sandro presented his lack of skills in pulling off a good *piropo* as an individual shortcoming, and expressed great admiration for those men daring, successful, audacious, conquering, and adventurous enough to be 'the good one' and become the 'leader' of the group. Later in our interview, Sandro explained:

Men dare more when they're in a group to demonstrate, perhaps unconsciously, to demonstrate to the other pal that he's daring, that he's successful, saying *piropos*, that he's a person who's audacious, as you say here, he's daring, that's the word that is used. That he's daring, he's adventurous, I don't know, conquering. And actually, when he's by himself, he's the same person, and he says nothing.

And in a group, it's like he feels more courageous. He's backed by the group, and the group sometimes encourages him to say a *piropo*: 'All right [*A ver*], say something to that woman!' Or you're walking, and you look at a girl, and they say, 'But come on, say something, say something!' whatever.

So, the good one is the one who *really* dares [*sí se lanza*], who dares, that's the leader of the group, the one that everyone wants to be like, so it's like this kind of group consequence...

Sandro emphasized the hierarchy that was created between men, where the highest rank went to the more courageous, the one who *really* dared. This description of encouragement or insistence among a group of men to give *piropos* to women clearly points to the importance of male homosociality in the performance of masculinity, both in terms of being backed up by the other men present and through the hierarchical status ascribed to he who excelled in this game.

The framework of male 'homosociality' has been an attempt to conceptualize how men encourage, promote, uphold, and foster their relationships with other men over their relationship to women (Hirdman, 2001: 19f., see also Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Sedgwick, 1985). In her classical analysis of homosociality, queer theorist Eva Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) developed an understanding of homosociality as a form of male bonding with a triangular structure; a triangle in which men have intense bonds with other men, and women are given the role of conduits or channels of communication for men to express those homosocial bonds (*ibid.*).

Male homosociality has also been explored within the field of masculinity studies in Cuba, of which historian Julio César González Pagés was one of the initiators, and historian Abel Sierra Madero has continued as a ground-breaking pioneer. González Pagés suggests that relationships between men in Cuba are characterized by rivalry, and that men must not show signs of weakness or vulnerability (González Pagés, 2005: 7). He argues that the construction of masculinity in Cuba includes ingredients such as the demand to constantly demonstrate virility and bravery in front of other men (González Pagés, 2002: 119). Sierra Madero traces the long history of such traits of masculinity, showing that an idealized masculine being, audacious and with warrior virtues, has been crafted since the wars of independence and consolidated throughout the revolutionary process as a form of 'autochthonous' Cuban masculinity (Sierra Madero, 2006).

Reading Sandro's account above against this background, his open admiration for those men who mastered the art of giving *piropos* – and his lament of his own shortcomings – clearly reflect González Pagés's point about the role of homosociality in the construction of masculinity, through demonstrating virility in front of other men, and Sierra Madero's connection

of a specific form of masculinity to national belonging. Sandro's account also points to the hierarchical nature of this ideal masculinity, in that *piropos* worked to establish a hierarchy among the group of men, and a hegemonic position was ascribed to the most daring and brave man in the group.

Negotiating positions among men

Pointing to the importance of male homosociality in the negotiation of hierarchical masculinity gives tools to understand the other side of the spectrum of *piropos*, namely *piropos groseros*, rude or offensive comments. The questionnaire on *piropos* that I carried out in 2006 also inquired about the most rude – grosero – *piropo* the respondent had received or heard lately. Some of the female interlocutors gave examples of comments that they had received from unknown men in the street, such as 'Mamita, let me touch your buttocks' or 'If I catch you I will suck all that'. Male interlocutors gave examples of *piropos* they had overheard being given to women in street interaction, such as 'Mami, what a great shit thrower [*bota caca*] you have!' or 'Mami, if I catch you I'll give you cock until milk [word also used for sperm] comes out of your ears'.

I discussed *piropos groseros* with Ramón, a man around thirty whom I interviewed in 2006. He reflected:

I think that often, it's like a performance. It's a thing that they do, independent of what the woman thinks or how she will react. That is, it doesn't matter, it's more like, among friends and, so that the friends will laugh at what they're saying, and see – right? – 'Wow, he is witty' and things like that. [...]

But I'm telling you, often it doesn't really matter what woman it is, and that stuff, you see? Instead, the important thing is the act of doing it, and making a good impression, or ...

Also, if you manage to provoke a burst of laughter at the expense of someone feeling bad, it doesn't matter, you still achieved it [*Incluso, si logras arrancar carcajadas a costa de que alguien se sienta mal, no importa, lo lograste igual*].

Ramón suggested downplaying the importance of the receiving woman's reaction to a *piropo* and instead highlighting how the man would appear witty and daring in relation to the other men present. This again points to the importance of homosociality, the presence of other men, to demonstrate central characteristics of masculinity. It also illustrates that men did not necessarily lose

status in a homosocial hierarchy through a *piropo* grosero. Women's bothered reactions seemed to be of less importance than appearing funny and daring in front the group of men. Thus, giving women rude or offensive comments might be understood as a way of communicating and negotiating hierarchical positions among men, rather than as a form of mutual heterosexual interplay.

This negotiation of positions among men could also take the form of rivalry. This was not only communicated through explicit comments but also gazes or body language. In 2005 I interviewed Elisabet, a woman in her mid-twenties, and she retold some occasions in street interaction that had upset her. I asked whether her boyfriend Abel had ever been present on any of those occasions, and Elisabet told me about one such event:

I remember once, we were crossing [a large traffic junction in Havana] and this man came, and he kept staring at me, right? A guy of thirtysomething, something like that.

And Abel did something like this, he turned around like this, and he did this gesture with his hand, like saying, 'What's up?' – right? – 'What's up with you?' And this guy... Abel looked back, and he said, 'This guy is going to fight me, we'll see what happens.'

And the guy told him, 'Shit, man, don't take it that way. The thing is that I was looking at what's beside you, because she's a very beautiful girl,' like that, right?

So the guy tackled it really well, right? It was like, I don't know, like he shouldn't think he was being rude, you see? Instead, like, that I was a beautiful person, that he was simply appreciating that – right? – but that he wasn't checking me out or anything like that. At least that was what he said, it might have been just the opposite. So Abel was like, 'OK, that's fine, it's OK, whatever.'

Elisabet's account reflects a very fine line in a double-sided communication in which women's bodies become instruments to communicate and measure strength between men. The story illustrates that on the one hand, for a man to check out a woman who is accompanied by another man is considered a challenge to the accompanying man's position and is thought to offend and humiliate him. Hence, a man accompanying a woman may look other men warningly in the eyes to show that he is alert and ready to meet any insult or comment. But on the other hand, to check her out might also be taken as

a compliment to the accompanying man's conquest and enviable catch, and thus give him a certain status position in a male hierarchy. Moreover, these two are connected; *because* a beautiful woman beside him will give *him* a status position, other men's comments or stares will be taken as insults or threats against him. In the situation above, this fine line was drawn through subtle moves. Abel interpreted the stare at Elisabet within the first interpretation above, as a challenge; but the other man managed to switch the interpretation into the second, as a complimenting admiration of his enviable catch. The situation hence turned from a potential fight to a sceptical truce.

Male sexual 'drives'

Another common emic understanding of *piropos* was as an expression of men's uncontrollable sexual 'drives'. Among my interlocutors, men who expressed desire and admiration for women's beauty through comments or stares in street interaction were often considered to be following an inherent nature. Ramón, whom I introduced above, explained this to me in our interview: 'It's also like a sign of virility, that with such a beautiful woman I can't hold back, I have to show her that "Oh, I'm dying to get her".' These 'drives' could be communicated through *piropos*, but also through non-verbal performances. On occasions, at seeing a particularly beautiful woman, a man could perform a scene in the street as if hypnotized or struck by lightning; he would moan loudly, hit the wall in despair, and at times even rip his clothes while groaning as if in pain, following the woman with his eyes. In my reading of the situation, this performance played with the conception of 'drives', in that it expressed how the man was trying to handle the instinctive reactions aroused by the sight of this woman. He could supposedly not control himself, but must stare, moan, and scream out the pain provoked by the sheer sight of her. Such a performance was generally considered a great compliment to the woman in question, as she was perceived as having managed to arouse such a strong reaction in a man just by her looks or body language. The more explosive and 'uncontrollable' the performance, the greater the compliment.

I understand the framing of such expressions of male desire in terms of uncontrollable 'drives' as a process of naturalization that legitimizes and authorizes the logic of street interaction. Moreover, I read this logic as an appropriation of the arena of the street as a symbolically male space. Through these performances, men declared an 'entitlement' to this arena, moving in and using this space as if they 'owned it' (see Skeggs, 2004: 153). The performance and negotiation of masculinity in this arena could thus be said to take the form of an 'authorized language' that made it legitimate in itself (see Bourdieu, 1977:

170). The street thus became an arena of male symbolic power, on which the male gaze was inscribed with the power to scan, examine, evaluate, and desire (Bourdieu, 2001: 66). In the words of sociologist Beverley Skeggs, this 'offers to masculinity the power to impose standards, make evaluations and confirm validity' (Skeggs, 1997: 112).

However, the framing of such expressions of male desire in street interaction in terms of 'drives' did not completely naturalize these practices. On the contrary, the material of exemplifies a conscious verbalization of the rules of the game, of its objectives, strategies and negotiations. This was the case both with *piropos* and non-verbal performances of male desire. While these practices were based on the image of an uncontrollable sexual urge, they were nevertheless understood as carefully crafted and skilful performances.

Challenging strategies

Of course women by no means passively or silently accepted this symbolic appropriation of the arena of the street. Quite the opposite; my female interlocutors applied a range of active and innovative challenging strategies to contest this appropriation (see also Martínez Herrera, 2009). Sofia, a woman in her late twenties, told me about the ways she used to handle *piropos groseros*, rude or offensive comments from unknown men in the street. At times, she said, she would enter a state of yoga or meditation so that she would not even notice the comments shouted at her. Other times she would walk directly towards a man before he even had time to say anything to ask him the time. When I interviewed Sofia in 2005 she explained, 'The guys, if you direct yourself to them, they immediately act cowardly, they go down. You see?' On another occasion, Sofia told me that she dreamed of gathering a group of female friends who would place themselves along a block and pick a man at whom they would shout *piropos* similar to those received by women. Yet another idea that she was elaborating was to prepare small paper notes with messages or questions to men who gave her offensive comments, to make them question themselves and their practice in street interaction. Sofia hence responded firmly to such *piropos*, both in the moment and planning ahead, along a scale from defensive to pro-active and elaborate strategies.

Sofia's strategies could be read as attempts to denaturalize the practice of *piropos groseros*. Her plan of written notes would make men reflect on what they were doing. Sofia also dreamed of turning the situation upside down with a collective revengeful response to bombard men with the same *piropos* that women received, to make them reflect on the order of things. I read these strategies as contesting and challenging men's symbolic appropriation of the

arena of the street, and as efforts to actively re-conquer this arena. Thus, while framing *piropos* in terms of 'Cuban idiosyncrasy' and uncontrollable male 'drives' worked to naturalize and legitimize this practice, women's active and daring challenging strategies managed to widen the space for possible critique. Hence, their strategies were not just reproductive contestations within a male symbolic appropriation of the street, but also set out to redesignate the premises of this appropriation and undermine it (see Skeggs, 1997: 129). In Bourdieuan terms, these challenging strategies took on the struggle about the terms in which street interaction was framed and contested the symbolic imposition of dominant definitions of this interaction (see Bourdieu, 2001: 13f.).

A similar contestation has been formulated by Cuban feminists such as psychologist Karelin López who has made a broad study of sexual harassment. López wishes to confront naturalizing understandings of *piropos* and bring the taken-for-granted familiarity of this practice to the fore to put its rules under scrutiny for public debate. López suggests seeing the practice of *piropos* as one end of a continuum of sexual harassment (see López, 2001; see also Acosta, 2005a; Martínez Herrera, 2009), a continuum that also includes *tiradores* (men who masturbate in public) and physical harassment at crowded buses. Furthermore, López suggests that legislation on harassment must be revised and that a new definition of sexual harassment must be developed (López, 2001). For instance, López argues that the naturalized conception of men's uncontrollable 'drives' contributes to holding women responsible for harassment (ibid.).

Above, I argued that *piropos* worked as an appropriation of the arena of the street as a symbolically male space. This appropriation, together with the processes of naturalization and legitimation through framing them as expressions of male 'drives' and of Cuban 'idiosyncrasy', also created a frame for developing challenging strategies. Creating a space for conflict and resistance on this arena implied a challenge to the inclusion of *piropos* as an element of national particularity, specified through the use of the term 'idiosyncrasy'. It also implied a challenge to naturalized gendered conceptions of sexuality, such as the 'irrepressible sex drives' of men. In this sense, my female interlocutors' creative strategies against rude or offensive *piropos* indirectly also challenged underlying conceptions that held women responsible for harassment.

'Cultural level'

To further contextualize the practice of *piropos* and in particular *piropos groseros*, rude or offensive comments, it is necessary to locate this phenomenon in its specific historical context of contemporary Havana. The last section of this article will explore how the talk of *piropos* was not only used to articulate unity

and pride, through inscribing this practice in the notion of 'Cuban idiosyncrasy'. *Piropos* were also a central tool to mark difference and distinction. To explore this I again draw on the work of Beverley Skeggs who analyses processes of 'making difference' (Skeggs 1997; 2004), and sees these processes as 'dynamic, produced through conflict and fought out at the level of the symbolic' (ibid.: 5).

At the outset of the article, I introduced Nelia, a middle-aged woman who expressed that she would feel sad if a whole day went by without her receiving any *piropos*. Later in our interview, we then about different kinds of *piropos*, and Nelia explained:

When it comes to the street there are the flirts, and there are the liars, and there are normal people. It depends on the person. There are very fine *piropos* from nice persons; there are persons who are very moderate. There are people who are shameless, filthy and disgusting. There are all kinds.

That also depends on a person's cultural level. If it's a person who has read, who has studied, one who develops within a normal environment, family-oriented and such, he will say a nice *piropo*, that doesn't hurt that person. If it's a vulgar person, less educated, he will say something disgusting.

Nelia linked 'normality' to characteristics such as fine, nice, moderate, educated, and family-oriented, which was then contrasted with a number of disdainful characteristics that made use of poor educational preparation to explain 'vulgar' and 'disgusting' *piropos*. Nelia created a hierarchy between a 'we' represented by 'normality' and moderation, and the contrasting vulgar and shameless 'others'. Through portraying the rude *piropos* as deviant expressions of poor education, Nelia could also celebrate the precious tradition of *piropos*, that without which her day would be a complete waste, as quoted above. In other words, the framing of *piropos* as part of Cuban 'idiosyncrasy' referred specifically to the beautiful *piropos*. Nelia's formulation of offensive *piropos* as 'vulgar' and inappropriate expressions of a 'low cultural level' displaces such rude comments *piropos* as 'degenerate' expressions of a positive national idiosyncrasy. Paradoxically, this exclusion of 'inappropriate' *piropos* also seems to consolidate the framing of beautiful and welcome *piropos* in terms of the celebrated unity of Cuban 'idiosyncrasy'.

