

Articles

Argentina against the Allende government, the look of daily *Río Negro*Argentina frente al gobierno de Allende, la mirada del diario *Río Negro*Alfredo Azcoitia ^{a*}  (<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1398-7655>)^a Universidad Nacional de Río Negro, San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina, e-mail: alfazkoitia@hotmail.com

Abstract

In the present article we address the news about the Argentine-Chilean ties that circulated through the most influential newspaper of Argentine Norpatagonia during the years of the government of Salvador Allende (1970-1973). Through the tools of discourse analysis we realize the multiple dimensions that conditioned the discourses as well as the meanings acquired by binational relations within the framework of the discourses. We consider that this type of studies contributes to deconstruct the essential glances over the other, giving account of the several edges contained in the representations that circulate through the press. This acquires greater relevance in the case of the Northern Patagonia, it is in a region whose links with Chile set up an as historical as everyday experience. In this sense, the discourses that prevailed in the Río Negro built a Chile. Its past and present intimately linked it to the future of Argentina and the region.

Keywords: press, binational relations, ideology, discourses.

Resumen

En el presente artículo abordamos las noticias sobre los vínculos argentino-chilenos que circularon por el diario más influyente de la Norpatagonia argentina durante el gobierno de Salvador Allende (1970-1973). A través de herramientas del análisis del discurso damos cuenta de las múltiples dimensiones que condicionaron dichos discursos como también de los sentidos que adquirieron las relaciones binacionales en el marco de los mismos. Consideramos que este tipo de estudios contribuyen a deconstruir las miradas esencializadas sobre el otro, dando cuenta de las diversas aristas contenidas en las representaciones que circulan a través de la prensa. Esto adquiere mayor relevancia en el caso de la Norpatagonia, al tratarse de una región

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cuyos vínculos con Chile configuran una experiencia tan histórica como cotidiana. En este sentido, los discursos que prevalecieron en el *Río Negro* construyeron un Chile cuyo pasado y presente lo vinculaba íntimamente al futuro de la Argentina y la región.

Palabras clave: prensa, relaciones binacionales, ideología, discursos.

Introduction

In 1958, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution marked the beginning of an era in Latin America characterized by a notable politicization and by the growing perception of the imminence of social change (Gilman, 2003). In this context, a series of governments came about in Chile, financially and politically supported by the United States, which assumed a reformist project that tended towards a capitalist modernization and towards encouraging the participation of the popular sectors as a means to contain the constant growth of the leftist forces (Moulián, 2006). Despite this, in the presidential election of 1970 the candidate for the *Unidad Popular* (Popular Unity), Salvador Allende, obtained a historical victory giving rise to an “unusual” experience, as described by Fidel Castro, tending towards the generation of conditions for the radical transformation of the social and economic order through the “bourgeois democracy”.

This unprecedented scenario taking place in Chile led to the assumption that relations with Argentina would enter a stage marked by tension, considering the strong anti-Marxism sentiment publicly declaimed by the military dictatorship of this country. Framed in the National Security Doctrine¹, the *de facto* government of general (R)² Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970) shared with his Brazilian comrades-in-arms both the thesis regarding the existence of “ideological frontiers” as well as the need to comprise a supranational military alliance to guard them (Rapoport, 2005; Zapata & Zurita, 2005). In this context, the victory of the *Unidad Popular* threatened to accentuate the ideological contradictions between the governments of both countries, turning the Mountain Range into a new “iron curtain”.

In terms of this new scenario that emerged in 1970, this article intends to analyze the stance regarding the binational relations adopted by the newspaper *Río Negro* during the government of the *Unidad Popular*. We considered that focusing the investigation on this medium, whose relevance will be made clear in the following section, allows us to interpret the multiple meanings surrounding the Argentinian-Chilean ties that exercised greater influence on the North-Patagonian public opinion. Similarly, it is worth noting that within the pages of this newspaper not only were the political and economic interests of a journalistic enterprise expressed, but so were the production and circulation conditions of a polyphonic discourse affected by the very particularities of a border region. In the case of the North-Patagonian region, we are referring to a region with a territorial configuration that was historically strained between the narrow links across the

¹ During the Cold War, the National Security Doctrine was structured in terms of the confrontation between the “stateless international communism” and the “western and Christian world”. In the context of this conflict that developed beyond the state borders, the Armed Forces transformed the nation into a “theater of operations” displaying its repressive potential on the “internal enemy”, an ideological other that by “blending” with the rest of the population ought to be identified, excluded and, subsequently, eliminated. In Argentina, this doctrine acquired its own characteristics by linking the fight against communism with the concern to contain the advance of Peronism (Ansaldi, 2004; Mazzei, 2012).

² (R) retired from the forces to which he belonged.

mountain range, forged by the early commercial exchanges and the continuous influx of Chilean immigrants, as well as the ever-present fear of the “permeability” of the “weak Argentinisation” of a border region, which was solidified in conflict hypotheses supported by the most diverse conspiracy theories divulged by the nationalist sectors (Bohoslavsky, 2009). Thus, it is interesting to analyze one of the discourses concerning the binational relations with the most influence on this particular scenario, during periods in which Chile moved towards socialism. In this sense, we hold the initial hypothesis that in the context we have just described, the newspaper *Río Negro* maintained the editorial line that prevailed in previous years, prone to presenting integration as a permanent objective under which all other circumstantial differences ought to be subordinated.

In this respect, it is important to remember that the journalistic enterprises present themselves before their readers as mere transmitters of a “reality” that they “objectively reflect” within their pages through an apparently transparent language that allows them to support their alleged neutrality (Wodak & Meyer, 2003). This discourse manages to legitimize itself through the actions of the press, which appeals to the information system as its main source for its construction, while granting certain homogeneity to the published events that reinforce the type of reality they describe (Rodrigo, 2005). This ability to establish and extend said fiction allows them to increase their influence over public opinion and thus consolidate their place as political actors capable of affecting the decision-making process of the political system (Borrat, 1989, p. 10). Thus, analyzing the journalistic discourse leads us to delve into the inserted frame of meaning, always taking into account that the owners of the media have interests and hold an understanding of the world, so that, from all facts, they will mainly select those that they consider appropriate to inform and build their messages upon (Raiter & Zullo, 2008).

The analysis proposed in this article intends to contribute to the rich historiographical production on the Argentinian-Chilean relations developed in recent years. After the clear predominance of jobs focused on the territorial conflict in the 1960s and 1970s, the return of democracy promoted a constant thematic expansion with respect to the binational studies. In this sense, the North-Patagonian region has contributed an abundant and complete scientific production regarding the specific relations and dynamics established in this border region. This is precisely the line followed by our article, adopting an approach focused on the construction of the other, which recognizes the works of Pablo Lacoste (2003) and Ernesto Bohoslavsky (2009) as precedents.

The article begins with a brief look at the editorial line maintained by the newspaper regarding the relations between Chile and Argentina until 1970. Subsequently, we analyze the stance of the *Río Negro* in light of the victory of Salvador Allende, followed by addressing the perspective adopted by the newspaper against the “ideological pluralism” promoted by the foreign policy of the dictator Agustín Alejandro Lanusse (1971-1973). We also take a look at the changes evident on the surface of the editorial content of the newspaper after the diplomatic incidents that occurred in 1972 following the events of Rawson and Trelew. We finalize with the analysis of the stance assumed by the newspaper in light of the coup in Chile.

The interpretation of *Río Negro* on the Argentinian-Chilean relations (1960-1970)

Since its first appearance on the streets of the city of General Roca, north of the Patagonia, the newspaper founded in 1912 by Fernando Emilio Rajneri clearly stated its intention to become an influential voice on the regional public opinion (Ruffini, 2001). Under the direction of Fernando Emilio Rajneri Jr. (1960-1967) and later of Julio Raúl Rajneri (1967-1986), the *Río Negro*—turned into a daily publication since 1958—reached regional leadership in the 1970s, becoming one of the most important journalistic enterprises in the country in the decades that followed (1970s and 1980s). This level of relevance achieved by the newspaper is explained by many causes—without a doubt, the close ties that the owner family of the *Río Negro* was able to establish with different governments, both provincial and national, was one of them. We must also make note of the continuous investment made in equipment that not only allowed it to increase its publication but also to modernize its aesthetic making it more attractive for the reader. Besides prestige, the continuous technological innovation and its business and political ties add to the difficulties that its regional competitors had to maintain the circulation of their publications. All of these elements made the *Río Negro* an indispensable reference when it came to investigating the representations that more significantly impacted the North-Patagonian public opinion with regard to the relations between Argentina and Chile.

