

The crisis of journalism and state retraction policies in Argentina, Brazil and Chile

Crisis del periodismo y

políticas de retracción de los estados

en Argentina, Brasil y Chile

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This article aims to study how the ownership structure of the media system and the role of the State are linked to the deterioration of journalistic work and the exercise of freedom of expression. From the Political Economy of Journalism and the discussions on the right to information, a comparative study is proposed to contrast the situation in Brazil, Argentina and Chile between 2016 and 2018. It is concluded that the high concentration in the three media systems, along with the retraction of the State as regulator and content producer, deepen a crisis that threatens journalistic activity.

KEYWORDS: Journalism, Political economy, Freedom of Expression, Crisis, Media concentration.

Este artículo analiza cómo la estructura de propiedad del sistema mediático y el rol del Estado, se vinculan con el deterioro del trabajo periodístico y el ejercicio de la libertad de expresión. Desde la Economía Política del Periodismo y las discusiones sobre el derecho a la información, el estudio comparativo propuesto contrasta la situación en Brasil, Argentina y Chile entre 2016 y 2018. Se concluye que la alta concentración en los tres sistemas de medios, junto a la retracción del Estado como regulador y productor de contenidos, profundizan una crisis que amenaza la actividad periodística.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Periodismo, Economía política, Libertad de expresión, Crisis, Concentración mediática.

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INTRODUCTION

This article deals with the state of affairs in Argentina, Brazil and Chile's journalism, during 2016-2018, from a comparative view based on the Political Economy of Journalism. Considering this as a starting point, we analyze a crisis that has press workers as protagonists in a scenario of audiovisual media concentration in these three countries, and the restrictions that this imposes on freedom of expression and the strengthening of democracies. It is addressed a multicausal issue that concerns journalism as a profession, including its continuity within traditional media, but that in particular has to do with the labor crisis in this field in relation to regressive political policies in terms of rights.

The journalistic activity has been experiencing a sustained crisis from several decades now that is linked with the reshaping of productive processes towards media digitalization, changes in consumption habits, and with deficient public policies in relation to workers' rights protection. In this context, our main concern is to problematize the state of affairs of journalistic activity in the media systems of the three countries selected, which constitute the most relevant media markets of the Southern Cone.

Based on the Political Economy of Communication theory, it is thoroughly analyzed the crisis that journalism experiences in the middle of profound changes on traditional media, which challenge its business and content production models. On the other hand, discussions on the Right to Information and freedom of speech will allow us to interpret state interventions under governments of different political ideologies and their impact on journalism. In this respect, the analysis is based on the premise that there is a low level of institutionalization of governmental agencies that regulate media activity, as well as a lack of clear policies on government-sponsored advertising distribution, elements that are decisive for the journalist's work.

This article also explores an interdisciplinary interpretation about media ownership and state media. In the analysis, a comparative study of the different national cases is made, to which end reports on media concentration and communication rights have been analyzed, based on specific indicators: 1) shaping of radio and television media market's

actors; 2) current working conditions and precarious work; 3) direct or indirect censorship exerted by the political and economic power.

Considering the interpretation of this complex scenario which results from the reshaping of the sector and the traditional value chain in news production, we could conclude that from high levels of media system concentration in all countries and retraction of the state as content producer arouse a crisis whose main issue is the destruction of employment and, in consequence, the disciplinary effect that this has on press workers.

In front of state policies that are dissociated from the general interest and articulated with predatory market actors, the extreme vulnerability of press workers has, in some specific cases, a correlative with union organization and defense. In spite of this, the subjugation of labor rights keeps growing in the sector and it represents an affront to freedom of speech in a context of democratic government systems.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

The Right to Information and Communication understood here as a right to all citizens (Uranga, 2007) is the result of a long political and legal tradition and evolution that have taken place in the national and, especially, international sphere. This has to do with agreements, expressed in treaties that, in many cases, were incorporated into the positive right of the adherent countries, were binding in character and had constitutional status. The effective enforcement of this right would be reached through what Loreti (1995) refers to as a “tacit agreement,” according to which citizens delegate authority to fulfill the social mission of informing to journalists and media companies. The expansion of the public sphere due to a widespread use of Internet and social media in the last years has come to add, problematize, and coexist with journalism and media outlets which preserve a relevant role as agents producing and spreading information within contemporary societies; although, this new public sphere does not replace or impose upon them.