Nelia explicitly used 'cultural level' as a marker of difference to make the distinction between different kinds of *piropos*. In the Cuban context, one can

talk about having '(high) culture' or 'low culture', or a high or low 'cultural level'. To understand the role of this particular marker of difference, I here draw on two anthropological accounts that discuss the classed and racialized aspects of the concept of 'cultural level' in the context of contemporary Havana. In the analysis of Mette Louise Berg/Rundle, to *have* cultural level in this context includes 'moderation, decency, and restraint' as well as an 'emphasis on non-promiscuous behaviour, and preferences in style and taste of music, food, hair and clothing' (Rundle, 2001: 8). The concept 'cultural level' is also clearly racialized, relating to a racialized 'hierarchy of "good" and "bad" accents', and Afro-Cuban religion and music are often seen as expressions of a low cultural level (*ibid.*, 8). In a similar manner, Nadine Fernandez relates talk of 'low cultural level' to formal education, but also to values such as decency, propriety, etiquette, and moderation (Fernandez, 2010: 134). To locate this marker of difference, Fernandez sees 'low culture' as 'a class discourse embedded with a racial one' (*ibid.*, 138). Similarly, Rundle argues that inscribing issues of race and inequality into a domain of 'cultural level' works to avert 'any indications of marginality being a product of social structures and processes' (Rundle, 2001: 1). Furthermore, she writes:

To have cultural level coincides with high culture and white elite values, but it is presented as a choice, open to all individuals, irrespective of social background. The discourse of cultural level has, in other words, become an idiom in which to articulate racialised and classed ideas of morality and behaviour, without acknowledging it as such. (Rundle, 2001: 8)

This is a necessary context to understand the situational character of categorizing a particular *piropo* as either beautiful or offensive, bonito or grosero. Very similar comments could thus be interpreted very differently depending on the context, tone, and who said it, and to whom. Moreover, the interpretation of certain comments as *groseros*, rude or offensive, must be understood in relation to the classed and racialized character of the concept of *grosería*. The terms used above to frame the examples of *piropos* as rude – *groseros* – such as 'vulgar' and 'bad taste', were typical of how my interlocutors framed 'low culture'. The entanglement of *grosería* with the conception of 'low cultural level' was so tight that this became self-explanatory in a circular fashion. The full reply from one of the questionnaires on *piropos* might illustrate this. A female respondent commented on the question about the rudest *piropo* she had received and what her reaction had been in the following manner:

Mami, you're so hot! A black man, rude, with a bad appearance in the street and with attitude [*Un negro, grosero, de mal aspect en la calle y con guapería*]. Sometimes this happens almost every day. Reaction: I don't even look at him and keep walking. You have to ignore such things of bad taste.

It is important to note that the comment in itself – '*Mami*, you're so hot!' – would not in itself have been characterized as rude. On the contrary, several examples of beautiful *piropos* from the questionnaires were strikingly similar to this comment. Instead, the respondent drew on the classed and racialized connotations of *grosería* to depict a rude and inappropriate situation. Central here is the use of the term '*guapería*'. The term comes from the adjective and noun *guapo*. In Cuban Spanish, this does not mean handsome, as it does in peninsular Spanish. Instead, it refers to cocky, gutsy, rough behaviour. Nadine Fernandez discusses how *guapos* are pictured as aggressive, with bad and vulgar language, and that this *guapería* is used as a marker of 'low cultural level' (Fernandez, 2010: 95ff.). Thus, in this specific example, markers of 'low cultural level' such as 'bad taste' and *guapería*, together with an explicit racialization of the man giving the *piropo*, were used to contextualize the comment and situation as rude and offensive.

The understanding of *piropos* was thus marked by a tension between inclusion and exclusion, unity and hierarchy. *Piropos* were, on the one hand, framed as part of 'Cuban idiosyncrasy', and the capacity to present a good *piropo* became a sign of national belonging. However, this understanding was clearly delimited through a portrayal of rude and offensive *piropos* as 'degenerate' forms of this national particularity. Such rude comments were explained in terms of 'low cultural level' and *grosería*, making use of the classed and racialized connotations of these concepts. And the other way around: classed and racialized difference was demarcated through examples of 'vulgar' or 'inappropriate' comments. Marking difference through the exclusion of certain *piropos* was in fact conditioned by and thus confirmed the role of *piropos* as an element of a positive national particularity.

The choice of 'cultural level' as a marker of difference must furthermore be related to a specific historical location. Much literature within Cuban studies explores how economic inequalities have increased since the economic crisis of the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet bloc (Espina Prieto, 2004). The main ways to access hard currency have not been equally available, since remittances from relatives abroad follows the stratification of the exile community, and employment within the new tourist demonstrate clearly racialized

preferences (Fuente 2001, Eckstein 2004). In this context, anthropologist Noelle Monet Stout suggests that 'during the island's transition to late socialism the relationship between cultural and financial capital was often inverted' (Stout, 2008: 734). Thus, people in contemporary Havana navigate in a context of new and unfamiliar differentiations. This serves as a framework to understand the increased importance of 'cultural level' as a marker of difference, in negotiating positions in a context where hierarchies are currently renegotiated in relation to new economic and material conditions.

Concluding remarks

The practice of *piropos* – approached as a continuum of catcalling, compliments and comments in street interaction – forms an important and omnipresent part of everyday life in Havana. It is therefore not surprising that this practice becomes a central ingredient to negotiate complex power relations inherent in everyday ideals around gender, sexuality and nationality. This article has pointed to two central processes of hierarchization and differentiation in which *piropos* play an important role. Giving *piropos* was a way to demonstrate a daring and brave masculinity and to gain a position within a male homosocial hierarchy. A comprehensive analysis of the connections between beautiful and rude comments sheds light on the role of *piropos* in male homosocial communication. Giving *piropos* appeared as a game among men, to measure strength and perform masculinity in relation to other men present.

Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account the central role of *piropos* as a marker of national 'idiosyncrasy' to locate this practice in its current social and historical context. An analysis of the framing of *piropos* as inherent in Cuban 'idiosyncrasy' points to a tension between unity and hierarchy; to the strong connections with belonging and pride on the one hand, which condition the need to exclude undesired elements on the other hand. Paradoxically, the hierarchy that was created through the exclusion of rude *piropos* as a form of 'degeneration' seemed to consolidate the role of *piropos* as an element of a positive national particularity.

Notes

- 1 The questionnaire inquired about *piropos* that the respondent had received or overheard, and their reactions to these comments. It asked whether the respondent would give *piropos* in street interaction or other contexts. The questionnaire also included questions about gendered ideals. I collected only a small sample of eleven men and eleven women of different ages who completed the questionnaire. Since the most interesting result of this experiment turned out to be the discussions it provoked around the phenomenon of *piropos*, I did not choose to amplify the sample through more questionnaires completed in my absence. The ages of respondents varied from twenty to fifty-something. After completing the questionnaire, the person was asked to put the form in an envelope which I provided, and seal it (see Lundgren, 2011: 97, 176ff).

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2 Justicia difusa. Ordenación y manejo del conflicto en una ocupación de Salvador de Bahía

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Tomando el caso de un barrio de la periferia de Salvador de Bahía, este artículo explora la ordenación de ciertos asentamientos informales, concretamente la de aquéllos cuya configuración social no cuenta con una autoridad central la mayor parte del tiempo. Descritos por la opinión pública y la literatura como espacios de desorden, faltos de cualquier normatividad consensuada, este estudio cuestiona dicha idea mostrando la existencia de principios claros que guían la convivencia entre los vecinos (entre los que destaca la atribución de estatus diferenciado) y de pautas que guían la resolución de sus conflictos. Para ello se citan brevemente algunos casos de conflicto etnografiados por el autor. Su análisis muestra que este sistema jurídico está marcado, entre otros elementos, por la evaluación concreta de las partes, la intervención regular de terceros, una medida *contención* y la presencia constante del Estado.

Palabras claves: Antropología jurídica, etnografía, resolución de conflictos, asentamientos informales, Brasil.

Cuando algunos soteropolitanos se referían a Nova Constituinte como “o Iraque”, país que en aquel 2006 simbolizaba el caos y la violencia, lo hacían para resaltar el desorden que supuestamente reinaba en aquel barrio de la periferia de la ciudad formado a partir de distintos procesos de ocupación irregular (compraventas clandestinas, ocupaciones directas...), hacía casi veinte años. Sus vecinos—algo más de 12.500-, trabajadores pobres dedicados a la construcción, la venta ambulante o el servicio doméstico, y que en su mayoría llegaron desde otros barrios buscando una vivienda en propiedad (cf. Uneb, 2007), eran adscritos al estereotipo de *invasores* y *marginais*, y por ello considerados incapaces de crear algún tipo de ordenación. Pero dicho estereotipo no es exclusivo de Salvador y su periferia, cuenta con una larga historia. En numerosas obras académicas y periodísticas barrios como Nova Constituinte son descritos bien como enclaves en un estado *hobbesiano*, donde todos lucharían contra todos debido a la falta de autoridad; o bien cuando hay una asociación de vecinos o líderes claros el orden parece depender absolutamente de ellos. La historia de Nova Constituinte muestra, en cambio, que estos contextos pueden resultar mucho más complejos, que transitan a veces de un tipo de configuración donde hay jueces o árbitros reconocidos, a otro en que ninguna autoridad se hace visible, sin que por ello cunda el desorden, funcionando siempre algunas normas y mecanismos que canalizan el conflicto.

Es mi intención analizar esto último, precisamente en un contexto en que el barrio carece de una autoridad central. Constituyendo éste un estudio de caso sobre el ordenamiento de cierto tipo de barrios (comúnmente designados como *asentamientos informales*, o *favelas e invasões* en Brasil). Pese a ser el conflicto y sus formas de resolución un tema clásico de la antropología jurídica (Nader, 2002), y pese a existir obras que abordan directamente ordenamientos informales (Ellickson, 1991) o haberse convertido la *favela* en objeto de estudio preferente (Valladares, 2005), son escasas las aportaciones sobre cómo los vecinos de los barrios informales gestionan su convivencia. Las únicas etnografías al respecto se centran en el funcionamiento de los mercados inmobiliarios, y se sitúan en contextos donde hay una autoridad clara (por lo general, una asociación de vecinos), pieza clave del orden local (Van Gelder, 2010). Por lo tanto, este artículo supone una contribución novedosa al estudio de los sistemas de regulación y del ámbito de lo *informal* en general.

Su base es una investigación etnográfica llevada a cabo en dos períodos: entre 2005 y 2006 (durante aproximadamente un año) y en agosto de 2012. Residiendo en Nova Constituinte, y mientras se investigaba la regularización de las propiedades, se recopiló una serie de casos, de conflictos, algunos de los cuales se presentan aquí. Se trata de reconstrucciones elaboradas a partir del relato de sus protagonistas o de testigos directos, recurriendo siempre a más

de una fuente. Alguno de los casos (el último y más extenso, por ejemplo) fue observado y seguido in situ.

El desarrollo del texto será el siguiente: en un primer apartado expongo parte del debate sobre el orden/desorden de favelas e *invasões*. A continuación describo con mayor profundidad el contexto de estudio, Nova Constituinte, detallando los distintos *órdenes* por los que ha transitado el barrio. En la parte central analizo la cuestión del manejo del conflicto y la ordenación social, explicando sus principales elementos e ilustrando cada uno de ellos con pequeños ejemplos etnográficos. Y en el apartado final apunto una reflexión sobre la naturaleza de este orden.

El desorden o el orden condicionado de *favelas* e *invasões*

Resulta antigua la visión de los asentamientos informales como espacios sin reglas y sin normatividades consensuadas. Valladares (2005) explica que en Brasil esta idea forma parte del arquetipo construido en torno a las *favelas*, y cita como una de las obras que ayudaron a difundirla la de Carolina Maria de Jesus, biografía de una *favelada* de São Paulo. Jesus (1960) retrataba una cotidianidad marcada por la competencia, las peleas y la falta de acción colectiva pautada; aunque su testimonio, contradictorio, describía constantes favores entre vecinos (1960: 25, 179). Tiempo después, trabajos como el de Perlman (1979) ofrecerían una imagen muy distinta de los *favelados*, mostrando, por ejemplo, su gran capacidad organizativa. No obstante, persistirían hasta hoy las representaciones que asocian *favela* y caos, ausencia de leyes o delincuencia (Varley, 2013).

Además, los pocos estudios dedicados a las normas y ordenamientos desarrollados por los *favelados* transmiten la idea de que éstos son extremadamente limitados, dependen casi en exclusiva del Estado o de la presencia de líderes poderosos. Para Conn (1969), quien llevó a cabo uno de los análisis pioneros, el factor clave en la ordenación de las *favelas* era la existencia de una asociación de vecinos: donde había una asociación, la convivencia estaba regulada y se aplicaban las leyes (oficiales)¹. Donde no, cundía el desorden y los conflictos se dirimían recurriendo exclusivamente a la fuerza. Santos (1977) ofrecería una visión más compleja. En Jacarezinho, la *favela* que él estudió, funcionaba un auténtico *derecho* confeccionado a partir de préstamos de la ley oficial. No obstante, también allí una asociación de vecinos era la pieza clave. Al margen de ella sólo había “rough justice” (1977: 97): justicia a medias, el dominio de los más fuertes. Recientemente, también se han presentado como ordenadas las *favelas* que están bajo dominio de un narcotraficante. Arias y Davis (2006), analizando un barrio de Rio, observaron que el *chefe* imponía leyes que le favorecían (la ley del silencio sobre sus actividades, por ejemplo), pero no actuaba con total arbitrariedad. Para legitimarse estaba obligado a

seguir lo que estos autores llamaban la *favela ethics* (“a general set of ‘rules’ regarding appropriate behavior”, 2006:65), un código que imponía el respeto hacia los demás vecinos y la consideración de éstos en función de su estatus.

La pregunta, leyendo la literatura sobre estos ordenamientos y tal y como exponíamos al principio, es qué ocurre en los barrios –o en los momentos- en que no hay una autoridad fuerte (oficial o paraoficial). Cómo se ordena la convivencia, y si, como insinúan algunos autores, se da entonces una falta casi absoluta de ordenación social. Esto chocaría, de entrada, con la idea defendida por otros teóricos: la de que cualquier colectividad (más aún si sus miembros albergan un proyecto común y están obligados a convivir) desarrolla un mínimo de regulación (Ellickson, 1991). Y choca con el caso empírico que presento a continuación.

El caso de estudio

Nova Constituinte empieza a gestarse en la década de 1950, cuando trabajadores de la Fazenda Periperi empiezan a vender clandestinamente terrenos y quienes arrendaban dejan de pagar. Era su reacción ante los problemas legales que el *fazendeiro* había empezado a tener. La Fazenda irá perdiendo terreno en un proceso que se acelerará en los años 70 y 80 a raíz de varias ocupaciones colectivas (*invasões*), la más importante de las cuales –y que daría nombre al barrio- se dará en enero de 1987². Fue ésta una ocupación promovida por dos líderes vecinales, buenos conocedores de la zona y trabajadores de la Administración. Habían reunido a una decena de familias que hasta entonces vivían en regímenes precarios en otros barrios de la ciudad. Afianzada su ocupación, un número reducido fundará una primera asociación de vecinos, asumiendo la tarea de organizar la *invasão* y de legitimarla ante las autoridades. Sería ésta una etapa de cierta organización colectiva y de autoridad más o menos colegiada.

Pero un vecino, Guaxinim, irá haciéndose con el control de la asociación. Empezará entonces una etapa de liderazgo individual, con Guaxinim dominando una amplia área del barrio. Pese a actuar de manera autoritaria, éste habría respetado ciertas reglas a la hora de hacer de árbitro: por ejemplo, la de considerar el orden de entrada, el nivel de trabajo o la necesidad de las partes. A su muerte, en agosto de 1991, seguirá una época de dispersión de la autoridad. Varios líderes se harán con el control de áreas más o menos pequeñas, actuando con una mayor violencia y arbitrariedad. No obstante, guardarán respeto, se cuenta, hacia los vecinos *trabajadores* y más próximos. En 1996 una nueva líder reactiva la vieja asociación de vecinos. Conseguirá convertirse en interlocutora oficial del Estado, casi todo funcionario o programa público pasará por ella (por ejemplo, a partir de 2003, el programa de regularización). Pese a esto, se encontrará compitiendo en el día a día con otras *lideranças* y su autoridad en

el barrio será muy limitada. La época más contemporánea está marcada, de hecho, por la actuación de múltiples líderes y por la existencia de pequeñas *redes* donde desarrollan su influencia. Las *lideranças* actuales son personas que por su profesión (pastores de iglesia o sacerdotes del *candomblé*, cargos de algún partido político, funcionarios...), sus conocimientos o contactos aglutinan a su alrededor a un grupo de familias (su *red*), que movilizan en ocasiones puntuales. Éstas, entre 4 y 8 y generalmente de la misma calle, suelen mantener una interacción cotidiana e intercambiar todo tipo de bienes y servicios. Estar integrado en una *red* supone contar con ciertos apoyos en caso de necesidad o conflicto, sobre todo si uno es considerado un *bom vizinho*.