In this sense, at the start of the 1960s, the newspaper supported initiatives such as the creation of the Latin American Free Trade Association³, which tended to promote regional integration. From the perspective of the *Río Negro*, these processes were essential to achieve the economic development and to guarantee institutional stability in Latin America. In this context, Chile would emerge from the pages of the newspaper as an example to follow, having a political class committed to the “American” spirit that allowed it to subject the internal complaints and territorial disputes to the historical imperative of integration (Azcoitia, 2016). Although this favorable climate for the rapprochement of both countries deepened during the presidencies of Argentinian Arturo Illia (1963-1966) and Chilean Eduardo Frei (1964-1970)⁴, the conflict caused by the “*Laguna del Desierto*”⁵ incident evidenced that both the territorial issue, as well as the fear of the foreign “expansionist enemy”, not only remained relevant in the military universe but so did its capability to influence the public opinion. In this context, the editorial line of the *Río Negro* appealed to the “secular ties of friendship”, to the “common origin”, and to the fundamental contribution of the Chilean workers on the North-Patagonian economy;

³ This association created in February 1960 was initially comprised by the governments of Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru. In 1961, Colombia and Ecuador also subscribed to it. Five and six years later it was ratified by Venezuela and Bolivia, respectively. The objective of these agreements was the progressive elimination of tariffs in light of the creation of the free trade zone.

⁴ Both governments not only shared a notable Latin American pride, but also the conviction that integration would allow them to decrease both the interference of Washington as well as the growing influence of the Brazilian dictatorship in the region (Cisneros & Escudé, 2000; Medina, 2002; Simonoff, 2007).

⁵ This event that took place in the border area denominated the “Laguna del Desierto” triggered a serious diplomatic conflict that deepened with the subsequent clash between gendarmes and carabineers, which resulted in the death of a Chilean official. Despite the cordial and fraternal climate that had prevailed during the interview between Illia and Frei, which took place in the city of Mendoza just a few days prior, the nationalist sectors launched a campaign in Argentina, which a significant part of the press joined, pressuring the public opinion regarding pending border issues (Cisneros & Escudé, 2000; Mazzei, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999).

thus reinstating, in a context dominated by territorial nationalism, the idea of unity as a historical imperative that ought to guide the binational relations (Azcoitia, 2016).

Following the coup of June 1966, the Argentinian dictatorship began a rapprochement towards its Brazilian counterpart, with which it shared both the alignment with the United States as well as the possibility of creating a military alliance based on the existence of “ideological borders” (Rapoport, 2005; Zapata & Zurita, 2005). In this context, president Eduardo Frei understood that he should ally himself with the democratic governments that existed in the region in order to avoid political isolation in the Southern Cone (Medina, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999). The distancing between both countries was expressed early on in the editorial content of the *Río Negro* through the proliferation of news that reported the displacement of integration by border disputes as the major theme of the binational agenda (Azcoitia, 2016).

Despite the territorial nationalist discourse that prevailed during the *de facto* presidency of Juan Carlos Onganía (1966-1970), —about which the editorial line of the newspaper was not entirely stranger—at the end of the 1970s the change started to become evident regarding the foreign policy that entailed the replacement of the thesis of “ideological borders” in favor of “ideological pluralism”. Towards the end of 1968, a series of conflicts that revealed the growing combativeness and politicization of the workers and students’ movement began to emerge, eroding the figure of Onganía as the guarantor of public order (Pozzi & Schneider, 2000). Meanwhile, the international landscape was also adverse due to the distancing with the Brazilian dictatorship and the strain with the White House.⁶ In this complex scenario, the Argentinian ministry began a tenuous rapprochement towards Chile with the purpose of finding a partner that supported it in its negotiations with the USA and would in turn allow to equilibrate the growing power that Brazil was acquiring in the region. This new context was evidenced in the pages of the *Río Negro* through the withdrawal of subjects related to border disputes along with the return of integrationism as the backbone of the binational agenda.⁷ However, as the possibility increased that a presidential candidate who was publicly assumed to be a Marxist could win on the other side of the mountain range, the future relations between both countries grew more uncertain.

Victory of Unidad Popular and “ideological pluralism”

During the Chilean elections, the news published by the *Río Negro* emphasized the “increase in violence” along with a “political euphoria” as outstanding traits of elections characterized as “doctrinal plebiscite”.⁸ In this sense, the chronicler sent to cover the topic expressed his surprise at the “polarization surrounding the rightist and leftist concepts”, all the while highlighting the massive popular participation. In his notes, he

⁶ The North American strategy to turn the armies of the region into efficient forces for anti-guerrilla warfare—but without advanced equipment for conventional war—would go against the objective of the Argentinian Armed Forces of acquiring military grade equipment (Rapoport, 2005).

⁷ Cf. “La reunión de Onganía y Frei”, January 10th, 1970.

⁸ Cf. “Culminó la campaña proselitista para las elecciones nacionales en Chile”, september 2th, 1970; “Finalizó la campaña proselitista en Chile”, September 3th, 1970; “Hoy se elige un nuevo presidente en Chile”, September 4th, 1970.

also gave account of the versions that circulated in Chile in case of a victory by *Unidad Popular*, which went from a coup to a possible Argentinian military intervention.⁹ The news regarding wealthy families seeking to flee to Argentina or the United States, along with those referring to arms smuggling through the Patagonian passages for the “big Chilean landowners” that sought to defend their estates, finished painting a picture of social division that threatened to plunge Chile into an unprecedented political crisis.¹⁰ However, the news regarding the electoral result rendered account of the popular “joy” expressed by the improvised street “carnivals” in light of the victory of an “anti-imperialist, patriotic and national” government, as characterized by the main referents of *Unidad Popular*.¹¹ It is worth noting that in its editorial space the *Río Negro* assumed an expectant role regarding what it defined as the “most disconcerting Latin American experience at the time” warning about the dilemma faced by “democracy in the traditional sense”, which stood between the reaction and “the revolutionary changes”.¹²

In the “International Current Affairs” section, the newspaper asserted that the Chilean process was an evidence that the left was “bloody” when “forced to”. In this sense, it condemned the assassination of general Schneider affirming that events of this nature consolidated “the Latin American revolutionary effervescence” thus justifying the use of violence.¹³ The stance assumed by the *Río Negro* regarding the Chilean situation had its correlative with the demand to the Argentinian dictatorship for an electoral exit without proscriptions, which it considered as the means to resolve the political unrest through institutional means, this in the context of a sustained increase of guerrilla activity.

For their part, the news regarding the repercussions in Argentina created a polarized stage between sympathizers and detractors of the new Chilean government. Among the former, the newspaper brought more visibility to Peronism, which interpreted the Popular Unity victory as a sign that the “moment of the people” was approaching, they also speculated that Peron could settle in Santiago, In case the dictatorship denied him residence in Argentina.¹⁴ Subsequently, it stood out that the Armed Forces—despite the “official silence”—cautioned that Chile would constitute “a danger area” for Argentina due to the close relation between Salvador Allende and Fidel Castro.¹⁵ However, despite this binary outline that seemed to interpret the Trans-Andean policy in the light of the Peronism-Anti-Peronism antagonism, the first official expressions of the dictatorship transmitted an absolute diplomatic normalcy. This was not only expressed in the congratulations given by General Marcelo Levingston to the new president elect or in his statements about it being an issue “exclusive to Chile”, denying the version regarding a possible Argentinian intervention, but also in the decision to detain and deport Chilean

⁹ Cf. “Frei advirtió que un nuevo feudalismo amenaza ahora a Chile”, May 22th, 1970.

¹⁰ Cf. “Las elecciones chilenas”, September 4th, 1970.