However, effective enforcement of this right is not free from interferences and threatens, and its protection, provided by the Inter-American Human Rights System, “points to build media systems that

guarantee public's right to receive the most diversified information possible being this protected from governmental intervention and commercial interest of media businesses" (De Charras et al., 2013, p. 22). Likewise, Fiss (1999) adds the following:

Past debates assumed as premise that the State was a natural enemy of freedom. It was the State that was trying to silence the individual, and it was the State to whom limits should be imposed. There is a great dose of wisdom in this concept, but it is half-truth. Certainly, the State can be oppressor, but it can also be a source of freedom... This point of view –disturbing for some– rests on a series of premises. One of them refers to the impact that private concentrations of power can have on our freedom; sometimes the State is needed in order to counteract these forces... the State may be compelled to act as promoter of public debate: when non-governmental powers curtail freedom of opinion (pp. 12-14, own translation from Spanish).

The excessive concentration in media ownership, a market trend that is facilitated by action or omission of States neglecting its active role as regulators, can act as an indirect determinant of the exercise of journalistic activity, and is widely detrimental to plural and diversified opinions. Regarding this point, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has established that “monopolies or oligopolies in ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people's right to information” (Inter-American Court on Human Rights [CIDH], 2000).

In this context, the journalists' work in the contemporary scene can be interpreted in a productive manner from the political economy of journalism approach (Dourado et al., 2016). This particular branch of Political Economy of Information, Communication and Culture studies (EPICyC for its name in Spanish) allows us to examine the information service sector in a wider context of labour transformations within a capitalist system.

We define as general theoretical object of EPICyC the study of social relations and, particularly, power relations, which mutually

constitute the relations of production, distribution and consumption of resources, including communication resources (Mosco, 2009). From the author's perspective, we take into consideration three general analytical dimensions that could be applied to the study of journalistic work processes: commodification, spatialization and structuration. For the scope and extent of this article, we will base our analysis on the first and last points.

In relation to commodification, it can be observed similar processes operating in other sectors and branches linked to staff cutback, in which mechanical systems are substituted by electronic systems. Digital economy –in which the migration from traditional media to digital variants or even convergence processes that open new windows and means are based– provides new scenarios of disrupted working schedules. This does not imply that working time is reduced; on the contrary, it is parcelled according to the diversification of media and projects. In effect, news companies depend less on well-known journalists' full-time and are more prone to part-time jobs, freelance jobs, low incomes and a few or none additional benefits (Mosco & McKercher, 2008). Concomitantly with this, it can be observed that in all branches of the communication sector there is a reduction of job positions and a resulting consolidation of part-time work. Likewise, audiences producing information content out of new modes of interaction appear as part of this new productive model. In critical terms, it can be pointed out that these commodification processes reduce the status of journalism as that of public interest, at the time that emphasize its more profitable entertainment side (Mosco, 2016).

On the other part, structuration implies a more comprehensive concept of social class and, therefore, it includes a combination of controversies centered on the working class such as gender or race. Moreover, it allows an interpretation about the class relations between media workers and owners in terms of inequality. Thus, it is a relational construct of social class. The normative conception of social class regards workers as producers of its own identity in relation to capital and independent of it. In this way, it can be observed that press workers respond to the changes and crisis that arise in the sector by calling for meetings, organizing themselves, unionizing, and also by

drawing up alternative or self-managed projects. Following our object of analysis, we can say that this line falls within the emergence of new forms of popular, feminist or self-managed² journalism articulated with communitarian, popular and alternative sectors, whose experiences rest upon power struggles against the major media outlets but also against the State itself.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that political economy of journalism is also linked to the analysis of processes related to state capture. Golding and Murdock's (1996) research based on the tradition of the Frankfurt School and Williams' works (1974, 1980) document the integration of communication institutions primarily with authorities linked to public policies and business owners within a capitalist economy. Likewise, some authors (Bizberge, 2019; Guerrero, 2014) point out that in Latin America it has prevailed a historical pattern of policy captured by political and business elites. They named it "captured-liberal" model, which refers to its predominantly commercial character and because, in a certain way, the model is held captive by interests whose loyalties are biased in favour of the actors in power. The effect of these processes upon media workers is crucial when it comes to analyze their working conditions.