En efecto, mantener la consideración de *buen vecino* resulta fundamental. Es ésa la categoría básica de una jerarquía de estatus que, como el resto del ordenamiento, está construida sobre principios morales (bueno/malo, legítimo/ilegítimo...). La otra categoría genérica es la de *marginal*, siendo ambas antitéticas. El *bom vizinho* es aquél que muestra ser un trabajador, que respeta a los demás, no importuna y cumple los tratos; *marginal* es el que no cumple con alguno de esos puntos –se gana la vida con alguna actividad ilícita (que no informal), crea problemas, etc.-. Además, dentro del grupo de los *buenos vecinos* se da una gradación en función de la vía de entrada al barrio y la antigüedad en la residencia. En el escalafón más alto encontramos a los arrendatarios y trabajadores de la antigua Fazenda; después vienen aquéllos que no entraron *invadiendo* (que compraron de alguien, recibieron una cesión, fueron realojados por la Administración, etc.) y los *invasores* antiguos; y en última posición tenemos a los vecinos más nuevos (ordenados, a su vez, en función del tipo de entrada). Por supuesto, el estatus es algo dinámico, modificable, y mantenerse como *bom vizinho* supone seguir ajustándose al patrón referido.

La atribución de estatus no es un simple hecho nominativo, tiene implicaciones sociales y jurídicas (razón por la cual nos interesa aquí). Supone disponer o no de ciertas potestades: un vecino de estatus elevado podrá conservar su propiedad aunque la abandone temporalmente (cosa que no podría hacer un vecino nuevo), o se atreverá a intervenir sobre el espacio público. Podrá contar con más apoyos y, en general, tendrá más probabilidades de vivir tranquilo. Vecinos como Manoel o Cícero –ambos antiguos– lo reconocen explícitamente. El primero explicaba que nadie tomó su casa, durante un tiempo en que había estado fuera, “devido à consideração” que le tenían. Y el segundo afirmaba, rotundo, que la fuente principal de su seguridad era “ser admirado; que os que te admiram, te protegem”.

El hecho es que el sistema de estatus es una gran fuerza ordenadora: ejerce una presión para cumplir con ciertas normas, y así conservar la consideración y los privilegios citados. Y es una fuerza que habría funcionado siempre, desde

que la ocupación tuvo cierta densidad y estabilidad, al menos, en cada una de sus etapas. Para seguir ilustrando esto trataré a continuación el tema del conflicto y su resolución; análisis que debería servir, como Llewellyn y Hoebel (1962) defendieron, para sacar a relucir los principios que estructuran las relaciones cotidianas.

El manejo del conflicto en el barrio

Cuatro elementos destacan en la forma como se gestiona el conflicto en el barrio: 1) el *personalismo* (la consideración de la posición y características de cada una de las partes); 2) la intervención de terceros basculando entre la mediación y la adjudicación; 3) la dinámica marcada por la *contención* y la fuerza; y 4) la influencia y uso del sistema estatal.

Algunos conflictos en torno a la propiedad muestran claramente el *personalismo*, por ejemplo. En los comienzos de la *invasão* fueron frecuentes las disputas por un mismo terreno en las que se confrontaban determinadas características personales, especialmente el nivel de *necesidad*. El *buen invasor* (como el *bom vizinho*) era el que ocupaba permanentemente su lote y lo trabajaba, pero ante un lote en disputa primero se medían las necesidades respectivas. Así ocurrió con Mara y otra vecina cuando entraron en conflicto por un lote. Los vecinos de su alrededor, capitaneados por una vecina más antigua que Mara (por tanto, de mayor estatus), hicieron presión para que desistiera y abandonara aquel terreno; la otra persona lo necesitaba más que ella (al parecer tenía más hijos).

El examen de la posición y el comportamiento de la persona es algo que se da siempre, determinando la reacción de los demás. Renata y sus vecinos, en diciembre de 2006, hacía meses que guardaban el terreno de una persona que había tenido que salir temporalmente. Lo hacían, según Renata, porque “aquella pessoa merecia”: era considerado un *bom vizinho* y, además, tenía un motivo justificado para ausentarse (le había salido trabajo fuera de la ciudad). En más de una ocasión, contaba, habían tenido que defender el lote y evitar que otras personas lo ocuparan.

Respecto a la actuación de terceros, indicaba que ésta se mueve entre la mediación y la adjudicación; o sea, entre la búsqueda de un compromiso entre las partes y la imposición de un veredicto (cf. Santos, 1977). De nuevo, hay que tener en cuenta las distintas épocas y configuraciones, y los asuntos que provocan el conflicto. Ya he comentado que Guaxinim actuaba la mayor parte del tiempo de manera autoritaria, sin buscar el acuerdo (pero sí cierta legitimación, respetando también principios como la primacía del más necesitado). En cambio, en casos en que el tercero actúa por tener vínculo con una de las partes la intervención se

acerca más a la mediación; aún más si el allegado ha cometido un error y tiene claramente las de perder. Fue lo que ocurrió en el caso del hombre que cerraba la calle del Cajueiro. Al principio de la *invasão*, cuando los ocupantes intentaban ordenar el espacio, los vecinos se encontraron con la actitud terca de un vecino que no estaba dispuesto a ceder parte de su terreno para construir la calle. Después de que construyera una cerca otro un vecino (portavoz de un grupo) le increpó. Ambos se enzarzaron en una discusión, pero cuando la situación estaba más tensa intervino un amigo del vecino díscolo, diciéndole (relata un testigo): “«olhe, realmente você está errado. Isso aqui é pra ser uma rua...», conversou direitinho; foi que ele caiu no consenso e abriu”. Hasta hoy existe la calle del Cajueiro, pero el vecino de la cerca hace tiempo que no vive en ella.

Aparece en este caso, por cierto, el fenómeno de la *contención* (que comentaré a continuación) y otros rasgos generales de la labor del mediador: el tono conciliador, la apelación a lo *razonable*³... Porque en la época y configuración más reciente, como señalaba, los mediadores acostumbran a ser personas cercanas a una de las partes intentando zanjar una disputa. En otras épocas lo fueron *lideranças* con un amplio apoyo que habrían actuado de manera más resolutiva, llevando a cabo algo más parecido a un arbitraje. Cícero, por ejemplo, que en la tarea de interceder en una disputa mezclaba la imposición de un veredicto con el diálogo y la compensación. Recreando un caso, comentaba: “eu ia lá e conversava: «não, aqui é o seu, aqui é de fulano, e acabou. Você vai sair daqui porque aqui é de fulano! Agora, se o senhor quiser pode pegar aqui na frente, eu arranjo outro terreno para você...»”.

El hecho es que la intervención habitual –en la época en que se hizo el trabajo de campo– es la que tiene por objetivo evitar que un conflicto se extienda. Lo cual forma parte del principio de *contención* que mencionaba, otro de cuyos elementos es la idea de que resulta mejor, de entrada, no enfrentarse con otro vecino. Para evitar mayores problemas, por la experiencia que se tiene sobre la dificultad de controlar ciertas disputas. Se prefiere en muchos casos “não dar ouvido” a quien difama y busca confrontación (“a gente temos que viver fingindo até de medroso”, sentenciaba una vecina); “não brigar por nada” y conservar la amistad. Y éste es un punto importante. Los vecinos intentan no poner fin a las relaciones, sobre todo con los vecinos que viven cerca y forman parte de la misma *red*, debido a la virtual necesidad que tienen de ellos. Renata –vecina antigua– lo expresaba de manera clara: “no lugar onde a gente mora, não pode deixar de falar porque se precisa do vizinho”. Y, de hecho, le ocurrió a ella que durante un tiempo hospedó en su casa a otra vecina. La estancia se alargó demasiado y Renata se cansó. Con diplomacia, la echó. Pero lo interesante es que, según explica, se preocupó de retomar después la relación porque ambas

vivían en la misma calle y ella no quería “ficar de mal com ninguém”. No es un caso aislado. Es habitual que personas que viven cerca mantengan una relación ambivalente, se critiquen mutuamente y muestren cierta desconfianza, a pesar de lo cual tengan contacto y se intercambien favores.

No mantener un comportamiento mesurado, en cambio, buscar el enfrentamiento o utilizar la fuerza cuando no toca supone ser considerado *bagunheiro* (pendenciero), y correr el riesgo de perder estatus o ser clasificado como *marginal*. Pero el uso de la fuerza, en general, forma parte de una correlación en la que tenemos en un extremo la referida *contención*, y en el otro este empleo de la fuerza; dependiendo del caso, de los implicados... el conflicto tiende más hacia un lado o hacia el otro. Hay casos, no obstante, en que el uso de la fuerza tiene como finalidad evitar un conflicto posterior (y, por tanto, se relaciona con la *contención*). Eneuzá –que había comprado un lote hacía mucho tiempo y tenía, así, un estatus elevado- decidió hacer un gesto de fuerza cuando unos chavales quisieron entrar a su patio para jugar. Cuando uno de ellos le pidió permiso se lo negó. Según comentaba, porque si dejaba que él entrara, entrarían todos, incluyendo desconocidos o chicos de mala reputación, y habría más posibilidades de tener un conflicto serio.

Al margen de esto, el uso de la fuerza se da en situaciones muy concretas: cuando existe un desequilibrio de estatus muy marcado (y la parte poderosa decide imponerse); cuando se trata de un grupo de vecinos actuando conjuntamente (los asuntos sobre espacio público, como el conflicto de la calle del Cajueiro); o en ocasiones en que hay un ultraje claro y un tercero actúa para repararlo. De este último género fue el caso de Joane. A esta realojada –que acababa de llegar por aquel entonces y vivía sola- su vecino le quitó primero un trozo de terreno, cosa que ella dejó pasar, y después quiso arrebatárle otro pedazo construyendo un muro. Ella decidió avisar a su yerno, quien tras llamar al vecino le espetó: “«Você não vai botar seu muro dem do quintal dela, não! Que é muita ousadia! Que ela não tem marido mas tem genro!»”. El muro no se hizo y la disputa paró ahí. En un conflicto en que el hecho que Joane fuera una vecina nueva y sin estatus resultó determinante.

Por supuesto, pueden ocurrir accidentes, que la *contención* usual falle y alguna de las partes utilice la fuerza o la violencia directamente. No obstante, se estará incurriendo en un fallo *procesal*; ya que el empleo de la fuerza está establecido como último paso en la secuencia de un conflicto –punto que desarrollamos ahora-. Cuando dos vecinos mantienen una disputa el arma que primero debe emplearse para agredir es el chisme (*fofoca*), o sea, la crítica soterrada; se *esculhamba* al otro, se ensucia su reputación. Si el enfrentamiento continúa y se vuelve más serio se pasa a los reproches abiertos. Y sólo en

última instancia debe emplearse la agresión física. Quienes hacen un mal uso de alguno de estos instrumentos verán menoscabada su imagen, como decía. Serán tachados de *fofoqueiros* (=que difunden rumores malintencionados) o *bagunceiros* (=que buscan pelea).

Un último elemento a destacar sobre los conflictos es el recurso al sistema estatal, a sus agentes (policía, tribunales) e instrumentos (ley oficial). Cabe matizar que la presencia del Estado ha sido continua (aunque desigual) en el barrio, de modo directo o indirecto: la ocupación misma nace ligada a la acción e inacción de la Administración, los primeros líderes ejercen ese papel gracias a su conexión con el Estado; las leyes oficiales inspiran y son replicadas, en parte, por el ordenamiento del barrio (que no puede ser visto como un sistema autónomo); y el hecho es que los vecinos han recurrido desde siempre a la policía o a los tribunales para resolver asuntos de orden público o penales, incluso de propiedad (si disponían de los contactos necesarios)⁴. No obstante, como el resto de las *armas* utilizables en un conflicto, hacer un uso impropio conllevará crítica y pérdida de reputación.

Pero lejos de ser sólo un arma de defensa o presión, el *derecho* estatal también puede ser generador de conflicto. Así ocurrió con la regularización (a partir de 2004), cuando vecinos que vivían *de prestado* decidieron registrar las casas a su nombre ocultando el acuerdo que tenían con los dueños (lo que les valdría duras críticas por parte del resto de vecinos). Que las leyes oficiales inicien un conflicto puede observarse también en el caso de Eneuzza y su ventana. A esta vecina antigua le explicaron un día que la familia de al lado había cometido una ilegalidad: habían puesto una ventana en el muro contiguo a su casa. Sin que Eneuzza se hubiera molestado por ello hasta entonces, lo único que pensó fue que “era tarde para falar”. Habían pasado meses desde que la ventana había sido colocada, y como ella “*não falou logo*” era mejor “*não ficar procurando problema*”, sobre todo porque mantenía una buena relación con los vecinos. De nuevo el tema de la *contención* y de la existencia de *proceso*: las quejas tienen un plazo para ser hechas.

Parece interesante, para acabar esta sección, explicar con más detalle un caso –cuyo desarrollo fue observado in situ– en el que se dan casi todos los elementos del conflicto apuntados. Se trata de la pelea en la calle Travessa. Este conflicto estalló una tarde en que Pássaro, un chico con mala reputación del que se rumoreaba trataba con *marginais*, vino a buscar al hijo de Rogério –vecino antiguo del área–. Pássaro llamó a la puerta y quien atendió fue Rogério, el padre. Al parecer Pássaro le preguntó por su hijo con muy malos modales y Rogério reaccionó dándole una bofetada. Según explicaría después, no quería aquella amistad con Pássaro y sólo le faltó que éste viniera a su casa a ofenderlo. Como

en muchos otros casos, era en realidad el último episodio de un conflicto que se había venido gestando desde hacía tiempo. Tras la agresión, los acontecimientos se precipitaron: Rogério empezó a entrar y salir de casa, nervioso, gritando “«foi aquele marginal, o marginal da rua!»”, narrando a los vecinos que habían salido a la calle lo ocurrido. Pássaro se fue corriendo y regresó al poco tiempo acompañado de otro hombre, su hermano mayor. Éste se dirigió a Rogério y le preguntó, de manera sosegada, el porqué del manotazo. Rogério empezó a dar explicaciones, pero en esas llegó otro familiar de Pássaro, un tío, al que acompañaban varias mujeres. Rodeando a Rogério, empezaron a interrogarle de un modo más agresivo. El tono fue subiendo hasta que el tío de Pássaro, tras amenazar verbalmente a Rogério, descendió la calle para coger un puñado de piedras que lanzó, arrancó la estaca de una cerca y subió hacia Rogério gesticulando de manera histriónica. Antes de que llegara a su altura, parientes y vecinos lo detuvieron.