¹¹ In “Discurso de Allende; Alessandri y Tomic reconocieron el triunfo de Salvador Allende”, “Allende prometió un gobierno sin espíritu de venganza. Manifestaciones de júbilo en Chile” and “Repercusiones del mundo marxista” September 6th, 1970.

¹² Cf. “El resultado electoral en la República de Chile”, september 8th, 1970 y “Las nacionalizaciones chilenas”, November 29th, 1970.

¹³ Published on September 13th, 1970.

¹⁴ Cf. “Conociéronse opiniones de políticos del país sobre el triunfo de Allende”, September 7th, 1970; “Perón, de no poder entrar en el país se radicaría en Chile”, September 22th, 1970; and “Perón se radicaría en Chile”, November 30, 1970.

¹⁵ Cf. “El triunfo de Allende”, September 6th, 1970 and “Conociéronse opiniones...”, September 7th, 1970.

citizens suspected of having perpetrated the assassination¹⁶ of general Schneider.¹⁷ In this manner, the image within the pages of the newspaper was that of two governments that favored the normal functioning of their diplomatic relations over their marked ideological differences.

The climate of détente and rapprochement that started at the beginning of 1970 deepened with the acknowledgement of dictator Alejandro Agustín Lanusse (1971-1972). As noted at the beginning of this article, this favorable context for the binational relations would be ascribed to the abandonment of the “ideological borders” strategy, followed by the Argentinian ministry up to that moment, and its replacement by “ideological pluralism”, which not only proposed to open markets in the region but also to equilibrate its negotiation capability before the expansive policy of Brazil (Rapoport, 2005; Zapata & Zurita, 2005).

In the context of this new conception concerning foreign policy, the heads of state Salvador Allende and Alejandro Agustín Lanusse they met in the Argentinian city of Salta in July 1971. At first, the news coverage of the *Río Negro* expressed some optimism regarding the possible results of the meeting, indicating that issues related to territorial disputes as well as topics of a political, economic, and cultural order would be discussed.¹⁸ The newspaper emphasized the importance of the interview, which it qualified as a “historical meeting”, all the while it highlighted the “festive climate” that governed the northern city. The journalistic chronicles also gave account of both heads of state “unexpectedly” going out for a walk through the streets of Salta and visiting a patisserie for a cup of coffee.¹⁹ This type of notes that represented the presidents in everyday situations, as if dealing with two unknown friends, were habitual in the coverage of the *Río Negro* regarding the meetings between Lanusse and Allende. In this manner, the newspaper blindly stuck to the dramatization strategy of politics, which tended to condense in the gestures of the protagonists, the interpretation of a complex issue such as foreign relations. The news regarding the final declaration of the interview highlighted the wish expressed by the heads of states to promote physical, economic and scientific integration, as well as their compromise to strengthen the ties of friendship between both peoples, based on the peaceful and legal historical resolution of their differences and concerning “political pluralism”. The declaration also included the need to increase the commercial exchanges between both countries, emphasizing the importance that the industrial sector should have in them.²⁰

For the newspaper, the agreements of Salta comprised a positive change to the Argentinian foreign policy. In one of their articles they emphasized that Lanusse had broken the “political-military line” that had been promoted until that time, which had had among its main objectives the conformation together with Brazil of a “right-wing Atlantic

¹⁶ A few days prior to Salvador Allende being confirmed by the Chilean Congress as president, a group of right-wing extremists assassinated the commander in chief of the Armed Forces, René Schneider.

¹⁷ Cf. “Levingston hizo anuncios sobre la futura actividad electoral”, September 25th, 1970.

¹⁸ Cf. “Canal de Beagle: Lanusse y Allende se reunirán antes de treinta días”, July 1st, 1971; “Lanusse y Allende se reunirán en Bariloche”, July 17th, 1971; and “Se reúnen el viernes en Salta, Lanusse y Allende”, July 21st, 1971.

¹⁹ Cf. “Lanusse y Allende en Salta”, July 24th, 1971.

²⁰ Cf. “Finalizó la entrevista entre Lanusse y Allende. Suscribióse una declaración conjunta argentino-chilena”, July 25th, 1971.

block” to face the “leftist shift” that was taking place in the Pacific.²¹ In the “Political week” section, the *Río Negro* affirmed that the Argentinian government seemed to have ended with the theory of ideological borders, which had subsumed their foreign policy to the strategy of Brazilian diplomacy for four years, in order approach the “nationalist regimes” of the region. Celebrating this change, the newspaper noted the advantages of starting an integration process with the Andean block, comprised by countries with an economic structure different to that of Brazil. The article distinguished between the industrial exporter model, supported by the latter, which required an aggressive foreign policy and, the other, which was promoted by the “modern social regimes” of the Pacific, which tended to reach a development based on the internal market that in turn allowed the integration of its population. In this framework, the “sterile” border disputes with Chile ought to be subsumed to imperatives of historical transcendence such as the integration of this block.²²

In October 1971, Alejandro Agustín Lanusse conducted a tour through the Andean countries visiting Peru, under Velasco Alvarado, and Chile, under Salvador Allende. The news published by the newspaper shared both the centrality assigned to the presidents and their ideological adscription, “nationalist” or “socialist” as the case may have been, as well as the importance of “cooperation” and “self-determination”, as fundamental concepts of the discursive articulation of the three heads of state.

In particular, the articles that addressed the visit to Chile once more referred to the importance of the meeting at Salta, as change in the binational relations that allowed to “dismiss” the doctrine of “ideological borders” and resolve the issue of the Beagle channel,²³ subjecting the dispute to a court of arbitration.²⁴ In this meeting celebrated in Antofagasta, the signing of a labor agreement was incorporated into the diplomatic agenda, which included the Chilean workers in Argentina, subject that the *Río Negro* highlighted on its front page as one of the main achievements of the meeting.²⁵ This is not surprising if we consider the historical importance that Chilean immigration has had in the region, adding to this the fact that for the North-Patagonian elite—of which the family owner of the *Río Negro* was part—the trans-Andean workforce comprised a fundamental link for the sustainability of its main activity: fruticulture.

As in Salta, in its news coverage of the meeting in Antofagasta, the newspaper emphasized the personal relation between the heads of state, which clearly set it apart from the formal tone that prevailed in the news regarding the visit of the Argentinian dictator to Peru. In this sense, the photographs of Salvador Allende adjusting the microphone of general Lanusse—those that captured the farewell of the heads of states and their wives at the airport, and those that rendered account of the decision of the “mason and Marxist” Chilean president to accompany his “dear friend” Lanusse to the

²¹ Cf. “Repercusiones de la entrevista”, July 25th, 1971.

²² Published on July 29th, 1971.

²³ Since 1904, the establishment of the course of this channel and the establishment of the sovereignty on the islands located in the area comprised a pending issue in the diplomatic agenda of both ministries. In 1967, the Chilean president Eduardo Frei tried to resolve the dispute by appealing to the arbitrage of the British crown, which the dictatorship of General Juan Carlos Onganía refused to accept.

²⁴ Cf. “Lanusse y Allende están reunidos en Antofagasta”, October 17th, 1971.

²⁵ Cf. “El presidente Lanusse finalizó la gira”, October 18th, 1971.

mass—contributed to the reinforcement of the belief that there was a strong personal tie between the two of them.²⁶

For the readers of the *Río Negro*, this spirit of brotherhood that swept through the news regarding binational relations gained a closer and more concrete dimension in the North-Patagonian region. In this informative scene, the news concerning the rapprochement to Chile deepened its economic aspects by reinstating physical and trade integration projects. In its editorials, the newspaper emphasized the “bright possibilities” that this would provide for regional trade and the exploitation of the “international touristic circuit” with the construction of routes in the mountain border, after the National Roads and Highway Bureau declared the priority status of the international crossings of the provinces of Río Negro and Neuquén. According to the *Río Negro* the realization of these projects would comprise a solid advancement in terms of the agreements reached during the encounter at Salta.²⁷ This perspective was reinforced with the news regarding the Development Planning and Action Council and its analyses about increasing the trade exchanges between the Alto Valle region and Neuquén with the Chilean Market and the countries in the Pacific. Similarly, the news that reported the deepening of the binational ties did not diminish in the economic sphere. The chronicles regarding the celebrations of the trans-Andean independence, published year after year by the newspaper highlighting the presence and entrenchment of the Chilean Community in the region, rendered account of a symbolic dimension of this rapprochement by referring to the “emotional ceremony” in which a school of Neuquén had been christened with the name of “República de Chile”.²⁸ It is worth noting here that while the news regarding the strong binational ties in the North-Patagonian space were not novel for the readers of the *Río Negro*, what did evidence a change regarding the first couple of years of the Argentinian Revolution was the centrality assumed by the state agencies as promoters of the same.