The high degree of media ownership concentration, the crisis in traditional news companies and the new regressive role of national states in matters of regulation and production of content are the main three dimensions that make up the landscape in which the problematic can be witnessed. At a methodological level, this work firstly aims at an exploratory and panoramic approach to three national cases. Later we will adopt a comparative approach focused on determining points of contact and contrast between them³ based on the observation of the three

² An example of this is *Latfem* (<https://latfem.org>), a platform for feminist communication; *Tiempo Argentino* newspaper, recovered and managed by its own workers, both with headquarters in Argentina; *Midia Ninja* (<https://midianinja.org>) from Brazil, among others.

³ To obtain sources and data about the Chilean case we work in collaboration with Luis Breull, professor and fellow researcher at Pontifical Catholic University of Chile.

indicators herein presented, by which it can be considered convergent and divergent aspects of journalistic work situation. The cases and time frame chosen for the analysis allow us to illustrate the situation under governments of different political ideologies, and in media markets of different dimensions.

In relation to the sources, this work is based on systematized researches into audiovisual industry concentration (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017; Vassallo de Lopes & Lemos, 2019); different reports on the economic situation of the aforesaid media sectors (Comisión Nacional de Televisión de Chile [CNTV], 2016; Media Ownership Monitor [MOM], 2018, 2019), as well as the main rates of press workers' employment (Consejo Nacional del Ministerio Público [CNMP], 2019; Reporteros Sin Fronteras, 2019; Sindicato de Prensa de Buenos Aires [SiPreBa], 2019a, 2019b).

DESCRIPTION OF NATIONAL CASES

Argentina: mega-merger, crisis and destruction of employment

Argentine communication system shows high levels of concentration in the different segments taking into account the participation of the main four companies in each industry (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017). Even with a declining tendency in the last years, television industry remains the most consumed media for information purposes. Only in Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA) the rating of the four major television broadcasting groups (free-to-air and pay TV) reaches 56.7% (MOM, 2019). The main free-to-air television stations are El Trece (Clarín), Telefe (Viacom), América (Grupo América), Canal 9 (Prisa Albavisión), and national public broadcaster TV Pública. Apart from these, there is a considerable number of pay-TV broadcasters, such as TN (Clarín), C5N (Indalo), y A24 (Grupo América) among the most relevant ones.

From all of them, the one that carries more weight is Grupo Clarín, which owns conglomerates in all segments and which also has had a distinguishing growth with respect to the other groups since 2018 when a merger between Cablevisión Holding –the major cable TV provider in Argentina–, and Telecom –one of the two major telephone, mobile-phone and broadband provider companies– took place. The

concentration levels in terms of revenue, audiences, market control and geographical scope that result from this merger produce the following numbers at national level: 42% in landline telephone, 34% in mobile telephone, 56% in fix-broadband Internet connections, 35% in mobile broadband, and 40% in pay television.

As regards employment in this segment, there are dismissals and significant restrains: Telefe company downsized a lot of positions; Canal 9 applied a contingency plan which included redundancies and salary freeze; TV Pública worker's wages have been frozen since 2018 and weekend newscasts were cancelled; pay-TV broadcaster C5N paid salaries "in installments"; Crónica TV made redundant 20 employees; and CN23 made wholesale redundancies ⁴ (MOM, 2019).

The situation at radio is different, since a lower cost structure made possible a greater diversification in the offer. However, in terms of audience and share, there are also high levels of concentration. It can be observed that four groups hold 53% of share, while audience rating is distributed as follows: Grupo Clarín 6.8%, Grupo Indalo 5.1%, Grupo Prisa-Albavisión 4.3% and Grupo América 2.2%.

Regarding employment variables, in this segment there are closures, suspensions, dismissals, payment of wages "in installments" and conveyance of property. In radio, particularly, phenomena such as closures of companies, staff cutback –Radio Nacional–, or partial payment of wages –Radio Del Plata–, permanent or temporary cancellations of aired radio shows –Radio América, Radio Belgrano– are commonplace. In the case of FM radio stations, many of them replaced its production staff with an automation music system model (RQP, ESPN, Blue), (MOM, 2019).