Se formarán entonces dos corrillos en la calle –cristalización, en realidad, de dos *redes* de vecinos-: uno centrado en los parientes de Pássaro y otro en Rogério, con la mayoría de residentes de la calle Travessa en el segundo. La conversación en el círculo de Rogério girará en torno al mal comportamiento de Pássaro y al hecho que Rogério era muy trabajador y nunca había creado problemas. Bien entrada la noche, los dos corrillos se disolverán. Al día siguiente los vecinos de la calle seguirán hablando sobre lo ocurrido, sobre el comportamiento chulesco del tío de Pássaro y el hecho que su familia estaba siempre metida en líos. También especularán sobre si denunciarían a Rogério ante la policía o no. Como se demostró días después, lo harían. Una mañana le llegó a Rogério la citación del juzgado de menores. Los vecinos comentarían el error de que Rogério no hubiera denunciado primero. En los días previos a la vista los vecinos afines a él discutirán sobre la estrategia de defensa y criticarán a las vecinas que habían apoyado a la familia de Pássaro. Sin que nadie se enterara del resultado del juicio, tiempo después Rogério encontraría trabajo fuera de la ciudad y empezaría a dormir poco en casa. Según se comentaba, estaba cansado de los problemas que le daba su hijo.

Sin necesidad de saber más, este caso muestra muchas cosas: la importancia del estatus, por ejemplo. El conflicto surge por la negativa de un padre a que su hijo trate con personas de mala reputación, y este vecino será mayoritariamente apoyado, en cambio, por estar bien considerado. Ello a pesar de que comete un error de *proceso* (la agresión al menor). Enseña también la comentada actitud de *contención*: pese a la agresividad mostrada el tío de Pássaro no llega a agredir a Rogério (y la escena parece más una representación). Muestra la intermediación

en la pelea de vecinos de la misma calle y de familiares de una de las partes. Y cómo el sistema oficial interviene de manera directa (la segunda parte del conflicto se dirime, principalmente, en los tribunales). Todo esto en una pelea que tiene su propia dinámica y que, como muchos otros sucesos, no puede entenderse si no es observando los antecedentes y el contexto.

Apuntes finales

Leyendo lo descrito aquí nadie diría que Nova Constituinte se encuentra sumida en el caos, que las relaciones entre los vecinos son arbitrarias o el desenlace de los conflictos aleatorio. Por descontado, no es un ordenamiento perfecto. Hay accidentes, desenlaces imprevisibles, fallas; y desigualdad, imposiciones o actos de fuerza. Pero estos últimos pueden ser incluso explicados, en parte, a partir del funcionamiento del estatus, vértice de toda esta ordenación.

Si atendemos al hecho que muchas de las normas de que se han dotado los vecinos tienen carácter vinculante (y gozan de cierto consenso), que no cumplirlas conlleva algún tipo de sanción (aunque se trate de una sanción diferida), o que la resolución de los conflictos está pautaada, debe cumplir con unos tiempos, espacios y formas, puede afirmarse que estamos ante un *derecho* (cf. Vinogradoff, 1967). Además, de un tipo que coincidiría con el encontrado en algunas sociedades sin autoridad central: un derecho emparentado con la moral, formado por principios generales (que permiten, precisamente por eso, ser adaptados a cada caso); un derecho que toma en cuenta a la persona que actúa, su posición, y que premia, no sólo castiga, por la vía de la reputación (cf. Gluckman, 1955).

Realizando las salvedades necesarias, teniendo en cuenta, sobre todo, que no puede desligarse esta normatividad de la estatal, la del barrio cumple con muchos de estos rasgos: encontramos normas muy claras (respetar a los demás, ser *buen vecino...*), y cuya infracción comporta sanciones directas (expropiaciones) o indirectas (la retirada de apoyos, la clasificación como *marginal...*). Una normatividad que determina cómo deben encararse las disputas (tiempos, espacios e instrumentos) y que castiga la incorrección (la figura del *bagunceiro* o *fofoqueiro*). Que tiene un corte claramente moral (el *buen* o *mal vecino*), y que juzga a los individuos íntegramente, adaptándose a cada caso (sobre todo a los estatus confrontados). Estatus que son, a su vez, la prueba misma de que se encuentra funcionando una ordenación. No es casualidad que quienes han perdido toda consideración, quienes han incumplido esta ordenación repetidamente, ya no vivan en el barrio (el díscolo de la calle del Cajueiro, Guaxinim...). Así, podemos afirmar que la del barrio es una justicia *difusa*.

Difusa por poco visible, por actuar sin efectismos ni demasiada formalización; y difusa, también, por estar extendida entre los vecinos y ser su alcance amplio y cotidiano.

Notas

- 1 Líneas de interpretación como la desarrollada por Conn conceden una primacía casi absoluta al sistema estatal; el informal aparece como una mala copia de éste. En realidad, lo que se aprecia en contextos como Nova Constituinte es una interrelación compleja entre ambos sistemas, en que los *favelados* manipulan las leyes oficiales pero también crean y desarrollan instituciones (parcialmente al menos) propias. Análisis en este sentido son los ofrecidos por Santos (1977) –a cuya obra nos referimos ahora-, Van Gelder (2013) o Varley (2013).
- 2 Es éste el nombre real, usado por los vecinos del barrio y de otras zonas de Salvador. Los vecinos, en cambio, son designados con nombres ficticios (excepción hecha de algún líder público ya fallecido). Por otra parte, cabe señalar que la historia y las distintas configuraciones socioespaciales del barrio son similares a las de otras muchas ocupaciones (cf. Gordilho, 2000).
- 3 La utilidad de principios jurídicos amplios y flexibles, como el de *lo razonable*, para encontrar en cada caso la salida más justa fue ampliamente demostrada por Gluckman (1955), quien analizó un contexto muy distinto al que aquí tratamos. En el caso de los barotse, por cierto, también se daba una evaluación moral de las partes y el veredicto se ajustaba a ella.
- 4 Es éste un tema complejo, como señalamos antes, que por cuestiones de espacio no puedo desarrollar (sí lo he hecho en Márquez, 2013). El sistema normativo del barrio se encuentra en parte subordinado al estatal, que lo influye de manera clara; aunque a su vez guarda cierta autonomía y carácter propio: por ejemplo, antepone cierta moralidad, filtra los conceptos legales por el tamiz de la *necesidad* o la *buena vecindad*, modificándolos (por ejemplo, en el caso de la acción de usucapión entendiéndose que la necesidad acorta los plazos y exculpa de la ausencia de buena fe). Por lo demás, los vecinos utilizan ambos sistemas: intentan obtener beneficios del estatal (la escritura de legalización, por ejemplo); y les resulta imprescindible conseguir y mantener cierta legitimidad ante el resto de vecinos. Vecinos como Marcos consideran más importante esto último. En referencia a la escritura otorgada por la Administración, comentaba: “A minha escritura é a minha presença. (...) Só o título não basta. Que o papel se apaga, se deteriora e não vale nada. O título na realidade é nossa convivência”.

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3 Stop the presses?

Journalistic practices in the face of citizen-created content during pulp-mills protest in Argentina and Uruguay

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This paper analyzes how activist-created texts and images were assessed and handled by four major Argentinean and Uruguayan newspapers during a longstanding protest against the construction of pulp mills and the monoculture of trees from 2005 until 2009. Based on interviews with the journalists in charge of reporting this protest during four years, as well as with nine activists belonging to the main opposing civil society groups, this paper argues that even though new communication channels managed by activists tended to facilitate activist-created content addressed to the mainstream news media on the protest – which in itself challenges the media ecology of this region – the new communicational circumstances also nurtured conventional event-focused journalism, normalizing potentially disrupting forces.

Keywords: Journalism, protest, digital media, Latin America

Introduction

The relationship between citizen-created content and national and global mainstream news media in situations of social and political unrest has been altered in the last years due to new informational circumstances. Two main factors seem to be at work here: the proliferation of online citizen-created content, even in regions with low Internet and mobile phones access, and secondly the way different national and global professional news organizations assess and handle these materials in their journalistic work. Available studies deal mainly with how global media with base in the West, and national media primarily in high-industrialized Western countries, managed citizen-created materials on the Syrian uprising in 2011, the Arab uprisings in 2011 and the post-election protests in Iran in June 2009. However, the study of how Latin American professional journalists are dealing with citizen-created content during situations of protest in the region is an understudied issue. This is of relevance because it may imply changes in the journalistic patterns of work with impact on the journalistic agenda and also on the visibility of activists and their causes on mainstream media, which subsequently may impact on the political agenda.

I analyze this issue based on a case study. The environmental and social movement against the installation of pulp mills and an associated forest exploitation model based in Uruguay and Argentina started in 2005, which rejected the construction of pulp mills (initially the Finnish company then known as Metsä-Botnia, hereafter Botnia and the Spanish company Empresa Nacional de Celulosa España) on the shores of the river Uruguay, along with the monoculture of eucalyptus in Uruguay, a tree that grows quickly and directly supplies the pulp industry. The Uruguay River functions as the geographical and political border between Argentina and Uruguay. This movement gathered thousands of people blockading international bridges, thereby interrupting the international traffic of people and cargo several times from 2005 until 2010. The protest actions and the difficulties in coming to an agreement on the location of the planned pulp mills; on how contamination effects would be monitored and not least, on how the environmental social movement should be dealt with, disrupted diplomatic relations between Argentina and Uruguay severely. When bilateral negotiations failed, the governments sought international assistance, including Mercosur, the regional court of justice of Southern Common Market (at that time, a regional agreement between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), the mediation of the king of Spain, Juan Carlos de Borbón, and the international court of justice in The Hague, to help solve their differences. This last court reached a resolution in 2010, which contributed to the dissolution of the activists' blockade, though it did not completely erase their manifestations

of dissent. Amid the intense protest actions, the Spanish plant was, in fact, never built. The Finnish plant was eventually built, but it is currently being subjected to stricter environmental monitoring than the regulations stipulated before this conflict. The plant is monitored both formally by the nations involved and informally by groups of citizens. Discrepancies among the ruling governments continue until today, and protest activity in both countries is still visible in different ways.

This protest is not representative of all protests in Latin America, however, it shows some features that make it interesting as a case study: inscribed in a complex regional and global context of environmental organizations and actors, it constitutes one of the largest environmental social movements in the region due to the share number of people involved in protests, its duration over a period of several years, its political repercussions locally, regionally and internationally, and the fact of being largely covered by the mainstream news media (Melián, 2012).

The period studied (from 2005 until 2008) is significant. It provides an opportunity to get insights on the interplay between journalists and activists via the growing communicational possibilities allowed by Internet and mobile phones during the years when these technologies were first being introduced and popularized in these countries. In effect, the expansion of Internet and mobile phones in Latin America, and in particular in the Southern Cone (Argentina, Uruguay and Chile), has been exponential. In 2010, two years after the studied period in this study, over 50 percent of the population in the countries studied had access to Internet compared to 30 percent in 2005 (Calderón, 2012). Regarding mobile phones, it's possible to observe an even more dramatic curve with universal access to mobile phone within the population in Argentina and Uruguay (Bibolini y Baker, 2009: 252). Even though I have not been able to find data on mobile usage in 2005, all the journalists and activists interviewed had mobile phones from the beginning of the studied period.

In summary, this case study offers the opportunity to analyze the interplay between journalists of agenda-setting national newspapers and key activists, regarding a particularly significant environmental protest, during the years when Internet and mobile phones became a common feature among journalists, activists and among middle classes in these societies.

Mainstream media and activists

The relationship between activists and mainstream media journalists is complex because different logics, practices and goals meet (Lester & Hutching, 2009). Activists have often encountered difficulties in advancing their arguments

within the news media repertoire (Downing, 2001; Atton 2001, 2004; Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008; Atkinson, 2010; Lievrouw, 2011) in different socio-political circumstances. In the Latin American professional news media context, fundamentally dominated by a commercial logic that privileges the representation of economic interests (Waisbord, 2000; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Fox & Waisbord, 2002; Rockwell & Janus, 2003) this has not been an exception.

Despite the fact that media studies have repeatedly shown that mainstream media simplify, criminalize and trivialize social movements and protests in different media ecologies, for instance, in Brazil (Pereira Da Silva & Rothman, 2011), in Sweden (Ekman, 2011), and in the US (DeLuca; Lawson, & Sun, 2012), among others, there is a 'mutual dependency' between social movements and mainstream news media. The symbiotic relationship has been characterized as a 'power struggle' because it implies a negotiation of access, shaping of meanings and circulation of symbols among them (Lester & Hutchings, 2009).

Old media (TV, newspapers, radios) are valuable for activists because they represent the possibility to put pressure on politicians and to reach as many people as possible (Lester & Hutching, 2009). Beyond the proliferation of content by globally linked environmental organizations and social movements through social media, blogs and websites, activists still regard old media coverage of their actions as highly important in what concerns general public awareness as well as a way to push for actions on the part of authorities (Jha 2007; Lester & Hutchins, 2009; Melián, 2012). Physical protest action is one of the strategies used to raise news media attention to the point that has it become 'reflexively conditioned' (Cottle, 2008: 853). Mainstream media are prone to cover spectacular actions, especially those that involve thousands of people gathered to denounce different social, political or economic issues (Castells, 2009) in public physical places.

However, with the advancement of new information and communication technologies, activists seem to be attempting to tip the balance between the professional and amateur supplies of mainstream media coverage in situations of social and political protests. Depending on the kind of protest, whether violent incidents occur and the socio-political context and media environment in question, activists have been more or less successful in this respect. Some argue that by expanding the reporting capacities of news organizations, citizen eyewitness images, for instance, have transformed the visibility of contemporary humanitarian and political cries around the world (Andén Papadopoulos & Pantti, 2013:960).

Journalism and social media is a rapidly expanding research field. Some studies have focused on social media as a professional journalistic tool (e.g. Hirst and Treadwell 2011; Hjort, Oskarsson, and Szabo' 2011). Researchers have also analyzed journalists' professional norms, ideals and identities in relation to social media (e.g. Bogaerts 2011; Lasorsa, Lewis, and Holton 2012). A recent study highlights that despite an increasing use of social media by professional journalists in Sweden, this usage differs significantly in terms of age and place of work (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2013). Despite journalists increasingly using social media as a tool for new information seeking and as a thermometer of the ambient among different social circles, where activists practices are only part of, there is little evidence of change in the thematic sources created by journalists when covering social protests (Jha, 2007; Melián, 2012). The present study aims at contributing to this field of study, by initiating a discussion and providing a perspective in what concerns protests in Latin American countries.

Methodological framework

The empirical materials in this study are semi-structured interviews with all the activists in charge of communication tasks in the three main groups within the selected environmental movement (9 in total) and the journalists (4 in total) in charge of covering the protest for the main four national newspapers in Argentina and Uruguay (Clarín, La Nación, El País and La República). The use of semi-structured interviews (with a scheme of questions) has advantages because informants can describe practices that occurred in the selected period. At the same time, interview use has limitations in the sense that informants provide only a reconstruction of practices for the analyst.

The selection of activists and journalists represents a 'purposive sample' Silverman (2006), as the interviews aim at illuminating the specific practices that I focus on. A representative sample of activists per group would not have been ideal as I focus on the Internet and mobile phone practices in the groups involved in the movement, although as performed by specific individuals selected within the groups. By interviewing those in charge of communication tasks I obviously leave out the assessment of many other activists involved in the groups. This decision has two basic explanations: a practical one that has to do with difficulties in identifying and interviewing activists of a loose network of individuals in the case of the ACAG, and of interviewing people that did not actually work with the communication tasks geared at journalists. The selection of journalists working for the print press was also purposive as these are influential media that set the agenda for the rest of the media spectrum.

Thematic analysis was the method selected to analyze the interviews. This analytical ‘pattern matching’ strategy (Yin, 2003) was the most appropriate for managing a great volume of text. Thematic analysis enabled the organization of the material according to the themes that informants dealt with during interviews on the backdrop of the theoretical framework of the study.

Media-suited actions

In line with research on how social movements consider mainstream media significant for putting pressure on politicians and to disseminate their cause widely (Lester & Hutching, 2009) activists in this study considered the coverage of the protest actions by mainstream media very influential. Within this movement, the gathering of bodies in the public space, which actualizes the rights of citizens to protest (Butler, 2011), was the preferred way to campaign. Demonstrations were spectacular (blockades, boats parades and car parades involving thousands of people), which transformed them into events suitable for media coverage. These actions were the preferred way to demonstrate because activists expected media coverage on them and hoped for higher chances of actually pressurizing national authorities to remove the authorizations to build pulp mills by the river. Blockades were not a new way of demonstrating but a proven method in this region. Other social movements had successfully gotten to be on the news and thus on the public agenda.