With that in mind, the different political analyses that circulated through the newspaper coincided in listing the trip of Lanusse through Chile and Peru in Argentina’s strategy to consolidate a block of nations of the southern cone.²⁹ However, these interpretations also incorporated a more domestic dimension concerning the intention of Lanusse to build his presidential campaign in anticipation of a future call to *elections*. In this sense, a special correspondent of the newspaper stated that the “populist shift” evidenced in the interviews with Velasco Alvarado and Salvador Allende fitted into the strategy of the dictator to build an “image of popularity”.³⁰ Here, it is important to note that despite the explicit support of the newspaper regarding the foreign policy change implemented by general Lanusse, the *Río Negro* remained critical regarding the continued existence of the dictatorship at times in which, it claimed, the political conflict in Argentina could only be solved by reinstating the channels for constitutional participation.³¹ In its editorial space,—while

²⁶ Cf. “Allende acompañó a misa a Lanusse”, October 18th, 1971.

²⁷ Cf. “Comercio y turismo con Chile”, September 5th, 1971.

²⁸ Cf. “Intercambio con Chile”, November 2nd, 1971; “Aniversario de Chile”, September 19th, 1971; and “Fiestas chilenas”, September 19th, 1971.

²⁹ Cf. “Argentina incrementará con Chile y Perú el intercambio comercial”, October 11th, 1971; “Lanusse deja hoy el Perú y se traslada a Chile”, October 16th, 1971; “Fue suscrita la declaración conjunta argentino-peruana”, October 17th, 1971.

³⁰ Cf. “¿Lanusse candidato a presidente?”, October 21st, 1971.

³¹ It is worth recalling that during these years the North-Patagonian region was also the stage for movements in the context of the social effervescence process that swept through the country. Between the end of 1969

highlighting the importance of the meeting at Salta as a realization of abandoning the strategy imposed by Onganía—the newspaper warned about the need for a prompt call to elections.³² This request was reiterated through the president Lanusse's tour in Chile and Peru, by arguing that a “president that lacks the popular mandate” has little to offer to the “neighboring countries”.³³ These critiques were also expressed through graphic humor, ironically referring to the contradictions of the new foreign policy adopted by the *de facto* president (see Figure 1).

In summary, Lanusse's assumption appeared to consolidate the change regarding foreign policy which began to come into view towards the end of the rule by Onganía. In this context, the frequent news concerning tensions with Chile that on occasion responded to the thesis of “ideological borders” and on others to the ancestral fear of territorial nationalism, give way to the integrationist discourses promoted by the new external guidance of the Argentinian ministry. Despite its critiques towards the national government, the *Río Negro* celebrated this change in foreign policy, which enabled the dictatorship of Lanusse to strengthen its ties with the government of the socialist president Salvador Allende. However, the conflicts that arose following the events of Rawson and Trelew would reveal the impossibility to circumvent the profound political differences that existed between both governments, as intended by the “ideological pluralism” promoted by the dictator Lanusse.

The escape of Trelew and the ideologization of binational relations

In 1972, an incident occurred that evidenced the complex scheme in which cordial coexistence was inserted that tried to impel the dictatorship of Alexander Agustín Lanusse and the government of Salvador Allende. On August 15, twenty-five political prisoners³⁴ escaped from the Argentinian prison of Rawson, six of them managed to escape to Chile on a plane hijacked, whereas the remaining took the airport of that city in order to negotiate their surrender. This event not only affected the public image of the dictatorship but also placed the Chilean president in a difficult situation in which there were different matters at stake: prioritizing his good relations with the “Argentinian government” by extraditing “escaped criminals” or acknowledging them as “popular activists” who resisted one of many “dictatorships” and thus provide them with political asylum. A week after the Rawson prison escape, political prisoners who surrendered at the airport and were detained at the base of Almirante Zar, in the Patagonian city of Trelew, were executed in their cells under

and the beginning of 1970 the workers involved in the construction of the *El Chocón* dam rebelled due to their meager wages and dismal work conditions (Mases, Rafart, Lvovich & Quintar, 1998). Moreover, in 1969 and 1972, two important revolts also took place in the cities of *Cipolletti* and *General Roca*, in *Río Negro*, while of a different character, due to their heterogeneous social composition as well as being more of an intraregional dispute than a contestation to the dictatorship, remained expressions of the social movement climate that prevailed in the country (Tapia, 2012; Yappert & Bohoslavsky, 2012).

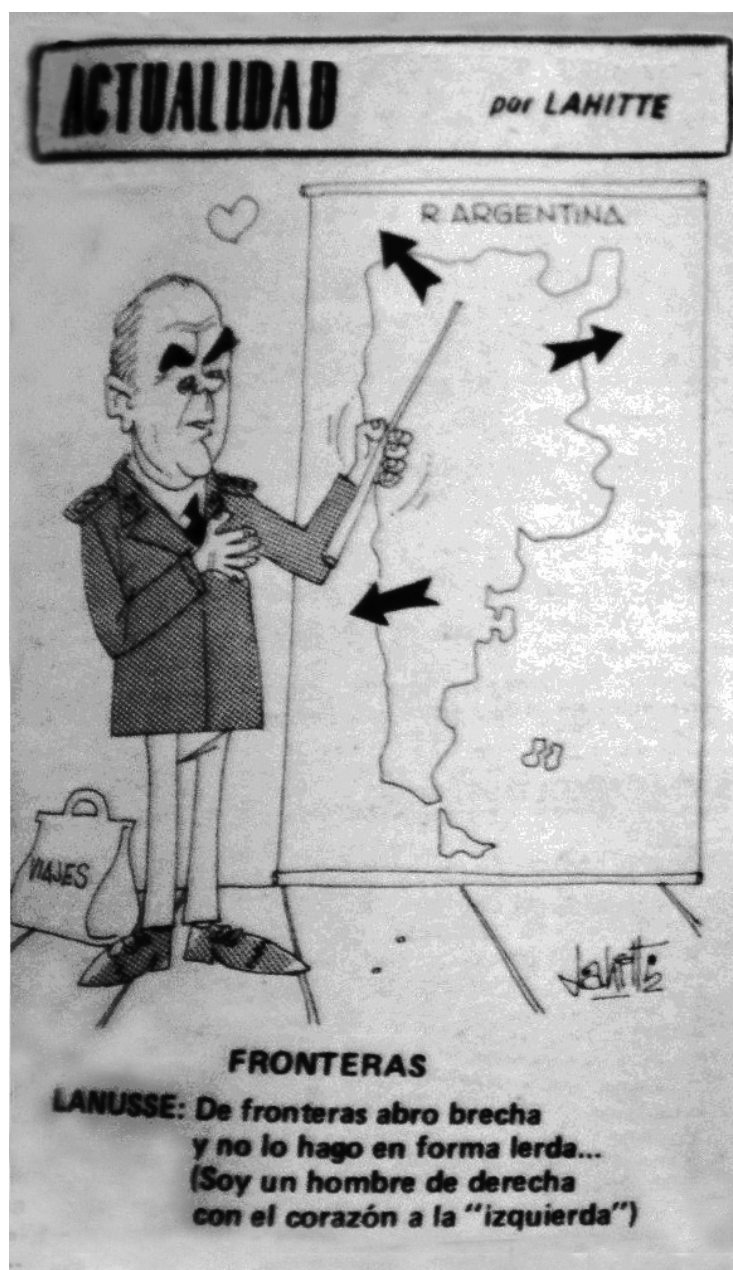
³² Cf. “Las fronteras”, July 31st, 1971.

³³ Cf. “Los viajes del presidente al exterior”, March 16th, 1972.