According to MOM's report, the revenue of audiovisual industry (radio and television) shows a year-over-year variation of 28% with a US\$ 1 441 million income. From that number, 64.3% corresponds to open-to-air TV channels and only 2.7% to low power radio and television. In relation to advertisement, it is worth to highlight that

⁴ See more detail on chart of dismissals and voluntary redundancies in each media outlet over the period of two years (2016-2018) at <https://argentina.mom-rsf.org/es/hallazgos/crisis-de-medios/>

85.7% of audiovisual industry income corresponds to private and public advertising. The year-over-year variation rate between 2016 and 2017 was 39% with a total turnover of US\$ 1 854 millions distributed as follows: television 41%, Internet 24%, radio 8%, and the remaining percentage distributed between cinema, print and outdoor advertising. At this point, there can be observed some issues arising from tendencies that began in 2016 as to the distribution of government-sponsored advertising in the country: a higher level of geographic concentration in the city of Buenos Aires and a few major urban centers; concentration of funds in less actors with more benefits for Grupo Clarín and alienation of non-profitable media sectors (Marino & Espada, 2017).

Since 2015, the economic and labor state of affairs in Argentina's media market shows alarming numbers: until 2018, there is a 47% fall of share rate in open-to-air television in Buenos Aires compared to 2014, and a 25% in the case of radio. Sales rates of print newspapers are the lowest in its history, under 800 thousand units per day in the whole country. This data is contrasted with the increase in access to news portals and information search on the Internet (MOM, 2019).

The loss of jobs in the sector as a whole have been estimated at 4 500 by Buenos Aires Press Workers' Union (SiPreBA, 2019a). Suspended workers, pensioners and those that chose a voluntary redundancy make up this number. Additionally, cases of state violence against journalists have been reported; according to SiPreBA, since 2015, 58 journalists were injured and other 28 were arrested while in line of duty (Racciatti, 2019).

Apart from precarious work, closures of media outlets and mass redundancies reported since 2015, there is a general loss of purchasing power rates. In the case of journalists, this loss is one of the highest and reaches 32.4%.⁵ Working conditions for freelancers are even more worrying since according to their income 95% of them are below the poverty line (SiPreBA, 2019b).

⁵ See report by the Observatorio del Derecho Social de la Central de Trabajadores de la Argentina (CTA Autónoma) at http://www.obderechosocial.org.ar/docs/infor_trim_2_2019.pdf

Finally, since Mauricio Macri was elected president 2015, in the national news agency Télam there has been a policy of zero salary increase and elimination of collective bargaining agreements (Bargach & Suárez, 2019). In 2018, Télam made redundant 354 employees; the most affected were the more qualified personnel of the editorial office and federal coverage network. However, the workers went on a strike and dismissed employees were reinstated.

Brazil: political violence and state authoritarianism as threatens against journalism

Similar to the previous case, Brazilian media system shows signs of a large concentration of audience and ownership as well as a high geographical concentration. According to a *Media Ownership Monitor* study (MOM, 2018), which examined 50 media outlets in Brazil, nine belongs to Grupo Globo; five to Grupo Bandeirantes-Band and Band News; five to Grupo Record managed by Universal Church of the Kingdom of God; four to RBS group; and three to Grupo Folha. Thus, in a landscape of cross-media ownership among segments, Globo stands out with a dominant position in open-to-air TV, in which it operates five private national channels and two public channels; in pay-TV, it owns Globosat; apart from this it manages two radio networks, printed media and leading news agencies.

If we consider advertisement investment numbers for 2018, open TV remains leading the taking rates, with a 50.8% of allocation funds and a 10% annual increase, relegating pay-TV (14.2%) and printed media (10.3%), in a scenario where there are considerable increase of funds for cinema and websites (Vassallo de Lopes & Lemos, 2019, p. 79).

Following what scholars said about concentration in the region, Brazil stands out for two reasons: first, the participation of politicians –especially members of Congress– as owners of media outlets; second, media groups continue being family businesses, whose management passes “from one generation to the next” (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017, p. 99). As a third reason, it could be mentioned the presence of religious organizations –primarily Christian movements such as Catholic and Evangelical churches– that have their own media outlets and spread their content in the schedule of other national and state

broadcasters.⁶ As it is also pointed in Reporters Without Borders' report (MOM, 2018), political control over media funding shows a "high risk" indicator, basically because state advertisement is distributed discretionary and among a few groups.

The ecosystem previously described shows a problematic panorama in terms of diversity and pluralism, worsen by the fact that regulation is fragmented⁷ and does not impose limits on concentration, except for pay-TV (Law 12.485/ 2011).