Even though physical protests were the main means of demonstrating, activists planned these activities counting on the Internet and mobile phones at hand. In effect, organized in the middle of the countryside, demonstrations had to be timed so journalists could write their stories in computers placed at cybercafés in the nearby cities. This was done for two reasons, journalists did not have own laptops so they needed to work in cybercafés and secondly because mobile phones did not have access to the Internet at the time.

In addition, meetings were planned using the same logic. Held until very late in the evening, one or two times a week, in the countryside under the open sky or at the shelter built to house the activists responsible for the blockade, meetings would never end too late so journalists would miss the opportunity to report back to their newspapers on time by using their mobile phones. Mobile phones were used to coordinate the last details of the news article with the editorial team located in the capitals. The main body of the article had been prepared in advance in an Internet café from where journalist could do research work. This first version of the article would be sent to the editorial team early in the evening. The final adjustments, including the title and the introduction according to the outcome of the meeting and the decisions taken, would be

communicated by mobile phone at the last minute. In this way, activists made sure resolutions taken regarding the physical demonstrations were included on the front page of newspapers the next morning.

Availability and 'statement journalism'

An event-centered logic dominates the journalistic coverage often associated with conflicting stakeholders, thus neglecting to situate the event within an explanatory context (Dunwoody & Scott, 1982; Nelkin, 1995). Far from promoting a nuanced perspective on the protest, the availability of activists, granted by mobile phones, fed the reigning 'statement journalism', as defined by journalists. This kind of journalism is basically characterized by the use of comments of a social actor to prompt the comment of other social actors on a particular issue or event.

The availability of contacting activists by mobile phone was perceived among the interviewed journalists as one of the most influential aspects of the use of new communication technologies on their journalistic coverage. Journalists and activists were dispersed in an area of several kilometers and mobile phones were assessed as vital to contact activists.¹ In fact, journalists contacted activists mainly on their mobiles. They generally did not use e-mail or social media because many of the activists were not permanently connected to the Internet, especially those sustaining the blockades. Activists were contactable for journalists regardless of the time of day or where they were. This suited the needs of immediacy of journalists, who were heavily pressed for time, which was basically associated with their particular working conditions. The accessibility provided by mobile phones, on the other hand, also paved the way for the event-centered journalistic coverage.

I mainly called them on the mobile phone. They did great with this. The mobile phone was always available and this facilitated my work enormously (...). A journalist needs things now, not tomorrow or in half an hour (...) when you have open telephones you help the journalist a lot. Even more with the cheap journalism of statement that leads to nowhere that we do here. I do not agree with it but sometimes your editor asks for this. (Argentinean journalist)

Journalists also made use of the mobile phones as a substitute for their actual presence, as 'a way to be there'. Mobile phones were used to support the journalistic coverage of events that were happening somewhere else other than where the journalist was. The long distances between the different groups of activists, the variety of actions taking place and the fact that journalists were

covering many themes for several media organizations, transformed the mobile phone into an extension of themselves. Through them they could be ‘present’ in a situation, in contact with activists or others, in ways that were useful to pretend to have been in the situation.

There was a time, from the end of 2005 until the beginning of 2008 when there were daily ‘asambleas’, sometimes three a day, extremely long with 30 people on the speakers’ list...Constantly car parades, demonstrations, activists’ traveled back and forth to Buenos Aires to talk to the ambassadors. The activities were endless and constant; they would rain on you. We covered a lot but not everything and then the mobile phone was crucial to be where things were happening without being there (...). (Argentinean journalist)

The use of mobile phones as an extension of the journalists was possible because activists were willing to, and saw the benefit of providing their perspective on what was happening. Sometimes images were also sent to help journalists to experience “what it looked like there.” It could be argued that the activists’ descriptions and images sent by mobile phones to journalists from the location where demonstrations or meetings took place were used as sources of information. However, even though this content provided by activists to journalists became part of the journalistic coverage somehow, it was somehow ‘hidden’ from readers because it was used to compensate for the fact that journalists had not been able to be on the spot.

Activists’ content as online sources

The activists’ websites were part of the journalists’ daily media menu. Even though they checked these websites often, journalists did not assess them as generators of information they had benefited from. In other words, most of them did not admit at first to openly use activists’ websites or other online content produced by them as journalistic sources. This might be explained by the fact that sources that could speak of prevention and long-term consequences tended to be ignored.

No, I did not get it (information) from the website of the ACAG (...). I saw plenty of material that was very well used by the people in Gualaguaychú. They used this issue of the technologies very well, uploaded videos, and have good pages. They worked it out really well. They used all the aspects of the technologies of information. (Uruguayan journalist)

Only one journalist openly admitted that the activists' websites, emails sent by the groups and even the chats used by younger activists, were valuable and indispensable to carry on part of her journalistic work. This was explained as a means of compensating for her limited budget though and not in terms of the additional source opportunities. Again, the interest here is on the actual event and not in finding information long-term consequences.

However, contradictory to their own opinions on the value of activists' websites and other online content, these same journalists actually described ways, during the interviews, in which this content had influenced their journalistic coverage. For instance, content received through the chain of emails and published on the websites, (usually the same information would be posted on the website and sent by email), was sometimes the starting point for journalists to investigate incidents that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Eventually the online content produced by activists would also lead them to new sources. Emails linked activists, citizens and journalists forming a network of organizations and individuals through which different types of content circulated. Journalists took part in an intense exchange of information facilitated by people and organizations supporting the anti-pulp mills movement. They would take advantage of those bits of information they considered of journalistic value and skim over the rest of the content. This flow could translate into the possibility to contact a person or to follow up on a piece of information provided.

People connected to the anti-pulp mill movement would always send information to us. In other words, emails circulated between people in Fray Bentos, Gualaguaychú, and Paraná. The flow of emails was very high. (...) What I mean is that Movitdes sent something to the environmentalists in Paraná and these would communicate it to those in Gualaguaychú...and a woman from Pontevedra would tell her story about smells, asthma, illnesses and what was happening there because they had pulp mills. I contacted her later on. (...) It was this type of chain if you understand me. (Argentinean journalist)

This flow fed them with the ideas and arguments that people, activists and organizations were discussing or reading. These e-mails could also consist of articles originally published by mainstream media.² As activists would send mainstream media articles that they considered of interest to other activists, people, organizations and also journalists. These flow of information helped journalists to be updated on what was going on within the movement and how activists reflected on issues concerning the conflict. Activists' information was never quoted as source though.

The flow of digital information via e-mails also contributed to the general monitoring of mainstream media that journalists usually perform. In this case, if journalists found something that they had missed, for instance, they would corroborate the information published and then initiate a new news article for the media they were covering for. In this case, journalists would provide the media as the source of the information.

All in all, it could be said that the exchange of information via newsletters and e-mail was then another way in which activists' online practices were influencing the journalistic coverage. In this sense processes of re-mediation or 'borrowing from each other' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) took place on different levels. Certainly, the content produced by activists was transformed and adapted following the journalistic conventions in place and in any case, all kind of sources would have followed the same process of transformation. The difference here is that activists had a concrete way of presenting content that was actually taken into account by journalists. Eventually, it could become part or even influence the agenda and the perspective from which journalists would write, as illustrated by the examples mentioned previously, even though it was not cited.

Initially journalists sought frames for understanding the forest industry and the pulp mills issue beyond the locality due to the newness of the issue and their lack of experience in dealing with environmental news. This led them to do online research on the forest industry and pulp mills beyond local sources that included global environmental NGOs like Greenpeace International, which had supported the regional movement in the first years. Some of them also searched globally for news on environmental disasters related to pulp mills published by mainstream media mainly in Spanish and also in English. This contributed to framing their initial understanding on the issue differently.

Entre Ríos had the same policy with the eucalyptus plantation and the pulp mills (...). In those days, we did not see the pulp mills as something so harmful. Later, the environmental issue became more visible. For us, journalists, this was the same: we understood the pulp mills as something very good, an alternative to just exporting the raw wood. In time, we got to know - basically because some Uruguayans alerted us - that Ence was to install a plant. (Argentinean journalist)

Online information provided by global environmental organizations provided a context for the regional protest, adding a more nuanced and informed understanding of it. To search for information online was assessed by journalists

as particularly important in this case because environmental issues, and specifically, pulp mills and forest industry, were not part of the regular set of themes they were used to taking care of.

Preferred source logic

A commercial logic dominates mainstream media in Latin America, greatly explained by the very close links between media owners' editorial line and the power (García Canclini, 2001; Waisbord, 2000). This contributes to strengthening the influence of high-ranking political sources, usually the preferred journalistic sources within mainstream media, something that indeed shapes the journalistic agenda (Bennett, 1995). The interplay between these activists and journalists followed this logic, in this case, both in favor and against activists depending on the position of the government in each country. The main local and national political voices and business interests supported the protest in different ways in Argentina. In Uruguay, the situation was exactly the opposite. Consequently, while mainstream media in Argentina was willing to include activists as sources in their accounts of the conflict, according to the activists, Uruguayan mainstream media excluded Uruguayan activists' and gave preference to governmental and companies' sources.

To be Argentinean was a dirty work, 'piquetero' was even worse. To be an environmentalist meant you were willing to do dumb things (The blockade) played against those of us who wanted to inform about what happens with the forest industry (...). If you are with the Argentineans you are a 'piquetero' and you boycott the government of the Frente Amplio, recently enacted, and then you are against Tabaré Vázquez. You never heard that you were against a decision but against the whole government's performance. This had a huge impact during a long period of time. We can feel it still today because we got isolated from the people. Ordinary people saw this conflict as a conflict between Argentinean and Uruguayans because this was what the media gave them every day. It was like a classic football match. (Uruguayan activist)

Uruguayan activists felt they had experienced enormous difficulties in reaching the established media in their quest to make their own critical account, beyond the actual possibilities provided by the Internet and mobile phones to facilitate contact with the journalists. As they had been established many years before, they had already been in contact with journalists in numerous situations before

this one. Initially they their attempts to try to advance their positioning got some response. Later on, this response faded and the Uruguayan journalists stopped contacting them or taking up the information sent by them. Some NGO activists were even told that there was an explicit order to exclude critical reports on the pulp mills and their negative impact.

Slowly all doors were closed within the Uruguayan media. We know that there was an order from the Presidency to limit the publication of the other opinion, the critic one. Some journalists faced a lot of difficulties to continue publishing our position until a point where their programs were even cancelled. (Uruguayan activist)

Within the Uruguayan media context (and in media other Latin American countries) the state is a very important buyer of publicity space. Implicit or explicit pressures coming from the government are regarded with extreme caution because the economy of the media can be seriously affected. This is a factor altering the Latin American journalistic agenda, which often reflects powerful and interrelated political and economic configurations (Fox & Waisbord, 2002; Rockwell & Janus, 2003). As a consequence, Uruguayan activists assessed their attempts to reach the Uruguayan mainstream media as almost meaningless. Press releases, e-mails and newsletters sent to Uruguayan mainstream media were mostly perceived as an attempt to influence media coverage, but offering little in terms of results.

In the long run, this isolation had perceived consequences for the general conception of these organizations as sources of information for mainstream media, even though, ironically, some of them had distanced themselves from the Argentinean activists and the blockade as method of protest. The decision to take such a stand was not shared by all the environmental organizations in Uruguay involved in the movement.

The government rarely debated on forestry. It was really difficult and I think we feel the consequences even today (...). Our position on the issue of the pulp mills made us loose visibility, relevance even in other issues. We were relinquished a bit...even within part of the environmental sector because we took distance from the Gualeguaychú movement. (Uruguayan activist)

On the other hand, Argentinean activists perceived themselves as welcomed sources of local and national mainstream media in Argentina. They saw themselves as championing the issue of bringing environmental issues to the public sphere for the first time. They were aware that the international presentation of the conflict and the national government's tacit support of the

blockades, opened up for mainstream media coverage. This was a powerful factor differentiating this movement from other social movements.

Our cause opened up possibilities for the environmental causes within the mainstream media. Some other voices started to be heard. Other social movements dared to go to the media with different environmental problems. (Argentinean activist)

As Argentinean activists had a more fluid access to the Argentinean mainstream media, they developed and maintained a system to communicate with these media that greatly relied on their use of Internet and mobile phone practices. This system would differentiate local, regional and national media in order to more appropriately adapt the content sent, in the form of texts and images. Argentinean activists' assessed their contact with Uruguayan journalists as sporadic. They included these journalists in the mailing lists but they did not contact them further to check whether they had received the information or not.

Conclusion

The journalists' interplay with activists was embedded in a larger context constituted by the journalistic ideals, actual practices and perceived limitations. These aspects framed the journalists' assessment of the activists' Internet and mobile phone practices. New to this particular conflict was that this was the very first bi-national environmental movement ever, which forced journalists to be systematically aware of the coverage done by the mainstream media in the other countries. Secondly, it involved local, national and global aspects including networked people, organizations, companies and institutions that pushed them to use follow new paths to seek sources and information. Thirdly, environmental issues are rarely front-page news and matters of investigative journalism (Waisbord, 2000). This issue became both a 'technical' and a political issue. The journalists interviewed tended to understand their role differently, although based on the same logic of compliance, with a certain amount of critique, to the editorial guidelines of their media outlets.

Notably, mobile phones and Internet facilitated the worked of journalists providing easy contact to activists' ideas, but also texts and images. This is noteworthy in the Latin American media environment, where privileged sources are people close to power. However, the event-based coverage did not favor the use of activists' background information on the forest industry. Covering the emergent aspects, directed attention to the actual physical demonstrations that were taking place. This meant a 'normalization' of the potential disruptive effect of the activists' generated content, an adaptation to the dominant journalistic logic.

Activists identified national mainstream media as the most efficient channels for pressuring politicians and industrial concerns by reaching as many citizens as possible, confirming the results of Lester and Hutching (2011). This is also important to understand the instrumental use given to Internet and mobile phones regarding the interplay between activists and journalists. To facilitate and assure journalistic coverage of demonstrations and meetings, activists counted on the possibilities offered through Internet and mobile phones. However, activist availability, provided by the use of mobile phones, and online information supported the needs of 'statement journalism' performed by the mainstream media journalists contrary to some activists' expectations. Activists' online content was not used as a journalistic source explicitly, which could be understood as an indication of its low status as a journalistic source in this case. Thus, the attempts to influence the journalistic coverage, by means of the new online content created by activists, were complicated by the dominant event-centered journalistic logic that largely remained intact.

Notes

- 1 Just to give an idea of the distances we are talking about: Buenos Aires is 226 kilometers away from Gualeguaychú. Montevideo is 309 kilometers away from Fray Bentos. Gualeguaychú is 30 kilometers from the bridge and Fray Bentos lies just beside the river and the bridge.
- 2 There were also anonymous e-mails that circulated widely. They mixed private and public matters 'unveiling' not confirmed details of the private lives of activists, public officials and journalists. They had low legitimacy status both among activists and journalists.

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4 "I think I'm in the middle": Evaluations of living standard in contemporary Havana, Cuba

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Building on eight months of anthropological fieldwork amongst state employees and informal workers in Havana, Cuba, this article shows that while feelings of deep economic stress were shared by all my interlocutors they were reluctant to call themselves poor. I analyze this reluctance in relation to emic notions of hunger and shame which made it impossible to label oneself as 'poor' without losing self-respect and humanity. Using Escobar's critique of the poverty discourse I show that far from being a local ethnographic curiosity the negative effects of this discourse are global. I argue that from being a neutral descriptive concept 'poverty' has political implications that can be devastating for the people studied.