³⁴ The detainees were members of the guerilla organizations *Montoneros*, *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* (FAR) and the *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP). These groups that surfaced between 1969 and 1970 shared the conviction that the current system of domination, of a semi-colonial type, now lay in violence and that only a different violence could defeat it (Altamirano, 2007, pp. 123-124).

The pretext of attempted escape. This crime would drastically change the negotiating environment between the Argentinian dictatorship and the Chilean government.

Figure 1: Political cartoon published by the *Río Negro*



Note: The political cartoons published by the *Río Negro* in the "Current Affairs" section were drawn by Carlos Alberto Lahitte, an Argentinian cartoonist who also published in the newspaper *La Nueva Provincia*.

Source: *Río Negro*, October 21st, 1971.

At first, news regarding the escape published by the *Río Negro* were reported in the police section of the newspaper, concealing its more political nature. In this manner, it created a limit that established a divide between legality and illegality, a principle through which the different discourses were regulated and prioritized.³⁵ This news coverage defined an *us* comprised of those who were within the law whereas a *them* described the groups that had decided to break said law for reasons that were not clearly expressed. Thus, the classificatory scheme in play established a binary field in which “extremists” and “forces of order” were antagonized³⁶ (Azcoitia, 2014).

This interpretative principle, functional to the discourse of the dictatorship, was prolonged regarding the news concerning the situation of the “extremists” who had escaped to Chile. In this news context, the newspaper presented Salvador Allende as a president facing the dilemma of choosing the path of “legality” and extraditing the “extremists”, thus, strengthening relations with Argentina, or breaking accepted compromises and granting the “escapees” political asylum, thus “yielding” to the leftist “pressures” of his country. In this sense, the first news presented various members of the Chilean government, among whom was the president himself, arguing that the decision regarding the request for extradition made by Argentina, under the charge of “air piracy and other common crimes”, was under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Justice. For their part, different articles insistently reported on the concern of the functionaries of the Argentinian dictatorship for the “delay” in the response of the Chilean government, all the while without calling into question that the end result would be the extradition of the “extremists”.³⁷ In this context, the possibility that the “escapees” would continue their trip towards Cuba or Argelia circulated as “versions” but without these being given greater relevance. However, days prior to the executions a spokesperson for the Chilean ministry had advised that while the extradition was under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, the international treaties exempted it from the task in cases of “certainty or serious presumptions that the people subject to extradition would receive the death penalty in their country”.³⁸ It is interesting that, despite the importance that this definition would have to understand the course the conflict would take, the newspaper would never again refer to this opportune clarification in the days that followed.

³⁵ Michel Foucault coined the concept of discourse order to indicate that discourses do not circulate freely in societies, rather that conditions that regulate their creation and circulation through control standards and procedures established by those collectives with the power to do so can be discovered. In discourse societies, the processes of exclusion generally do not entail the annulment of the discourse of the other but rather through the procedures of realignment and rejection. Realignment means to establish an opposition between two terms, one representing “normality” and the other “abnormality”, ultimately acting on “us” and “them”. Rejection entails building a negative image based on some standards or rules that could or could not be explicit, but that are, in any case, elicited (Martin, 1997).

³⁶ Amossy and Herschberg state that the solidified collective representations play a fundamental role in the cohesion of the group and in the consolidation of its unit, the stereotype appears first and foremost as a categorization tool that allows to easily distinguish an “us” and a “them” (Amossy & Herschberg, 2001).

³⁷ Cf. “Adquirió un cariz sangriento el dramático episodio que se vivió en el penal de Rawson” and “Se entregaron en Chile los que lograron huir en avión”, August 18th, 1972; “Chile: Allende afronta una difícil situación”, “El gobierno afronta distintas presiones”, August 19th, 1972; “Detienen en Trelew a un dirigente radical”, August 20th, 1972; “Chile: sin definir aun el caso de los evadidos de Rawson” and “Chile: confuso panorama en torno de la situación de extremistas argentinos”, August 21st, 1972; “Chile: interrogarían a los extremistas”, August 22nd, 1972.

³⁸ Cf. “Chile: los extremistas están a disposición de la Suprema Corte”, August 18th, 1972.

The news regarding the repercussions in Chile were impacted by the tension between those who identified themselves as part of a collective that included the detained “comrades” and those who defined them as “criminals” or “terrorists” who should be extradited. The *Río Negro* was among the former, along with the “youth” of the Leftists Revolutionary Movement, as well as the conspicuous members of the Socialist Party, which at the time represented the most radicalized sector of *Unidad Popular*³⁹. The conservative newspaper *El Mercurio* antagonized this stance and argued that:

The ample admission of foreign extremists, the dissemination of the outward belief that Chile is an open country for the agitators that fight against governments or their people, and the illusion that the Chilean people must express solidarity with the guerrillas, have led to tough problems. This criterion has opened the doors for many undesirable guests.⁴⁰

As with the news referring to the escape, within the pages of the *Río Negro* the position of the Argentinian dictatorship was also on the side of legality, appealing to the international agreements that supported the request for extradition.

However, one week after the escape from Rawson the situation took a radical turn. At dawn on August 22nd, the 19 political prisoners detained at the Almirante Zar base were executed in their cells under the pretext of an escape attempt. In this new open stage following the assassination carried out by the Armed Forces, the government of Salvador Allende made the decision to grant a letter of safe-passage to the six Argentinian refugees, which allowed them to leave Chilean soil and make for Cuba.

For the *Río Negro*, the killing carried out by those who ought to be the keepers of order strained the interpretative principle maintained up until that moment, placing the Armed Forces in the side of illegality. In this new context, articles that ascribed other meanings to the event came forth. These no longer represented the conflict in its legal interpretation but revealed its true political nature (Azcoitia, 2014). Despite this, a “legalist” perspective prevailed in the news coverage regarding the request for extradition, which was spread without nuance condemning the decision of the Chilean government to grant a letter of safe-conduct to the escapees allowing them to make their way to Cuba. While in the days before, as has been stated, the trans-Andean ministry had advised that compliance with the national treaties was suspended so that the subjects of extradition did not “...suffer the death penalty”, an issue that Lanusse was clearly in no condition to guarantee following the executions, this argument was missing in the articles that tried to explain the reasons that motivated the decision of the government of Salvador Allende.⁴¹ The news regarding the departure of the “extremists” towards La Havana did not make any reference to the radical change of scenery generated by the killing that occurred in Trelew, which was reported when covering issues of a national level. This duality in the analysis allowed the *Río Negro* to hold the dictatorship accountable for the assassinations at the Almirante Zar

³⁹ Cf. “Adquirió un cariz sangriento el dramático episodio que se vivió en el penal de Rawson”, August 18th, 1972; “Se entregaron en Chile los que lograron huir en avión”, August 18th, 1972; “Chile: Allende afronta una difícil situación”, August 19th, 1972; “El gobierno afronta distintas presiones”, August 19th, 1972; “Detienen en Trelew a un dirigente radical”, August 20th, 1972.

⁴⁰ Cf. “Comentario periodístico”, August 19th, 1972.

⁴¹ Cf. “Chile: los extremistas están a disposición de la suprema corte”, August 18th, 1972.

base while supporting its strategy before the Chilean government, all without establishing any relation between the informative scenarios.⁴²

The pages of the newspaper explained the decision to grant the safe-conduct focusing all accountability on Salvador Allende, who had finally yielded to the extreme leftist pressures. The articles emphasized time and again that the Chilean president had “inopportunistly” changed his decision, accusing him of breaking the traditional respect that both countries had maintained in view of the binational compromises and agreements.⁴³ Here, it is important to note that by focusing the critiques on the presidential figure, the news inscribed the antagonism on an ideological-political context and not on a national one. In other words, —for the newspaper—the explanation that Allende would have defaulted on the international compromises assumed, it was not due to the fact that it was “Chilean”, an argument that would have been spent from a territorial nationalist matrix, inscribing this decision in an alleged genealogy of “betrayals of our neighbors”, if not in the orientation of the “socialist” of his government.