In the middle of this, there can also be observed an alarming context of violence against journalists translated into direct censorship and violation of freedom of expression, as well as campaigns fostering disinformation, race hatred and community media persecution during an election campaign marked by confrontation, which escalated when Jair Bolsonaro went into office. In relation to censorship, it is worth mentioning that *Folha de São Paulo* was banned from interviewing ex-president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, among other interferences involving the Judiciary.

Thus, threats and attacks against journalism become everyday life of press workers and human rights activists, and in extreme cases this has even ended in homicides. As it is emphasized in one of the reports revealed, "Brazil was the 8th country in the world that reported more assassinations of journalists in 2018: four" (Amorim et al., 2019, p. 12). Considering a longer time frame, this figure reaches 65 deaths between 1995 and 2018 (CNMP, 2019).

Another factor that threatens critical journalism and pluralism has to do with the decision of eliminating public media, in particular the threat of closing the Brazil Communication Company (Empresa Brasil de Comunicação [EBC]), which was set up in 2008, during the second term

⁶ A study conducted by Agencia Nacional de Cine (ANCINE), in 2016 reveals that religious programming is the main genre by open TV networks, taking up a 21% of total airtime: <http://brazil.mom-rsf.org/es/hallazgos/medios-y-iglesias/>

⁷ A phenomenon explained by *Intervozes* in an analysis of legal framework in 2017: http://brazil.mom-rsf.org/fileadmin/Editorial/Brazil/MOM_Documento_legal_portugues.pdf

of Partido de los Trabajadores (PT). This was a systematized offensive lead by Bolsonaro in the last years, but whose predecessor was Michel Temer, who erased from the state-owned company legislation all mentions about *Consejo Curador* and its attributions, leaving civil public out of governance. Another point that is worth mentioning is about voluntary redundancies and lack of economic support: in 2018, almost 350 press workers were dismissed from their positions in state-owned companies, which represents 16% loss of active staff (Amorim et al., 2019, p. 60).

Chile and contraction of work market

Chilean open television system is made up of five national channels: Canal 13 (Grupo Luksic), Chilevisión (Time Warner, via Turner Broadcasting System), Mega (Grupo Bethia –72.5%– and Discovery Communications –27.5%–), and TVN (State-owned). There are also two other networks of less audience share: La Red and Telecanal, both linked to Grupo Albavisión. Except for Mega, which leads audience share rates, all channels present negative annual balances above US\$ 50 million in the last five years. This has produced changes in ownership, foreign capital investments and capital injections from the government in the case of the state-owned channel (Julio et al., 2019). The reasons behind open television crisis are the combination of high costs, general low level of audience share and, primarily, advertisement investment. While in 2010 open television concentrated 48.2% of advertisement investment in the country (US\$ 607), in 2014 it fell down to 40.6% (US\$ 493); in the same period, advertisement in online media turned from 4.1% to 11.8%, according to data provided by Asociación Chilena de Agencias de Publicidad (ACHAP). On the other side, pay-TV increased its share from 3.9% to 6.3% (Asociación Chilena de Agencias de Medios [Achap], 2019).

In the segment of radio, owning eleven broadcasters, Spaniard group Prisa monopolizes the highest amount of radio frequencies. However, there is also a marked presence of Copesa and Bio-Bio group. Besides, Canal 13 (Luksic) and Mega (Bethia) also own numerous radio frequencies. Apart from cross ownership of radio and television, these groups differentiate from others for having commercial and economic

activities beyond media outlets; for example, in the field of real-estate, finances and mining industry, among others. In newspaper industry, the duopoly made up of *El Mercurio* and *Copesa* manages the market almost in equal parts under various brands.

According to a study about media market concentration, pay-TV and telecommunications conducted by National Television Council of Chile (CNTV for its name in Spanish), the four main media groups concentrate 91% of audience share and 87% of advertisement investment (CNTV, 2016). As it is also pointed in this official report, although concentration levels of ownership, audience and advertising resources have remained high in the last 15 years, it is a dynamic market for being an interesting target to foreign investors who can replace local capital thanks to laws that benefit them. As Mastrini and Becerra conclude in their study about info-communication concentration in Latin America, “Chile is one of the countries that reported the highest levels of concentration in the region because, apart from the traditional press duopoly, with two groups leading this sector since constitutional government returned in 1989 (*El Mercurio* and *Copesa*), there are high levels of concentration of open-to-air and pay television” (Becerra & Mastrini, 2017, p. 155). Reporters Without Borders (RWF) also observes that media concentration in Chile is one of the main obstacles that community media, pluralism and, in consequence, democratic debate encounter in ensuring their long-term survival (Reporters Without Borders, 2019).