Key words: Latin America, Caribbean, Cuba, anthropology, economy, morality, poverty, living standard

I like my job and it's really the only good thing I have. The only problem is, the salary is not enough. I could get another job making more money but everything is illegal.

Teresa, a middle aged saleswoman in an insurance company¹, makes a pause before continuing with an anguished look:

Sometimes you feel like this [puts her hands to her throat and pretends to choke herself]. *Dios aprieta pero no ahoga*, as they say. You always solve your problems but you never know how. Someone always helps you but you never know who. The other day, for example, I had no money and a client came by to pay an insurance premium. He paid it in cash. That never happens! But he paid in cash and left me a 5 CUC² tip.

But you didn't know that the day before and that is where the insecurity and stress comes from, right? I ask her.

She continues speaking as if she didn't hear my question:

Sometimes I really freak out. I freak out. And saving is almost impossible. Here [in Cuba] the only people that can save are the ones with a business. The only thing I can save for is to buy a pair of shoes for my son. Luckily I always have somebody I can ask to lend me some money when I find myself in a rough spot.

This article builds on eight months of anthropological fieldwork in Havana in 2006. Besides living in Havana my interlocutors shared few characteristics. They lived in different types of *barrios*, had very different educational levels, lived in different households, and held different political views and positions in the Cuban racial hierarchy. I made no conscious selection based on gender or age but given my own gender and age there is a certain over-representation of women and people in their twenties as well as middle-aged women - my friends' mothers. They made a living mainly as state employees and/or in the informal economy. This meant that the people that feature in this study had *a low to moderate level of economic capital but very varied levels of cultural capital and personal characteristics*.

In this text I show that while the experiences of material deprivation and deep and continuous stress expressed by Teresa above was practically universal amongst my interlocutors, people refused to conform to conventional tales of poverty. When making evaluations of their living standard or quality of life

they refused to be labeled 'poor'. I explore the lived experiences of stress and scarcity as well as this refusal, creating a complex image of the living standard in Havana and how it is lived and evaluated by my interlocutors.

In some ways, then, this article is about poverty. At the same time it is written to show what a problematic term 'poverty' is and to question if it should be used at all. In order to find a neutral starting point from which to begin this questioning I have chosen to use the concept of living standard. During fieldwork this was my way of talking to people about their situation in life without forcing them to do so in terms of a specific discourse: about poverty, about rights, about economy or about something else. In this text the concept of living standard plays the same role. It allows me to speak about ways in which they negotiated things such as stress, pride, deprivation and fulfillment in relation to their specific situation in life. However, it does not allow me to ignore and discard the concept of poverty completely. In both scholarly work and politics this is the principal idiom in which living standard is described and, as we will see, while being mostly silenced in Cuba it is there, implicitly, in the ongoing negotiations about how to evaluate life.

One danger of highlighting Cubans reluctance to be labeled poor is to conclude that this means that they fare quite well. Therefore this article begins by describing my interlocutors' experiences of economic stress. It is in a context of deep continuous economic stress and deprivation that we must understand the refusal to be labeled poor. After setting the scene in this manner I will turn to the discourse of poverty in scholarly analysis and the critique that has been formulated against it. I then return to Cuba with a quick look at previous studies of poverty – primarily those done by Cuban scholars. After that, my interlocutors refusal to be labeled poor is analyzed by looking at emic notions of shame, hunger and food. The conclusions are formulated as a critique of the label 'poor', revealing it as a far from neutral concept that can have dire consequences.

The Lived Experience of Economic Stress

Stories of economic stress, of the hardships of everyday life, and of a general feeling of living a life that was lacking and not normal pervaded my fieldwork. Problems related to housing, economy, transportation, bureaucracy and work were often considered jointly, and there were many ways to express the hardship of everyday material life in Cuba: "*aquí uno pasa mucho trabajo*", "*hay que luchar mucho*", "*todo es un problema*" etc. In these expressions, daily life is characterized as hard work, struggle and problems, and even if one can find oneself in a good position regarding one aspect of life (such as money) another one might be hard (such as housing). A young man living by himself and getting

by on a minimum-salary state job and some irregular unlicensed activities talked about several different sources of stress in his daily life:

I feel much stress for various reasons. It stresses me to have bills to pay. [...] Now that I don't have a fridge I also feel a lot of stress because I have to cook on a daily basis and cannot store food. I also had a leak from the apartment above in my kitchen and the worst part was that it was sewage that dripped onto my kitchen counter. I managed to fix it but it really had me insane! Another thing that stresses me is not having running water. As things are now, I have water now and then... Lack of money and the responsibility for the economy of the household also causes me a lot of stress.

Putting food on the table was frequently talked about as a daily struggle where one constantly thought about how to get the next meal. "It is hard to sit down to eat seeing your parents' worried faces thinking about how to put food on the table tomorrow" as a young woman about to finish her university studies put it. When talking about this, many emphasized that the stress they felt was not exactly related to *if* they were going to solve their most pressing needs but rather *how*. It is not a question of starving but one of never having a ready and/or stable solution. When asked if she feels economic insecurity, a skilled worker with a state employment answered:

Yes. But what I feel is more stress than insecurity because there is always somebody that saves you. You can always ask a friend or family member for money. But I can feel stress: 'And now what will I buy? What will I cook?'

"Nobody starves here" was a phrase that was constantly repeated in interviews and conversations. Below I will come back to the symbolic meanings of hunger, but here it can be seen as another way to frame that the insecurity felt was not so much related to actually getting by but to what the solution would be this month, week, or day. It was, in other words, not a matter of life or death, but of never finding a once-and-for-all solution.

The above paints a picture of everyday economic life as a never ending struggle to make ends meet. A struggle that is deeply stressful. It is within this context of stress and deprivation that, as we will see below, the refusal to be labeled "poor" is made. But before analyzing this refusal we will take a closer look at the discourse of poverty and the problems with such a discourse.

The Discourse of Poverty

Economist Amartya Sen is one of the most influential scholars theorizing poverty. It is in many ways thanks to Sen that contemporary definitions of poverty often move beyond crude calculations of income-levels and caloric intake to include non-material aspects, and make room not only for biological survival but also for the avoidance of shame, the fulfillment of self-respect and the specificities of cultural context (Chant 2006; Sen 1983; Sida 2004; Zabala Argüelles 2010a). The issue of 'poor people's' own views regarding poverty has thus become an important part of poverty-research (Booth, Leach & Tierney 1999; Chambers 1995; Moore, Choudhary & Singh 1998).

It is, however, questionable if these complex and culture-specific definitions are actually put into practice shaping research and interventions or if they serve simply as lip-service in the introductions of documents and texts. According to Chambers (1995: 180), "The classic pattern in erudite analysis is to start with a recognition that poverty is much more than income or consumption but then to allow what has been measured to take over and dominate."

Nevertheless, it would be futile for me to make the case for a move beyond biological 'basic' needs to a wider perspective including people's own definitions of a normal life – this has already been done. What is surprisingly absent in studies on living standard is a critical look at the act of defining somebody as poor. "The 'poor'", writes Wratten (1995: 16), "are labeled as poor by outsiders, not according to their own criteria."

In critical poverty studies, the question posed is typically: "How do those people whom we label 'poor' view themselves?" (Moore et al 1998: 3). Even though this question theoretically leaves open the possibility of emic resistance to a poverty discourse, texts of this type typically assume that 'poor people' define themselves as poor and swiftly move on to ask how they view their poverty. The issue of the political dimension of the discourse of poverty – What is it we do when we define someone as poor? What consequences does it have? What relations of power do we make use of and create? – is even more absent in this kind of literature. These are the questions my interlocutors helped me see through their refusal to be labeled poor. Part of the answer is found in studies that critique the discourse of poverty.

A Critique of the Discourse of Poverty

Anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1995: 30, 53-54) and post-development scholar Majid Rahnema (1992) have pointed out how the discourse of poverty has been used to consolidate the unequal relations between the modern developed parts of the world and the 'Third World'. The whole development discourse, argues Escobar, builds on a tale of difference between reformers and those about to

be reformed and, at the same time, of similarity within the categories. What is it that erases the differences between "a squatter in Mexico City, a Nepalese peasant and a Tuareg nomad" so that they can be seen as a distinct category different from the West and in need of (the same kind of) development? Escobar writes:

Development assumes a teleology to the extent that it proposes that the "natives" will sooner or later be reformed; at the same time, however, it reproduces endlessly the separation between reformers and those to be reformed by keeping alive the premise of the Third World as different and inferior, as having a limited humanity in relation to the accomplished European. [...] The signifiers of "poverty", "illiteracy," "hunger," and so forth have already achieved a fixity as signifieds of "underdevelopment" which seems impossible to sunder. (Escobar, 1995: 53-54, my emphasis)

Sociologist Lynne Haney (2000, 2002) has shown how this same discourse has been used in Hungary's transition from socialism to capitalism with devastating effects for the newly labeled 'poor'. The author looks at the changes brought about in Hungary as welfare programs went from being universal to needs-based. The latter, it was (and is) argued by the IMF and other counseling entities, is far more rational and humane as the state's resources are channeled to the needy who can then be helped in a better way than before³. Through the ethnographic material gathered by Haney in welfare offices in Budapest, however, another picture emerges. In the needs-based welfare program, new differences are created between the needy and the not-needy. The category of 'poor' becomes relevant and, far from being more humane, this leads to stigmatization and de-humanization. Welfare workers despise their clients and talk about their looks, behavior and smell in considerably derogatory ways (see for example Haney 2002: 201).

What these authors do is to politicize the concept of poverty and show it to be a normative concept used in a specific relation of power and inequality. Poverty, as a label, is involved in processes of othering, de-humanizing and discrimination. While poverty is always a political term, I argue that it might be even more so in the case of Cuba. As a socialist country, Cuba represents a political and economic model which is counter-hegemonic in the contemporary international context and thus constantly defended, as well as attacked, with highly symbolic, ideological and emotional stakes. This goes for policy-makers,

journalists, activists as well as scholars. I will now turn to how scholars, mainly Cuban scholars, talk about poverty in Cuba.

Previous studies of Poverty in Cuba

Several authors (Añé Aguiloché 2005: 2; M. Espina Prieto 2004: 209, 223; Zabala Argüelles 2010a: 81-82) point out that poverty disappeared from the agenda of Cuban researchers as a consensus was formed on the success of the Revolution in guaranteeing basic needs for all and establishing social justice. But as living conditions worsened for large groups of the population during and after the fall of the Soviet Union, the issue has been subject to a certain revival.

Añé Aguiloché’s study of Cuban’s auto-perception of their living standard is especially relevant to my argument⁴. The author shows that when asked about the living standard of Cubans in general the answer “not poor” was the one generating the highest percentage amongst respondents living in Havana (Añé Aguiloché 2005: 15, table 5). When considering their own personal living standard questions were asked in relation to income, food and housing respectively. In relation to food and housing, most respondents chose the category “not poor” (Añé Aguiloché 2005: 16, 17, tables 6.2 and 6.3). As seen in the following table the picture is different when asked about income poverty.

Table 1, How do You consider Your living standard in terms of income? (per cent)

	Poor	Almost poor	Not poor
Decile 1	52.5	19.8	27.7
Decile 2	46.0	27.0	26.1
Havana as a whole	33.8	25.2	41.0

(Añé Aguiloché 2005: 16, table 6.1)

Here respondents’ answers coincide with the method used to identify them. Deciles are defined in relation to income⁵ and the answers seem to reflect this. Yet, it should be noted that 27.7 per cent of Cubans with the lowest incomes do *not* consider themselves to be income-poor. In the qualitative part of the same study (using another sample), interviews revealed that two thirds of that sample did not identify themselves as poor (Añé Aguiloché 2005: 18).

This reluctance towards the label poor is shared by most Cuban and many non-Cuban scholars⁶. They seem to agree that the term poverty, if applicable at all to the Cuban case, must be used with certain reservations since conditions in

Cuba are vastly different from the rest of the region in terms of state-guaranteed social security. Chávez Negrín (2000: 15, my translation) sums up his position, which is representative of this thinking: “[in Cuba], despite the crisis, there is no extreme poverty even though there are people facing serious difficulties in satisfying very important needs (principally, I would argue, food-stuffs, housing and transportation)”. This way of framing poverty, or ‘extreme poverty’, as something located outside of Cuba was also present in the narratives of the people I spoke to.

Refusing Poverty

When making evaluations regarding living standard, my interlocutors often took a comparative stance using notions about how other people live as a measuring stick. Processes of globalization and access to information on the life of other people are important here. Comparative evaluations often resulted in a position in the middle and a standard answer was: “there are those that are better off but also those that are worse off”, both when comparisons were made on a local and on a global level. When it came to global comparisons, references were often made to the lack of first-hand information. The following quote is taken from an interview where I asked a middle-aged woman living in a large extended household with informal incomes if she considered herself to be poor:

Well...no...I would say that we are poor people that are rich [*somos pobres ricos*]...I manage [*vivo desahogada*]. I have enough for clothes, food and shoes. Judging from what I see on television – which might be all lies, I wouldn't know since I have never traveled – there are people in the world that are much poorer.

The quote is typical of how my interlocutors described their position as “in the middle”. It also points to the politics of my question, making reference to the Cuban state's interest in showing poor people from other parts of the world on national TV to create an image of the difference between Cuba's relatively high levels of social security compared to other poor countries in the global South. Finally, she makes an important point – very few of the people I spoke to considered themselves to be poor.

My interlocutors seemed to share the perspective of many Cuban scholars summarized above as most of them were skeptical about applying the term ‘poverty’ to themselves, and related their skepticism to a comparative global situation where there are people who are worse off. However, while Cuban

scholars point to the Cuban state as the cause of this exceptionalism – partly because they use a comparative macro perspective and partly because of a political commitment – the people I spoke to instead pointed to themselves. Their perspective was personalized and, if they refused the term poor, it was because they saw themselves as capable of tending to their own and their family's well-being. They were proud of their ability to make a living and refused the helplessness, vulnerability and failure that they associated to a denomination such as 'poor'.

Sen (1983: 159) argues that there is "an irreducible absolutist core in the idea of poverty", one important element of which is hunger and starvation. In the quote above Escobar mentions poverty and hunger as two of the signifieds of 'underdevelopment'. Hunger seems to lie at the core of the idea of poverty. I therefore argue that the symbolic force of food and hunger in Havana is an important aspect of the refusal of the label 'poor'.

Poverty, Hunger and Shame

In Havana, the meaning of hunger can easily shift from being a feeling indicating the need to eat to becoming an existential state of being which is made explicit in the accusation of *ser un/la muerto/a de hambre*. The literal meaning is hard to capture in English, but it is about being starved to death. What it really implies, however, is that one's actions are motivated by hunger – i.e. by a search for material gains where food is the most basic one. As an expression, it is used not only to talk about situations where people display hunger, but also where they prioritize material gains over other values – such as pride and morality. Food here stands for the biological needs of the body and thus for the most elemental and, in a sense, vulgar aspect of materiality. This is illustrated in the following anecdote told by a woman working in an establishment serving food to personnel with high positions within a ministry:

Today a man offered me the ice-cream we served as dessert – he didn't want it for some reason. I declined but my sister accepted it and ate it right in front of him: "It's just that it's so delicious and they don't give us anything..." That's so embarrassing! Right there in front of him! Sure, I can accept it if they offer me something but I store it away and eat it when they have left. Really, I like my sister a lot but I have to admit she is a *muerta de hambre*.