The *Río Negro* reinforced this construction by re-contextualizing articles published in the national and international press, which allowed it to create a unanimous effect or consensus regarding the “noncompliance” of the socialist president. In this sense, the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* warned that, despite the achieved cordiality “between Marxists and Servicemen”, the decision of the government of the *Unidad Popular* could lead relations “to a dark and hazardous area” as they have “common borders and very clear political differences [...] between a Marxist ideologist and a General career”.⁴⁴ For its part, the “influential liberal newspaper” *El Tiempo*, from Bogotá, qualified the letter of safe-conduct as “a blunder” as it caused “a breach” that was going to be “very difficult to close”.⁴⁵ Among the national newspapers, the *Río Negro* turned to *La Nación*, who qualified the decision as “unfortunate” maintaining that it would probably disrupt “the intelligent and fertile dialogue” that both countries had maintained “above any circumstantial discrepancy in the order of the inspiring doctrines of their political action”. For this newspaper (*La Nación*), the conflict originated simply because Allende did not apply “the norms of law” due to pressure from “sectarian groups [...] of an ultraleftism character”. It argued that the friction between both countries was not of any importance to the escapees because “... their loyalties were limited to the dogmas to which they ascribed and which set their minds to hate”.⁴⁶

For his part, Juan Domingo Perón came across the pages of the *Río Negro* spotlighting the personality of the trans-Andean president for fulfilling his compromises, stating that “those of us who fight for freedom ought to trust in the governments that represent the people”.⁴⁷ However, the voice of the escapees seemed to be more attuned with the dominating version within the pages of the *Río Negro*, which stated that the extradition had been possible “due to the mobilization of the Chilean people” which helped overcome the “hesitation” of the “comrade Salvador Allende”. This divergence about

⁴² Cf. “La sombra en la pared”, August 24th, 1972.

⁴³ Cf. “Podrían abandonar Chile los diez fugados”, August 24th, 1972.

⁴⁴ Cf. . “El gobierno chileno estudia la respuesta que dará a la formal protesta argentina”, August 29th, 1972.

⁴⁵ Cf. “Colombia: comentan la situación entre Argentina y Chile”, August 31st, 1972.

⁴⁶ Cf. “Comentarios acerca de la decisión chilena de dar asilo a extremistas”, August 29th, 1972.

⁴⁷ Cf. “Refirióse Perón a los episodios de Trelew”, August 29th, 1972.

the readings concerning the Chilean processes expressed the deep arguments that were being produced at the heart of Justicialism and that, as we will see, would grow from 1973 onwards.

Finally, around the month of September 1972, the news gave account of the normalization of the binational relations. The return of the Argentinian ambassador to Santiago was interpreted by the press as having “totally overcome” the conflict caused by providing asylum to the “extremists”.⁴⁸ In the pages of the *Río Negro* one could read the words of the representatives of the Chilean government expressing their “will to foster closer ties” of friendship between both countries, defining the incident as a “circumstantial divergence”.⁴⁹

As we have already pointed out, the news regarding the Argentinian-Chilean relations dispensed with the ideological ascriptions of the governments until August 1972, which had barely comprised a reference more descriptive than explanatory. However, parting from the incident caused by the escape from Rawson, the growing preeminence that acquired this dimension in the informational construction of the binational agenda was evidenced in the newspaper.

In this sense, the relations between Argentina and Chile became strained once more after the dictatorship of Alejandro Agustín Lanusse decided to provide political asylum to Walter Roberto Thieme, one of the main referents of the ultra-rightist organization “*Patria y Libertad*”. Concerning the news coverage of this situation, it is interesting to see that Thieme was presented simply as “a singular character” or “a young rightist leader who opposed the government of Allende”, given that in the *Río Negro* one could read that he had staged his own death “...to be able to more comfortably dedicate himself to organize an armed conspiracy intending to overthrow the government” and also that the organization he was leading identified itself with the swastika and the “cult to violence”. This characterization of an “ex-industrial, married, and with three children” that the “leftist Chilean press” accused of smuggling weapons “... to support a coup”⁵⁰ visibly clashed against the systematic employment of the “extremist” anathema used profusely by the newspaper to refer to those involved in the escape from Rawson just a few months before. This strategy of nuancing the pro-coup character of the person was complemented by the lack of articles that questioned the fact that the dictatorship would have granted him political asylum. In this sense, the newspaper simply limited itself to explaining the reasons behind the decision of the Argentinian government using an ideological argument, based on “... the deep sympathy that the FFAA has for movements of the Country and Liberty kind”, as well as diplomatic argument concerning a return “in kind” to the Chilean government for the Trelew incident.⁵¹

Despite the strain caused by this situation, the news regarding the presence of president Allende in the ascension of Héctor J. Cámpora not only returned to the cordial tone that had predominated in the meetings at Salta and Antofagasta, but also revealed a qualitative change in the discourses concerning binational ties, imposing on them a greater political density based on the need for an “anti-imperialist” integration.

⁴⁸ Cf. “Reasumió el embajador argentino en Chile”, September 25th, 1972.

⁴⁹ Cf. “Respondió Chile a la protesta argentina”, September 8th, 1972.

⁵⁰ Cf. “Concedieron asilo político a los dos chilenos detenidos en Mendoza”, May 8th, 1973; “Uno de los asilados políticos habla de su salida de Chile”, May 13th, 1973.

⁵¹ Cf. “Chile: Thieme, un personaje singular de la ultraderecha”, May 21st, 1973.

To understand this new context, it is necessary to review the transformations that Peronism went through during the 1960s and 1970s. In Argentina, the Cuban revolution had created a bridge between nationalism, socialism, and Peronism showing that in Latin America the national movements and not the communist parties might be what would lead their people to socialism. In the context of this radicalized version, the “socialism”, “Peronism”, and the “anti-imperialist fight” created a single semantic field (Sigal, 1991; Sigal & Verón, 2008). The very nomination of Héctor Cámpora as candidate for the Justicialist Liberation Front (FREJULI for its acronym in Spanish)⁵² appeared to respond to this new demand, displacing the syndical sector of the party in favor of the political and youth branches. The latter became the great protagonist of the presidential campaign, ending in victory in March 1973 (Nahmías, 2013; Riz, 1981).

This discursive universe shared by radicalized sectors of the FREJULI and the government of *Unidad Popular* was depicted within the pages of the *Río Negro* in headlines and cover photos that indicated the importance and popularity of Allende, placing him above the rest of the delegations who assisted to the ascension of Cámpora, except for that of the Cuban president Osvaldo Dorticós (1959-1976).⁵³ The news rendered account of the considerable youth presence that followed the movements of the trans-Andean head of state, as well as the chants in his favor connecting the Chile and Cuban political processes with the one that had just begun in Argentina.⁵⁴

In those days, a strong anti-imperialist discourse circulated profusely within the pages of the *Río Negro*, advocating for the Latin American unit. In this line, the words of Salvador Allende celebrating the “reunion of Argentina with a popular government” were inscribed, emphasizing the transcendence of a change that would allow the region to move “together towards its freedom”.⁵⁵ The Chilean president recalled the “mandate of the dignitaries” affirming that it was necessary to fight for an “integrated, independent, and sovereign” America.⁵⁶ The discourse of Héctor Cámpora agreed with these demands by assuming the compromise to support the “close cooperation with the countries of the Developing World and specially with the Latin American countries”. In this sense, the Argentinian head of state also questioned the role of the Organization of American States, stating that this institution was in crisis and did not serve “the purposes of freeing” the people of the region.⁵⁷

⁵² This front was comprised by the Justicialist Party, the Integration and Development Movement, the Christian People's Party, the Conservative People's Party, and the Labor Party, along with a myriad of provincial parties. Their victory in the 1973 elections put an end to the long proscription of Peronism that began following the coup of 1955.

⁵³ Cf. “Allende viaja hoy a la Argentina”, “Se aguarda el arribo de Allende y Dorticós”, May 23rd, 1973; “Dorticó es esperado hoy”, May 24th, 1973.

⁵⁴ Cf. “Hoy llegaría Dorticós”, May 24th, 1973; “Tendremos en pocos años la Argentina liberada”, May 26th, 1973.

⁵⁵ Cf. “Actividades de delegaciones del extranjero”, May 25th, 1973.

⁵⁶ Cf. “Cámpora y Allende reunieron ayer”, May 28th, 1973; “Allende: hay que luchar por una América soberana”, May 29th, 1973.