In this context, the main threat for journalistic activity is the massive destruction of jobs in the last few years in television, radio and printed media segments, and the effect of precarious work conditions as a way of indirect control. Since 2014, the public service broadcaster TVN has made redundant, either fractionally or massively, more than 400 employees of all areas, while private broadcasters such as Canal 13, *Chilevisión* and *Mega* do likewise (Gómez & Álvarez, 2018; Orellana & Cabello, 2018). In the segment of print press, the Mexican Editorial Televisa affiliate that published 14 magazines in Chile closed its doors in 2019; while, *El Mercurio* dismissed more than a hundred of workers of its headquarter located in Santiago and other hundred belonging to regional media networks; the layoffs included journalists, photographers, and copy editors. This goes hand in hand with

other redundancies made by *Diario El Día* and *Mi Radio* belonging to TVN regional media, which was condemned by Colegio Chileno de Periodistas (Chilean Journalists' Association). Another aspect that it is worth noting, it has to do with acts of intimidation by security forces against reporters, particularly, the ones covering the Mapuche conflict in the southern region of the country.⁸ Although this conflict is outside the time frame analyzed in this article, it is important to point that only in the first month of this social conflict, which started in October 2019, there were dozens of attacks, threats and intimidations against journalists and photographers, according to a report by the University of Chile.⁹

ANALYSIS AND DEBATE

From the comparative analysis of the three cases described above, the crisis of journalism is mainly interpreted as: a) regressive state policies in matter of communication; and b) the growing media concentration and the resulting exclusion of other players and precarious work. As regards the first analytical point, we observe that national states adopt regressive policies, which are directly or indirectly related to work variable and press workers. One significant component is violence against journalists when their claims are made public or when they cover political events held by opponents to the official government.

Considering the context of violence that journalists face in their everyday work, it is important to highlight the seriousness of the Brazilian case, in which attacks and assassinations of press workers have placed Brazil among the most dangerous countries on earth to be a journalist. More recently, journalists were the target of attacks by

⁸ Colegio de Periodistas (Chilean Journalists' Association) reject police spying on journalists in La Araucanía region. <http://www.observatorio-fucatel.cl/colegio-de-periodistas-rechaza-espionaje-de-carabineros-a-periodistas-en-la-zona-de-la-araucania/> and <http://img-view.mailpro.com/clients/2013/06/05/31315/Espionaje-Periodistas.pdf>

⁹ See report at <https://www.uchile.cl/noticias/161115/informe-revela-alcance-de-las-vulneraciones-a-la-libertad-de-expresion>

security forces while covering the social uprising in Chile in October, 2019.

Likewise, these attacks and threats against journalists also transcend to virtual environments where there are an exponential growth of *trolls* and *bots* working systematically, among other functions, to counteract opposing voices or criticism, especially in Brazil and Argentina (International Amnesty, 2018).

Regarding public politics, a regressive policy shaping that we can categorize as indirect censorship has to do with discretionary distribution of government-sponsored advertisement. In Argentina, for instance, it has not been passed yet a specific legislation aimed at regulating this issue; the same happens in Brazil where pre-established rules are non-existent. Partial regulations in this matter leave a grey zone full of uncertainties in regards to allocation of official budget according to the type of media and levels of audience by means of equal and transparent criteria (Marino & Espada, 2019). This clientelism has generated both fanatic and opposing media in relation to agenda setting and treatment of conflicts, especially that involving press work. Likewise, there have been reported acts of direct censorship in TV Pública Argentina; for instance, when the personnel spoke out about the prohibition of covering some events, which were detrimental to the government. In the same way, workers of Empresa Brasileña de Comunicación (EBC) also reported several times interferences from current government in their journalistic work.

Other hindrance to democratic debate and journalism has to do with a recession on labor market, primarily as the result of redundancies and other ways of ending working relations with press laborers in the three countries. These mass redundancies that are registered in all the markets analyzed have a disciplinary effect on the group of employees that manage to keep their jobs or get another one but in worse working conditions. In short, the concentration generates a general labor impoverishment in media outlets, which have less and less employers. In this point, it is worth noting that in Argentina there is a union tradition more organized and willing to defend workers against attempts to attack labor rights.