It seems like food and materiality in general is seen as a pleasure, but only as long as it is not so scarce as to control your actions. Hunger is lived as a question of degradation and of losing humanity (see Lundgren 2011: 129). Anthropologist Ana Cristina Pertierra argues that women in Santiago (Cuba's second largest city) achieved not only respectability but identity and self-worth through their capacity to manage the household. According to Pertierra, the "quality and consistency of [women's] food provision" (Pertierra, 2008: 763) is of prime importance for the proper managing of the household in Santiago. In the division of household work the preparation of food often falls to women. Given the centrality of food and the scarcities experienced by most, this is an important task and the skill of making tasty food every day is something to be proud of. Besides preparing food, the serving of food is also central. In most households, the person preparing the meal also serves it and carries the plates to the other household members. This is a task of care and intimate knowledge of the members of a household. Individual tastes and preferences are taken into consideration, as well as a sense of justice as scarce resources are distributed. Handling food in the household is, in many ways, a daily ritual of care work based on intimate knowledge of household members and performed principally by women.

Anthropologist Mona Rosendahl (1994, 1997, 2001) also stresses the importance of food in Cuba and highlights the capacity to enjoy good, proper, well-cooked food two times a day as crucial for feelings of self-worth and humanity. A common explanation for vagrancy and very short workdays amongst workers in agriculture, was that, due to long trajectories between the home and the fields, many choose to stay at home after lunch. The workers union tried to solve the issue through many different measures, none of which included suggesting that they bring food with them to the fields. "For the workers in agriculture", Rosendahl (1994: 85) writes, "the mere thought of not eating warm, recently cooked lunch was comparable to living like animals. It was unthinkable."

This is one of the reasons why accounts of scarcity and of material deprivation often include assurances like: "here nobody dies of hunger", "I have never gone to bed without eating something" or, at least, "my children have never gone to bed with an empty stomach", and also part of the answer to why my interlocutors resist defining themselves as poor. Food and the ability to fill one's own, and/or one's children's stomachs, had the symbolic power to maintain pride, respect and, ultimately, humanity. Being called or calling oneself poor was to imply hunger, and had the potential of stigmatizing and hurting

people to the point where the term was impossible to use in relation to oneself with self-respect. One arena that encapsulates the anxieties surrounding food and hunger is hospitality.

People in Havana often described Cubans in general as hospitable and placed special pride in offering all guests something to drink – strong, sweet coffee, a soft-drink, or at the very least ice-cold water, the latter often with an excuse of not having anything else to offer. While beverages are offered to any guest visiting the house and can be readily accepted even by strangers, food is more complicated.

In Havana, generally speaking, one does not sit down to eat in a house without inviting everyone present to join. If there are people present whom the hosts cannot or do not want to invite, they just wait for them to leave. If already eating when a guest enters the house, the hosts always invite that person to join with the question “¿Gusta?” (Would you like?), to which the guest answers: “¡No, que aproveche!” (No, enjoy your meal!). Failing to say either of the two phrases is very impolite. A host that doesn't offer the guest food is stingy, but a guest who accepts the offer is equally rude and will be considered *descarada/o*, shameless (lit. lacking face).

During one of my stays in Cuba before my fieldwork, I got to talk to a middle-aged housewife who told me a funny story. A young backpacker from Europe was staying at a neighbor's house during his brief stay in Havana and had become friends with her son. The two young men often sat in her living-room listening to music and talking. Food was not abundant and the young backpacker seemed unable or unwilling to contribute with anything to the household economy, despite, it might be added, her assumptions about his material wealth given his foreign status. Some days she managed to wait until he had gone in order to serve the plates, but at other times she couldn't and had to offer him food. The strange thing was that instead of politely declining the offer he readily accepted! One day, she told me, she had gotten fed up with him “eating up all her food” and decided to tell him so in a subtle way so as not to seem impolite. At lunchtime he still sat on the living-room sofa and she started speaking about how she lacked appetite: “I'm not hungry at all. In fact, I think I won't make any lunch today. Some milk and a piece of toast or two will have to do...” Instead of getting her hints, the young man happily replied, “Just what I was craving!”

The woman told this story with humor, laughing at the young foreigner's answer and finishing off with: “¡Oye, que descarado ese chiquito!” (Hey, what a shameless young man!). The humor lies in part in the image of an adult person

behaving so contrary to custom and polite etiquette, but also in the fact that he was a foreigner who, according to Cuban prejudices, should be not only wealthy and decidedly non-hungry, but also overly polite. Solberg writes about the anxieties surrounding hospitality and how local patterns of sociality changed in Baracoa, a small town in eastern Cuba during the economic crisis following the fall of the Soviet Union⁷: "Meals are sacred in the sense that it is impolite to visit at those times. Guests must be invited to eat if the family is eating. This creates a very uncomfortable situation for everybody when nobody has anything extra." (Solberg 1996: 53)

Lack of food and shame are, then, intimately related. Not being able to invite visitors to eat is as shameful as eating at someone else's place, as both imply that one lacks food and, in the end, that one is hungry – a state of being impossible to occupy with self-respect.

By refusing the label 'poor' my interlocutors resisted the othering inherent in a de-humanizing poverty discourse. "Poverty is not," Sahlins writes, "a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people" (Sahlins 1974: 37). And this, I believe, is not necessarily to be read as an argument in favor of the "relative deprivation" approach to poverty where one is always poor in relation to someone that has more resources. Instead it runs deeper, anchoring poverty in sociality and morality. In the case of Havana in 2006 this means that a poverty discourse mobilized feelings of shame and degradation where being poor was being seen and seeing oneself as failing, as inferior, as hungry and as less than human.

Conclusions

In this article I have attempted to take culture-sensitive approaches to living standard seriously and let it guide me, not only in the definitions I make in the introduction of the text, but also in how the study and analysis is made. I have asked not only how my interlocutors view their assumed poverty but also how they view the label 'poor' itself.

The result has been a complex picture of living standard in contemporary Havana. On the one hand my interlocutors all experienced continuous economic stress. Regardless if they were highly educated state employees, store clerks with a minimum salary or informal street vendors they all had a hard time living what they saw as a normal life in terms of material standard. Getting food on the table, equipping your house with a refrigerator and a fan, buying new shoes for your son – all these were struggles in my interlocutor's daily life. However, they were keen to stress that the question was not so much about *if* they were going to be able to fulfill their household needs but rather *how*. The problem

was not starvation but the fact that it was impossible to find a once and for all solution – this need to always struggle to make ends meet was their source of stress.

In this context of deep economic stress people were reluctant to label themselves poor. They pointed at their relative well-being compared both to other Cubans and to people in other poor countries and they underscored their ability to take care of the needs of themselves and the people they cared for. Phrases such as “I have never gone to bed with an empty stomach” were repeated in conversations and interviews when talking about living standard and I have argued that they point to one of the keys to understanding not only my interlocutors’ refusal to be labeled poor but the problems of a poverty discourse in general.

Poverty and hunger are closely linked concepts so that the one can hardly be thought of without the other. In Havana hunger was seen as a state of being (*ser una muerta de hambre*) in which people could compromise pride and morality for material reasons. This state of being is not only shameful but de-humanizing as it reduces people from capable moral human beings to animal-like beings controlled by their needs. Being labeled or labeling oneself as ‘poor’ was thus impossible without losing self-respect and humanity.

Escobar’s critique of the poverty discourse lifts the issue from a local ethnographic curiosity to a continuous series of speech-acts with global political implications. As shown by both Escobar and Haney scholars’, politicians’ and professionals’ use of the poverty discourse is made in a certain political context where it has the effect of othering and de-humanizing the dis-possessed and reinforcing prevailing structures of power. My study of lived experiences as well as discourses of living standard in contemporary Havana strengthens this picture.

The conclusion is that the label ‘poor’ must be used with caution and always accompanied with a critical examination of the consequences it might have for the people studied.

Notes

- 1 Teresa’s salary was about five times the minimal salary at the time and included a valuable bonus in hard currency – something few state employees had.
- 2 Cuba has a dual economy with two currencies: the Cuban peso (MN) which is a soft currency and the Convertible peso (CUC) which is a hard currency. In 2006 when the data for this article was collected the exchange rate was 24 MN per CUC. One CUC was, in Cuba, worth slightly more than a USD.
- 3 Some of the reforms made (or aimed at) by Raúl Castro – for example the gradual elimination of the universal subsidized rationing system – certainly point to a similar development in Cuba.

- 4 For another study showing similar results see Zabala Argüelles 2010a.
- 5 The text does not expand on the issue of how the deciles look. Are incomes, for example, defined as state salaries? What per capita income does decile 1 and 2 have?
- 6 See also Álvarez Suárez (2004: 315); Añé Aguiloché (2005: 4, 19); Espina Prieto et al. (2005: 16-17); Pérez Izquierdo (2003: 16); Ramírez (2005: 147-148); Uriarte (2005: 110-111); Vázquez Penelas (2005: 107-108) and Zabala Argüelles (2010^a: 89-90; 2010b: 111-112).
- 7 See also Rosendahl (1994) for more about hospitality, food and shame.

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5 Argentinean flood management and the logic of omission: The case of Santa Fe City

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When the disastrous flood, generally referred to as “*la Inundación*”, occurred in Santa Fe City in 2003, it seemed like a bolt from the blue. Yet, it was far from the first flood to strike the city. Situated between two major rivers, flooding is part of the city’s history since its foundation. The lack of preparedness raises questions about the relation between past experience and future action in matters of disaster management. This article analyses the processes of remembering and forgetting as mediators of this relation. By focusing ethnographically on how these entwined processes play out within the Santafesinian bureaucracy, following a logic of omission, it is argued that this logic contribute to the normalisation of disaster instead of future prevention.

Key words: disaster, flooding, vulnerability, adaptation, memory, oblivion, Argentina, Santa Fe City

Introduction: Flooding in Santa Fe City

On April 29th, 2003, a disastrous flood occurred in the Argentinean city of Santa Fe. It came to be called simply “*la Inundación*” (the Flood) by the city’s inhabitants. Around 130 000 inhabitants had to evacuate for weeks and months, some even for years. Hundreds of these families had no home at all to return to. The management capacities of local authorities were largely surpassed leaving a third part of the city with severe material and social impacts. In the months following, a protest movement was constituted, consisting of thousands of Santafesinos who had been affected directly or indirectly by the disastrous flood and who were dissatisfied with the risk and crisis management of the municipal and the provincial governments. In general, the Santafesinos were shocked by the catastrophe and, judging from the reactions, the flood was like a bolt from the blue. However, this was far from the first flood to strike the city. Because it is situated between the Paraná and Salado rivers, flooding has in fact been part of the city’s local history since the time of the settlement of the place by Spanish conquerors in the 16th century. Since the mid-17th century, at least 30 extraordinary floods have affected Santa Fe. The 2003 flood was however the worst of them all in terms of people affected. A widespread notion I found among my interlocutors was that, during the last decades, “things in this town had only become worse.” People referred mostly to the economic and social development of the city after the return of democracy in 1983, but in particular included the 2001 financial crisis in Argentina and “*la Inundación*” in 2003. These events epitomised the structural adjustments made to Argentinian economy in the 1990s, which had largely affected the middle- and low-income sectors. This period was in Santa Fe characterised by low economic growth and increase in unemployment and poverty rates due to economic structural adjustments, turning the city into one with the largest numbers of urban poverty in Argentina. Hence, when “*la Inundación*” occurred in Santa Fe, rates of social vulnerability scored high in over 40% of the population (Arrillaga et. al., 2009).

This article is based on research presented in my doctoral thesis (Ullberg, 2013). This sets out to problematize the idea that there is a relation between social experience of disasters, resilience and adaptation. The Santafesinian case raises questions about such correlations. In order to scrutinise this relationship, the aim of the study is to understand the role of memory as a mediating process between experience and action. Taking Santa Fe City as a case, this study is based on ethnographic fieldwork in this city in the years 2004-2011. It draws on multiple anthropological and sociological theories to analyse how people in different urban settings have engaged with their flooding past through processes memory and oblivion, which configure a particular memoryscape.

This article focuses in particular on one of these urban settings, namely on the political and bureaucratic realms. I describe how memory and oblivion of past floods in Santa Fe are shaped by what I call the “logic of omission;” a particular pattern of selective remembering and forgetting. This logic is here illustrated ethnographically describing some of the inherent practices of Argentinean political and bureaucratic life such as the cycles of exclusion and the *cajoneo*; the making and unmaking of public archives; and flood management plans as artefacts of modern knowledge. I conclude the article by arguing that the logic of omission that pervaded the Santafesinian public administration has contributed to a normalisation of disastrous flooding in this city.

A short note on theories of memory

The capability to remember and forget is a human feature that has long puzzled thinkers. In common talk this is mostly thought of as an individual, personal and mental feature and the object of study for psychologists, psychoanalysts and neuroscientists. Yet it is also well established that memory is as much a social phenomenon. What the past means to people and the making of society has long been an anthropological concern (Ingold et. al., 1996; Munn, 1992) while the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1941) is generally credited with coining the concept of “collective memory.” Although many scholars still use this same term, several other terms have been developed throughout the years to better conceptualise this phenomenon.¹ Inspired by the work of Cole (2001) I have nevertheless chosen to conceptualise this phenomenon as “memoryscape,” because I consider that it offers a more comprehensive understanding of the heterogeneous, dynamic and situated aspects of memory (Ullberg, 2013:13-15). The logic of omission that I discuss in this article is defined as a form of remembering and forgetting that constitutes the urban flood memoryscape in Santa Fe City. In the following, we shall see how this logic is constituted.

Bureaucratic practices and cycles of exclusion

During my fieldwork, getting “inside“ the Santafesinian bureaucracy to make interviews was both easier and harder than I had imagined. It was difficult to get interviews and when I did, interviewees were on the whole reluctant to speak about the past before they themselves had been hired to that particular position. What I felt at the time was a methodological problem points to an interesting phenomenon however, which seems to be of relevance to this analysis of remembering and forgetting in bureaucratic organisations. In Argentina, as in other countries (Lundgren, 2000), there is an established political practice that when a newly elected government at any level (municipal, provincial or national) assumes power, there is a considerable turnover of staff. People in politically

appointed positions are exchanged as well as civil servants, because they too are identified with the former political leader, party or policy (Frederic, 2004). There is of course a natural staff turnover in every organisation everywhere, but the turnover in the public administration of Argentina represents a larger movement than can be accounted for by individual careers and pension retirements. New and fresh, or old but recycled, employees, loyal to the new government, are taken in as the new government assumes power. The discarded staff are simply removed or transferred to other less important positions within the administration. This practice is based on an asymmetrical yet reciprocal relationship and can be seen as part of a larger political phenomenon generally labelled “clientelism.” Political clientelism in Latin America and in Argentina in particular, is a phenomenon so vastly studied in the social sciences that it has become seen as something of a regional characteristic, close to what has been called a “gatekeeping concept” (Appadurai, 1986). An anthropological take on this phenomenon leaves the normative judgment aside to instead examine its meanings and effects. The cyclical turnover of staff in Argentinean public administration raises interesting questions about political change, continuity, accountability and how this is related to memory and oblivion within organisations and in the public realm.

Guber (1999) has suggested that the Argentinean past is of particular importance in the political struggle to define what the Argentinean Nation is, could have been and should be. This locates processes of social remembering and forgetting at the centre of Argentinean politics and the creation of the Nation State. She likens this struggle with a geological cataclysm (p. 66), in which political periods are abruptly marked by forced exclusion of people and memories. This takes place not only at a discursive level but also within the State in the public administration. The former outgoing administration is regarded as a political enemy by the new administration, and this idea justifies the purge of staff, policies and symbols that can serve as reminders of the former. The new administration picks up and revitalises symbols and narratives from its own political legacies and predecessors, which have been buried in layers of the past, while forgetting, and making forget, those of the immediately preceding administration by in effect erasing both people and policies. The entering of a new administration and the beginning of a new political cycle is represented as a rupture with the former administration, which is why the boundaries to this must be clear (p. 66-67). In order to establish a new administration and enable a fresh start, selected portions of the past need to be purged, or in other words, omitted from memory. In what follows, we shall delve into another useful illustration of how the logic of omission operates by looking at one of the most emblematic technologies of memory, namely the archive, which is where much of the political and bureaucratic past is materialised.