⁵⁷ Cf. “Exigiré respeto y obediencia de todo el personal militar”, May 26th, 1973.

The condemnation of the coup in Chile and the fear for the revolutionary left-wing

Despite the generalized optimism that the anti-imperialist discourses of Allende and Cámpora appeared to convey, the political context would change radically from one side of the mountain range to the other in the months that followed. In Argentina, the demonstrations of strength of the Peronist left-wing contributed to create a context of crisis of authority that favored the rightist sectors that pressured for the return of Juan Domingo Perón. From the perspective of the leader of the movement, the situation required the reconstruction of the State's power, which would only be achieved with the intervention of the political parties, the syndical bureaucracy, and the Armed Forces (Riz, 1981). Finally, the confrontations of June 20th, 1973, at the airport of Ezeiza revealed the depths of the tensions that had spread within Peronism.⁵⁸ Silvia Sigal and Eliseo Verón (2008) state that during the exile of Perón this conflict had been expressed through the adhesion to different words of the leader; however, there could be only one word in the country, his public word, and it would be the one to denounce the "internal enemy" that had assassinated the true Peronists in Ezeiza. On June 21st, the day following the events, the leader of the movement gave a speech in which he spoke of the *infiltrators*, without mentioning the killing (Sigal & Verón, 2008, pp. 165 and 168). In this new open stage with the return of Perón, Héctor Cámpora stepped down from the presidency and his place was taken by Raúl Lastiri (1973), beginning the ascend of the circle of politicians that had surrounded the old leader in the last years of his exile⁵⁹ (Riz, 1981).

Parallel to the complex political landscape present in Argentina, the depth of the Chilean crisis appeared to have no limits. Between May and September of 1973, the pages of the *Río Negro* rendered account of a delicate scenario where the outbreak of civil war was presented as a certain danger.⁶⁰ In August, the president convened the military once more in order to create another government cabinet; however, this strategy which had helped mitigate the 1972 political crisis was unable to stop the conflict in a context where the government practically did not govern, the people had demobilized, and generals were disobeyed by their subordinates. The parliamentary opposition announced itself to be against the new cabinet and in the face of official pressure general Carlos Prats had to resign, being replaced by general Augusto Pinochet as commander in chief of the army of Chile (Mires, 1989). Finally, on September 11th, 1973, a coup overthrew the democratic government of *Unidad Popular* and resulted in the death of president Salvador Allende. In his first public appearance as a member of the Governing Body, the commander in chief of the Chilean Airforce, Gustavo Leigh Guzmán, clarified part of the ideological

⁵⁸ In the context of the act organized by the definitive return of Juan Domingo Perón, groups from the Peronist right opened fire against a group of Montoneros and Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias that tried to get close to the gallery, which sparked a pitched battle. Ezeiza was constituted with the facing off between two transversalities within Peronism, a rightist and a leftist (Nahmías, 2013).

⁵⁹ As president of the Chamber of Deputies, Raúl Lastiri was third in line for the succession; and after the resignation of Héctor Cámpora and his vice president Solano Lima, he assumed the presidency on July 13th, 1973, ending his brief mandate on October 11th of the same year. The following day Juan Domingo Perón assumed the presidency for the third time. Lastiri was the son-in-law of José López Rega, minister of Social Wellbeing and future responsible for the Anticomunist Alliance of Argentina, an extreme right paramilitary organization.

⁶⁰ Cf. "Chile: parece acentuarse de hora en hora el peligro de una guerra civil", June 26th, 1973.

foundation of the new government by confirming that the country was at war and that the majority of the Chilean people were "...prepared to remove the Marxist cancer to the very last consequences" (Valdivia, 2010, p. 166).

From the start, the *Río Negro* condemned the coup stressing the "popular" character of the overthrown government in its headlines. In its editorial space, it identified itself with the complex situation that existed beyond the mountain range stating that the historical ties and the long border that linked both countries made the "Chilean drama" into a "...national problem...". Despite adjusting the character of Salvador Allende, the newspaper had no hesitation in holding his government accountable for not finding "concrete solutions to the relevant problems", stating that it had been revolutionary in the "ideological field" but "painfully inefficient" in practice. This situation, in addition to the "reciprocal sectarianism" that "filled political life with hate" made it possible to understand the "helplessness" of the system to "solve the aggressiveness of the factions". The newspaper warned with evident concern that in this new context emerging in Chile, the left would find "full justification to their appeal to violence".⁶¹

In the editorial content of the *Río Negro* there was a clear predominance of discourses that condemned the interruption of the "popular government", essentially exalting the character of the deposed president. The initial news qualified the coup as "bloody" and described the situation as "chaotic" and "bleak".⁶² The pages of the newspaper created a context of confrontation between the governing military junta, which defines himself as a responsible for having freed "the nation from the Marxist oppression", and the armed resistance of the "workers" in the "slums" and "industrial areas", along with the "leftist snipers" stationed on the buildings.⁶³ The newspaper even published versions that circulated in Argentina concerning the advance of two columns under the command of Carlos Prats towards Santiago, comprised of soldiers and workers; these versions were quickly refuted following the entry of the Chilean general in Argentina.⁶⁴ While for the readers of the *Río Negro* the streets of Chile seemed to be the next to become the stage of a decisive battle in the class struggle, following the first week of the dictatorship the journalistic information reported that the pockets of resistance were practically under control.⁶⁵ Before the end of September the news concerning the death of Neruda, the prohibition of "Marxist" parties, and of the Unique Workers' Center (CUT for its acronym in Spanish), in addition to the oppressive journalistic information regarding executions, denunciations of torture, and detainments, informed about the depth of the change that began to be imposed across the mountain range.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Cf. "El fin de una experiencia", September 17th, 1973.

⁶² Cf. "Golpe de Estado en Chile: las FFAA asumieron el poder en Chile", September 12th, 1973; "Lucha en Chile", September 13th, 1973; "Desolador panorama en Chile", September 15th, 1973.

⁶³ Cf. "Enfrenta resistencias el régimen militar chileno", September 13th, 1973; "Confusa situación en el vecino país", September 14th, 1973; "Chile vive un clima de confusión", September 15th, 1973.

⁶⁴ Cf. "Confusa situación en Chile", September 14th, 1973; "El Gral. Prats ingresó en territorio argentino", September 16th, 1973.

⁶⁵ Cf. "Chile: tratan de reducir los últimos focos de resistencia", September 16th, 1973.

⁶⁶ Cf. "Hay más de 5000 detenidos en Chile", September 18th, 1973; "La junta de gobierno estudia una nueva política económica", September 20th, 1973; "Chile: declararon ilegales a los partidos marxistas", September 22nd, 1973; "Se realizaron nuevos fusilamientos", September 23rd, 1973; "Denuncian que hubo entre 400 y 500 fusilamientos", "Falleció anoche Pablo Neruda", September 24th, 1973; "La junta militar declaró ilegal a la CUT de Chile", September 27th, 1973; "Más fusilamientos en Chile", September 28th, 1973.