Part of that rearrangement, which results from objective transformations in real conditions of production, distribution and consumption, is based on the “technological convergence theory”, of which one imperative maxim is to reduce work structures. The arguments in favor of this technological replacement and the need for getting rid of obsolete structures are reaffirmed by media business men as well as office holders. In countries like Argentina and Brazil, this common ground of politic and economic elites gives room to policies biased in favor of the major players of the info-communicational sector.

Chile, the smaller market analyzed, reports the clearest example of job losses in the whole media system and rise of precarious work, especially in television; besides, there have been reported numerous closures of regional and printed media outlets. The pressures and censorship imposed on journalism is subtler in comparison to the other countries, except for specific cases deemed as political sensitive, such as the Mapuche conflict or, more recently and outside the time frame here analyzed, the attacks against press workers by security forces during the uprising in October, 2019. As regards to public television, there is a definitive break from its foundational ethos which was originally conceived after the transition to democracy in 1990 and which held independence from its editorial guideline, nowadays more pressured by political power. Likewise, it is observed a reduction of diversity which consists in including representatives of both official and chief opposing sides in informative segments in equal parts measured by screen time, without considering “newsworthiness” criteria, hierarchy of themes or testimonies, nor incorporations of other voices outside the bipartisan system, in process of dissolution.

CONCLUSION

Considering the interpretations based on the Political Economy of Journalism, we draw a comparative analysis about press working conditions in the three media markets of the Southern Cone. As result, in the first place, we observed the continuous destruction of employment in different segments, especially in radio, TV and printed media. Likewise, it have been confirmed precarious working

conditions connected to different factors which combine concentration and convergent processes, global crisis in traditional media industry, changes in audience consumption habits, and a State that is permissive with business interests and concomitantly reluctant to take side for journalists, to the point of violent repression in a context of legitimate complaints about press workers' rights.

In relation to audiovisual branches, even with nuances in the case of Brazil, during the time frame analyzed, there is a decline of open-to-air and pay TV. In Chile, television channels are not profitable and not even the leading media outlet of the market (Mega) is exempt from this. Historical "national champions" such as Televisa in Mexico, Globo in Brazil or Clarín in Argentina witness the crisis of a model which, during some decades, allows them to have a leading and dominant position by capturing the highest rates of audience and advertising investment, now more diversified since new players such as Facebook and Google hit the market.

This situation resulted in higher levels of concentration as a survival mechanism –in part because it was also a market tendency– which was endorsed by the states in all cases. In the markets analyzed, it is observed high levels of ownership, geographical and audience concentration – both convergent and conglomerate– which compromises diversity of informative offer and has an impact on freedom of expression, in a double dimension both individual and collective. A phenomenon that tends towards the integration of editorials and different changes in the routine of journalism activity, materialized in the emergence of hybrid profiles, which often collide with labor laws and agreements resulting after decades of negotiations between workers and companies.

All in all, as we have confirmed in the analysis of the three countries, there is a common denominator in technological changes that have a negative effect on the journalist's task; also, in the high concentration levels of media systems that are experiencing at the same time a profound economic crisis; and in the retraction of the state as content producer, all translated into a crisis whose main issue is the destruction of employment and, consequently, the effects of this on press workers.

The problematization of journalism as an intellectual work within a capitalist system entails a series of questions about assessment processes

implied by work variable in a context of transformation processes of productive models. Following Bolaño (2009), we can affirm that this produces a “complex movement of convergence that cause instability in consolidated markets, refuting hegemonic standings, not necessarily in a sense of greater democratization of the media but, on the contrary, in the promotion of a tendency towards increasingly multimedia concentration” (p. 71).

This paradigmatic change cut across geographies and political projects, and constitutes a contemporary dilemma of a highly automatic, increasingly asymmetrical and selective world in which job positions become just an adjustment variable in many fields. In their modes of resistance, union and self-managed groups address this complex issue by pointing out the regression in labor and information rights –diversity and pluralism– that is generalized. Furthermore, they demand from States laws that observe these inequalities and differences among journalistic companies and actions on government-sponsored advertising redistribution systems, as well as policies aiming at supporting journalists. In spite of this, even in front of labor restructuring processes, the loss of employment is more and more significant.

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