Archives and the materialisation of selective remembering

The public archive as a technology of governance is central both to memory and accountability. In fact, the archive is often used as a trope when conceptualising memory. The archive is where governance becomes the past objectified, as it is filed and classified. It has been suggested that there is no [political] power without archives (Ketelaar, 2007). Archives are often associated with modern bureaucracy, just like the practice of filing and keeping documents even if the practice of governing through documenting the past has a longer history (Dery, 1998). The modern aspect of the archive as an institution is its public character. Historians date the birth of the modern archive to July 25th, 1794, when the French National Archives were opened up and made public (Osborne, 1999) and address the role of this institution in the making of the values of the French Republic, and not least, its role for social memory (Pomian, 2010).

My own understanding of the archive in the bureaucracy as a public site of memory (Nora, 1989) was put on trial during my fieldwork in Santa Fe as I pursued answers to my questions about disaster preparedness within the local public administration. As I have already mentioned, more often than not, the civil servants that I interviewed replied that they had no knowledge about this or that issue because it concerned a period prior to their employment within the administration. I figured that if I could only access the municipal archive, I could find out about past policies and regulations myself. Yet nobody was willing to help me gain access to the archive. It only later became clear to me that there was no neat archive for me to visit. Presumably there had once been a municipal archive, but in 2005, documents and files were stored in boxes and drawers here and there in the different departments of the municipality. I was told that they had been ruined by damp while standing in the basement of the municipal building. In combination with oblivious civil servants, the municipal past seemed to have passed into the terrain of forgetting. This situation changed however when Mario Barletta assumed power as the new Mayor of the Municipality of Santa Fe in December of 2007.

Barletta had been the head of the National University of the Littoral in 2003. When he was elected Mayor, he set out to modernise the municipal administration in a more transparent vein. One way of doing this was to establish an archive, a Centre for Documentation, which included the digitalisation of documents and to provide open access to all documents from 2003 and onwards from the municipality's web site. This electronic service was operating fairly well in 2012, especially in terms of accessing municipal legislation. Yet all that seems transparent is not necessarily so. To access documents regarding particular proceedings, the applicant had to download a form, fill it in and submit it personally at the registrar's office. Even if the municipal archive was

set up to enhance democratisation and public administration, the archive was far from being accessible to everybody. Furthermore, it was not evident which documents had been cleared for open access, and which had not. This illustrates that as much as there is no political power without a public archive, there is no public archive without politics (Osborne, 1999). Even if an archive is public (as opposed to private), it is not necessarily accessible to the public. In this sense, the archive can be thought of as materialising the logic of omission because it is a selection of what is to be saved, hence remembered, and what can be discarded and thereby forgotten. Another aspect of the virtual archive, in which documents are digitalised, is that it implies a certain degree of technological vulnerability. A computer virus, a software bug or a power outage poses the risk of passing memory into oblivion in a twinkling.

Another example of how the archive is subject to interests and contestations as to what is to be included is that of the Memory Archive created by the Santafesinian Provincial Government in 2006, placed administratively within the realm of the Secretariat of Human Rights. The issue of human rights has been highly ranked on the national political agenda in Argentina in the 21st century, and likewise in many provinces. In the Province of Santa Fe, the Secretariat of Human Rights was created in 2003. Among the many activities carried out here, the most important was perhaps the promotion of trials of local military leaders for human rights violations during the dictatorship. One of my interlocutors in Santa Fe, Fernando, worked at the Secretariat and was deeply involved in preparing for these trials as part of his tasks. In addition, he also testified in some of them, having been a political prisoner himself during the dictatorship years. He considered it very important to keep the memory about the Dirty War atrocities in Santa Fe alive through the archive. Yet, when I met him in 2008, he was not very enthusiastic about including other past issues in the Memory Archive, such as for example the documents and testimonies from *la Inundación*, which had been suggested by the provincial government that year. Fernando was quite annoyed that the *inundados*² would share the place of memory with the Dirty War *desaparecidos*³ in this public archive. He clearly thought the two were not comparable in terms of violations of human rights and lamented that he was forced to let office space to staff that would collect material about the natural disaster instead of working on the memory of the Dirty War. He never told me what the reasons to his reluctance really were, but his stance illustrates the fact that what is to be remembered through the archive, is subject to contestation and negotiation.

The Memory Archive was equally subject to the logic of omission. In 2012, I found that numerous legal documents involved in the so-called *Causa Inundación*, the lawsuit against the municipal and provincial governments regarding the 2003 disaster,⁴ had been published in a digital archive on the website of the Provincial Government of Santa Fe, more specifically on the site of the State Attorney. The reason for this was stated as a response to citizen claims (Gobierno de la Provincia de Santa Fe, 2011). Having followed the case and knowing about the problems of the plaintiffs among *the inundados*/activists in gaining access to the files of the investigation, this decision seemed like a major achievement for them. I became curious to know who these citizens behind the claim had been. Gabriel, one of my key interlocutors among the *inundados*/activists, confirmed to me in a long e-mail what I had imagined, namely that it had been the activists in this protest movement who had presented this claim. What Gabriel was unaware of (and what Fernando did not know either, or was just unwilling to tell me) was that this selection of documents, related to the lawsuits had in fact been incorporated to the Memory Archive, as publicly stated on the government's website. According to Gabriel, this documentation was nevertheless incomplete, missing important information and hence constituting a skewed institutional memory or one that would benefit the government in future hindsight. Here we have an illustration of how the logic of omission governs the politics of the archive. While the *inundados*/activists pushed for transparency in the conflict and the publication of important information, which sustained the memory of *la Inundación* and hence, their struggle for justice, the government at this point responded favourably, yet selectively, by publishing only some of the documents, but not the most compromising. An exacerbated historical analogy of this phenomenon in the Argentinean context was one of the last laws issued in the transition from dictatorship to democracy in 1983, the so-called Pacification Law (*Ley de Pacificación Nacional*). This act pursued amnesty for the militaries involved in any action of fight against political subversion in 1976-83. In support of this law, a presidential decree determined that all documents relevant to the regime's detention of people carried out in the framework of the Process of National Reorganisation and under the §23 of the National Constitution, which regulates the possibility of declaring state of siege, should be declared missing from the archives or destroyed (Torres Molina, 2008). The detainees referred to had by then already been murdered by the regime in most cases. In view of a forthcoming democratisation, the military regime considered that they could never be held accountable for this crime if the documentary traces of these actions and the people involved disappeared.

By discarding all documents, the decisions and actions of the government would be erased and accountability made impossible. Amnesia and amnesty go hand in hand. The public archive, as we have seen from these examples, is organised through the logic of omission. What is gathered, filed, authorised, certified, classified and made public (or not), and hence remembered or forgotten, is always a matter of evaluation, negotiation and decision (Lynch, 1999). In the same way, the logic of omission forges how the future is envisioned, as shall become clear when we take a look at the practice of planning.

Materialising the logic of omission through plans

During my fieldwork in Santa Fe, a new municipal contingency plan, the *Plan de Contingencia de la Ciudad de Santa Fe*, was launched. In the 2003 post-disaster context of Santa Fe City, the issue of safety, or rather lack of safety, had been no minor issue. Besides the flaws of appropriate flood protection infrastructure in 2003, an important part of the explanation as to why the governmental response in the 2003 disaster was such a failure in the first place was the lack of a contingency plan. I was told by several interlocutors that there had been no such plan in place at all before 2003 despite the numerous disastrous floods that had affected the city. This void was also addressed in the inquiry commissioned by the judge in the lawsuit of the *Causa Inundación* (Bacchiega et. al., 2005:8). Hence, the launching of a plan in 2005 was framed by the new municipal government as a major political achievement and a fresh start over. The new Mayor separated his government discursively and temporally from other past administrations which had failed in matters of disaster preparedness, while at the same time omitting the fact that the municipality had since long been governed by the same political party that he also represented.⁵

From an anthropological perspective, plans can be seen as documents and “artefacts of modern knowledge” (Riles, 2006), referring to the materialisation of knowledge and information that pervade modern life. Others have defined the practice of documenting as technologies of government (Nyqvist, 2008; Scott, 1999) and “intersections of exchanges and meetings of different [discursive] domains” (Weszkalnys, 2010). A contingency plan can be said to materialise such modern knowledge as it communicates notions of risk and how to deal with it. It has been suggested that contingency plans, in particular, are symbolic “fantasy documents” (Clarke, 1999) because they represent an organisational rationality that is in control over processes that it can never completely be in control of, simply because risk is such a complex phenomenon and uncertainty and unpredictability are at its core. Yet the fact that a plan and a policy exist at all, is generally seen as a reassuring action of safety; a badge of rationality (Clarke, 1999). As material objects, plans also shape thinking and acting

(Nygqvist, 2008). Their very purpose is to coordinate action and intervention. Plans can thus also be seen as artefacts that gain meaning through context, as objects with social lives (Appadurai, 1988; Miller, 2005). While plans are future oriented as they anticipate risk and action, they are simultaneously historical objects in the sense that an existing plan materialises the outcome of a past process of negotiating ideas and interests. In this sense, plans can be seen as time objectified.

There is not space enough here to describe in detail the 2005 contingency plan of Santa Fe City.⁶ For the purposes of my argument, suffice it to say that it consisted of numerous policy documents that forecasted risky places, people and practices by remembering the city's past and present in particular ways. By describing selected aspects of the past and the present of social life and flood management in Santa Fe, other aspects were omitted. Nothing was for example mentioned about those economic and political processes that put people and places at risk by forcing them to live in risky places. Nor were the significant human effects on natural processes, such as deforestation, agricultural technologies or regulation of rivers for energy production, considered in the framework. This is perhaps not surprising if we consider such a plan to be part of the disaster risk reduction "anti-politics machine" (Ferguson, 1990). The logic of omission can in this vein be seen as constitutive of this apparatus, while at the same time, plans are political as much as archives are.

In April 2005, the director of the municipal Department of Pumping Stations had a bit reluctantly agreed to meet with me. He had been publicly accused of mismanagement in *la Inundación* by activists in the *inundados* protest movement, and had assumed that I would also hold him accountable. After some insisting, I finally managed to convince him that I was an impartial scholar, genuinely interested in understanding the point of view of municipal employees regarding the problem of flooding in the city. We met at Rolando's office located in a store building, presumably an old train shed. A large yard surrounded the building where trucks were parked and large pieces of machines were leaned against the walls. Rolando's office was dark and gloomy, perhaps due to the bookshelves in oak wood and the large desk. Rolando himself was sitting behind the desk but stood up as I entered the office. He politely invited me to sit on the wooden chair in front of the desk. As I began asking him questions about the technologies of flood prevention in the city, he seemed to relax and told me about this system. As we were talking about the state of disaster preparedness within the municipality. I asked him about the lack of a flood contingency plan. Without saying a word he first looked at me and then opened a drawer in his desk. In silence he threw a tiny green booklet and a thin spiral bound folder with a transparent cover on the desk in front of me. I read

the title on the first page of the booklet: *Ct.I.M.A Flooding and Environmental Control*.⁷ It had been published by the Secretariat of Water Affairs of the municipality of Santa Fe and was a summary of the purposes of this programme, which was to control, maintain and operate the flood defence system.

The plan consisted of nine pages, in which the CIMA programme for the management of the flood defence infrastructure was outlined. While it was not really a plan for how to organise an evacuation in a flood emergency, the programme described the equipment, personnel and time needed to operate and maintain the embankments, the canals, the reservoirs, the floodgates and the pump stations in order to mitigate floods. It also included an early warning system. This flood management plan was not dated, so I asked Rolando when it was from. He laconically replied that he and his colleagues had formulated it after the 1992 floods, but that it was closed down in 1996. He continued:

¡Fue cajoneado! Our plan was put away and forgotten. Then, the 2003 flood occurred and here we are. Now they are trying to invent the wheel again.

Indeed, for Rolando to keep a copy of this plan in the drawer of his desk, in the *cajón*, struck me as symbolic to what he just told me. *Cajón* means box or drawer in Spanish and the verb *cajonear* is used in Argentina to denote a hindrance, delay or holding back of a question or a procedure within the political realm and in public administration, by putting it away. An analogy could be made to the English concept of “shelving,” yet *cajonear* seems to denote a particular form of holding back something, since it is no longer visible but rather contained within the darkness of oblivion. In this respect, Rolando, keeping his own copy of the plan in the drawer seemed symbolical, not to say ironic, of the logic of omission.

Conclusion: The logic of omission and the normalisation of disaster

This article has analysed how the historical problem of flooding in Santa Fe was addressed within the municipal realm of the city. I have argued that different bureaucratic practices and artefacts follow and reproduce a logic of omission regarding flooding. As has been illustrated ethnographically throughout this paper, this logic refers to a pattern of selective remembering and forgetting that enabled new governments and decision makers to cyclically start over. This logic can be said to characterise the Santafesinian bureaucracy in particular, but it confirms what has been observed of other parts of the Argentinean political world. In Santa Fe City, this logic forged the ways in which the urban flooding past was handled within the municipal and provincial spheres of action, which in turn forged flood management policies (or the absence of them). As we have

seen, memory within the public administration was shaped by the practice of changing administrative staff within the public agencies following the electoral time cycle. This was not because individual experiences are forgotten when people are changed, but because there are incentives to not remember past decisions and arguments. This pattern of forced exclusion also involved materialised memory of the bureaucracy, that is, documents such as plans and documents placed in public archives or *cajoneados* in the drawers of public servants, withdrawn from use and the public eye. Technocratic narratives and calculations of risk framed how the flooding past was addressed in policy documents. Future oriented contingency plans omitted addressing root causes of social vulnerability to flooding and instead framed the problem as one of human obstruction to the course of nature. The logic of omission within the Santafesinian public administration normalised cultural notions of disastrous flooding and enabled policies of neglect. I hold that instead of enhancing community resilience and adaptation to recurrent hazards, this contributed to the reproduction of conditions of social vulnerability in the urban outskirts and creating conditions for the recurrence of disaster.

Notes

- 1 Among these are “social memory,” “cultural memory,” social or collective “remembering” and “memory-work”. Historians, on their part, use the term “oral history” (Vansina, 1965). For a comprehensive overview of the anthropological and sociological study of memory, see (Climo and Cattell, 2002; Olick et. al., 2011).
- 2 *Inundado* means a flooded person in Spanish. In Santa Fe City, this is a historical social category, given the recurrence of disastrous flooding. In the wake of *la Inundación* in 2003, the category transformed from denoting merely disaster victims to activists, as many people affected by this particular flood mobilised to protest against the flaws in the disaster management of the government and to make claims for political accountability and economic compensation.
- 3 The *desaparecidos*, literally the “disappeared [people],” refers in Argentina to the thousands of people who suffered forced disappearance during the Dirty War. Most of them were murdered and many of the bodies have never been found.
- 4 The so-called Flood Lawsuit actually referred to two different legal processes. One was pursued according to the Criminal Law to establish responsibility of public officials before, during and after the 2003 disaster. This was the one in which the *inundados*/activists’ plaintiffs claimed that former Governor Reutemann should also be interrogated. The other was pursued according to the Civil Code by around 6,000 *inundados* plaintiffs who demanded economic compensation.
- 5 Since the return to democracy in 1983, the Santafesinian municipality had been governed by the *Partido Justicialista*. Not until 2007 was there a power shift when a centre-left coalition called *Frente Progresista Cívico y Social* won the elections at both municipal and provincial levels.
- 6 For a detailed description and analysis of this plan, see Ullberg (2013).
- 7 The acronym C.I.M.A. stood for *Control de Inundaciones y Medio Ambiente* in Spanish.

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