Within the pages of the *Río Negro*, the North-Patagonian region comprised another stage that contributed clues to interpret the political derivations in Chile. The notes concerning the different reactions in the region generated a unanimous effect or consensus regarding the condemnation of the coup. The provincial governments of Río Negro and Neuquén, alongside their respective legislative chambers, the Catholic church, the regional of the General Labor Confederation, Justicialism, the Communist Party, the Radical Civic Union, the Integration and Development Movement, among other forces, coincided in explicitly condemning the institutional interruption in Chile. In this same line, the *Universidad del Comahue* expressed its support to the deposed government, naming its Assembly Hall as “Salvador Allende”.⁶⁷ Predominated in the daily a speech expressing a profound rejection of the imperialist offensive against the process of “Liberation” initiated by the Chilean people. It is worth emphasizing that the usual chronicles regarding the celebrations of the trans-Andean independence that the newspaper published every September 18th became, in this occasion, spaces to denounce the coup and for improvised homages to the memory of president Allende. The North-Patagonian cities of Neuquén, Cipolletti, Roca, Villa Regina, Cinco Saltos, Viedma, and Cutral Co were the stage for events in which the Chilean associations and different vernacular political organizations expressed their adherence to the government of *Unidad Popular* and to the resistance to the dictatorship. According to the newspaper, in Catriel, the attendants showed their solidarity by chanting: “Chilean brethren do not lower the flag as we are willing to cross the mountain range”.⁶⁸ With the effect of truth generated by the words of the “witnesses”, strengthened in this case by the closeness of being inhabitants of the region, the *Río Negro* published the story of two people from Bariloche detained in Chile, in which they gave account of “torture”, “concentration camps”, “summary executions” and “bloody persecutions”.⁶⁹ It is important to note that no news were registered to have occurred in the region concerning confrontations due to political issues between Chilean residents, as was the case of the news coming from the city of Mendoza. It was in this city that tensed discussions occurred between Chilean citizens that were passing through and others who celebrated the coup, having migrated following the victory of Salvador Allende.⁷⁰ This absence could have been due to the social composition of the trans-Andean migration differing between areas. While the region of Cuyo has historically been a place preferred by the Chilean middle and upper classes, the North-Patagonian region, as was indicated at the beginning of the article, became early on the main destination for workers.

In the national scene, the first public declarations of Juan Domingo Perón evidenced the political change that was emerging in Argentina. In them, although he explicitly condemned “military forces overthrowing a government chosen by the people”, at the

⁶⁷ Cf. “Chile: repercusiones en la región”, September 14th, 1973; “Repudió el golpe en Chile, ayer la cámara neuquina, Chile”, September 15th, 1973; “Chile. Reprueban el golpe entidades de la zona, UNC: apoyo al pueblo de Chile en una asamblea”, September 16th, 1973.

⁶⁸ Cf. “Suspenden las fiestas chilenas en V.Regina (sic)”, September 14th, 1973; “Chile”, September 21th, 1973; “La independencia de Chile, conmemoróse”, September 19th, 1973; “Chile. Repudio al golpe de Estado hubo en Viedma”, September 20th, 1973.

⁶⁹ Cf. “Relatos de testigos del golpe militar en Chile”, September 28th, 1973.

⁷⁰ Cf. “El pueblo chileno soporta escasez de alimentos”, September 17th, 1973.

time of stating his causes he also held the “usual suspects” responsible.⁷¹ In an interview on French television, which the *Río Negro* reproduced within its pages, the leader of Justicialism confirmed that Salvador Allende had not been a revolutionary but rather that the “guerrilla fighters” had “pushed him too far and his death was the result”.⁷² The news published by the newspaper presented Perón as being less concerned about the repercussion the Chilean “change of situation” could have on Argentina than turning this political experience into an enlightening example regarding the negative consequences of the “Marxist infiltration” within the popular governments.⁷³ This political identity, placed on a chain of equivalences along with that of “extremist”, “subversive” and “terrorist”, became, once more, a stigmatizing representation (Franco, 2012).

In this new context, an area for discourse was progressively defined where the Chilean dictatorship and the Argentinian government converged, but this time without regard to “national freedom” and “social justice” and instead focusing on the idea that Marxism was a common antagonist.⁷⁴

Concluding thoughts

As a conclusion, we can confirm that between 1970 and 1973, the *Río Negro*, as a border newspaper, presented within its pages a discourse concerning binational relations; in it, the influence of the Latin American context of the 1960s and 1970s, the positioning of the newspaper before national and provincial politics, and the close ties that historically united Chile with the North-Patagonian region alternated as explanatory clues. In these public actions of the newspaper, the conception of the world supported by this medium was combined with the political and economic interests of this journalistic company present in the region since 1912.

In this sense, despite the fact that the first news published concerning the victory of *Unidad Popular* rendered account of the political tensions generated on either side of the mountain range, the newspaper expressed early on, not without caution, its expectations regarding the possibility that the “Chilean path to socialism” could become an antidote for the revolutionary paths which were referenced in the Cuban experience. From this perspective, it urged the Argentinian dictatorship to call for free elections, without proscriptions, at times when the armed conflict acquired a greater presence in the Argentinian political life. This demand of the newspaper can also be explained by

⁷¹ Cf. “Perón condenó el golpe militar en Chile. Manifestó que constituye una fatalidad para el continente”, September 13th, 1973.

⁷² Cf. “Declaración de Perón para la TV francesa”, October 21st, 1973.

⁷³ Cf. “Reportaje a Perón desde Madrid”, October 12th, 1973.

⁷⁴ Cf. “La ‘lucha frontal contra el marxismo’ declaró Perón”, September 30th, 1973; “Severas directivas a gobernadores para la lucha contra el marxismo”, October 3rd, 1973; “A combatir la infiltración en la esfera gremial”, October 3rd, 1973; “Perón afirmó que la guerrilla está dirigida desde el exterior”, October 4th, 1973; “Pinochet acusó al marxismo de haber querido desatar una guerra en Chile”, October 12th, 1973; “La ilegalidad de los partidos marxistas y promarxistas en Chile”, October 25th, 1973; “La junta chilena advirtió que actuará violentamente contra los marxistas”, October 28th, 1973.

the tense relation that the *Río Negro* maintained with the last military interventionist, who stoked historical regional disputes within the young province.

On the other hand, the change in the production and circulation conditions of the discourses evidenced towards the end of 1969 created displacements of meaning that allowed the newspaper to once more place integration as the “historical imperative” to which they needed to subordinate both bordering disputes as well as ideological disputes. In this context, the rapprochement between the dictatorship of Alejandro Agustín Lanusse and the government of Salvador Allende had an enthusiastic promoter in the *Río Negro*, with it expressing its interest in both, the political and economic implications it would bring at the national level, and in the manner that these changes would influence the Patagonian space. The transcendence that the newspaper allocated to these ties became apparent in the disparity of informative coverage regarding Lanusse’s trip through Perú and Chile. Whereas for the former it only published a couple notes concerning protocol aspects and an analysis of the reunion in terms of domestic policy, the news concerning the trip to Antofagasta also included the personal relation between the heads of state, the signed agreements and their impact on the region, in addition to different analyses that rendered account of the advantages of deepening the ties with Chile.

However, starting with the incident caused by the escape from Rawson prison and the executions that followed at Trelew, the ideological identity of the governments began to create a determinant dimension in the newspaper to understand the direction that the relations between both countries were starting to take. The pages of the *Río Negro* clearly expressed this new context, both during the moments of tension caused by the refusal of Allende’s government to deliver “political prisoners” to the Argentinian dictatorship, and during the times in which the integration with Chile appeared to acquire a more “national and anti-imperialist” feature. In both cases the news was centered on the figure of the trans-Andean president; in the former attributing to them the responsibility of breaching the international agreements, whereas for the latter it emphasized their relevance and popularity in the national political scene. Despite this apparent contradiction, in both cases the news ended up favoring the rapprochement with Chile, exalting the presidential figure when this appeared to strengthen a certain spirit of unity between the people and vilifying it when the editorial line of the newspaper needed to enable a division that allowed focusing on Allende the responsibilities concerning the diplomatic tensions, thus differentiating it from the traditional respect to the agreements built as a historical and unchanging characteristic of the binational ties.

Finally, in the context of the institutional collapse that ended with the path to socialism promoted by *Unidad Popular*, the pages of the *Río Negro* evidenced a clear predominance of voices that spoke up to condemn the coup, both at the national and regional levels. In the latter, not only did the different organizations that formed the core of the Chilean migrant community emerged as actors, but so did different North-Patagonian institutions among which stood out governors, provincial legislatures, political parties, syndical centers and universities. This unanimous repudiation to the trans-Andean dictatorship of which the newspaper reported was reinforced in its editorials, in which it warned about the spiral of violence that it foresaw for Latin America by blocking the left of the possibility to implement changes through institutional channels.

To finalize, we want to highlight the contribution of this type of studies, which make it possible to observe the polysemy presented in the media as concepts such as “border”,

“integration” and “migration”, among others that have acquired different meanings in function of the discursive contexts to which they are inscribed. This acquires greater relevance even in the case of the North-Patagonian region, due to it being a region where the ties with Chile do not present a distant and abstract reference. On the contrary, they are a constitutive trait of its history.

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