

For Social Emergencies “We Are 9-1-1”: How Journalists Perform the State in an Argentine Border Town

Ieva Jusionyte, *University of Florida*

ABSTRACT

This article focuses on Puerto Iguazú, an Argentine town bordering Brazil and Paraguay, where the local media create a patchwork of substitute social services that form the basis of governance. More than 1,200 kilometers away from the federal capital, Iguazú was historically neglected by the central government: water shortages, power cuts, natural gas and fuel scarcity, impassable roads, and squatter settlements contributed to infrastructural collapses in a territorial periphery. Local news coverage has been consistently critical of the failing state in Iguazú, treating governmental neglect as social emergency, which requires an urgent media intervention. Through their routine news itineraries and agendas, social solidarity, and assistance campaigns, Iguazú journalists have taken on certain pragmatic functions ordinarily understood to be the task of the government. In reference to Foucault’s theory of capillary power, I call this locally embedded performance of the state, separate from official policies and projects, capillary governance. I pay special attention to the role of infrastructure, showing how different infrastructural networks—from power and water supply to communications technologies—interconnect, at times enabling and other times disabling the work of journalists. Merging anthropology

of journalism with political anthropology, this article analyzes media practices on a remote border, where official governmental policies and actions are tentative and uneven, showing how Iguazú journalists take on the role of state actors. [Keywords: Border, media, journalism, state, governance, Argentina, Triple Frontera]

I will not tire to repeatedly inform you that here in Iguazú,
a natural wonder of the world, we don't have power or water.

—Kelly Ferreyra, *La Voz de Cataratas*, December 13, 2012

The Blackout

For about 24 hours, Puerto Iguazú, a northern Argentine town bordering Brazil and Paraguay, had neither electricity nor running water. It was Sunday, January 30, 2011, the middle of a heavy subtropical summer with temperatures reaching into the high 30s centigrade (over 100°F) with 100 percent humidity. Residents, who were used to gathering for a traditional weekend family *asado*, were leaving meat stores empty-handed: the butchers could not cut, weigh, nor accept payment for the *churrascos* and *costillas*, whole stocks of which had to be thrown away from unplugged freezers. Restaurant chefs, pressured by tourists visiting Iguazú Falls, were carrying buckets of water from an old Mercedes fire tanker, the next-to-last resort in case of a fire emergency. In the evening, an angry crowd assembled in front of the buildings of Electricidad de Misiones S.A. (EMSA, Misiones Electricity, Inc.), whose major shareholder is the provincial government, threatening to set it ablaze. After sunset, more and more anxious people were contacting the authorities to ask for police vehicles to patrol the pitch-black streets. Late that night, using the power from a generator in the nearby town of Wanda, electricity was restored to the town center. Peripheral barrios, however, remained in a blackout until the following morning.

For years, the local media have covered such infrastructural collapses, caused in part by the town's geographical location. Misiones Province is in a peripheral northeastern corner of the Argentine state, and 90 percent of its perimeter is an international borderline—900 km shared with Brazil and 367 km with Paraguay. Due to its peculiar location in relation to the national territory, the province has been called a penetrating wedge or a

puñito (fist), pushing its way between Brazil and Paraguay, a dislocated arm of the nation-state's body (Ferradás 1998). More than 1,200 km away from the federal capital in Buenos Aires, Iguazú was historically neglected by the central government. Water shortages, power cuts, natural gas and fuel scarcity, in addition to other urban development issues such as impassable roads, abandoned public places, and squatter settlements, challenged the residents for decades. National security strategies left Misiones (especially its eastern flank) undeveloped. Throughout the 20th century, larger infrastructural projects were avoided in the area, fearing an armed conflict with Brazil and subsequent seizure of the borderlands. During the years of the military regime (1976-1983), the junta legally defined the border as a buffer zone against a possible attack.

Unlike Brazil, Argentina did not have a program of cultural expansionism and did not invest in strengthening the media on the border. In addition, the topography of Misiones—a hilly jungle terrain—created obstructions for national television or radio signals to reach the remote area. Left without access to the Argentine media, Iguazú residents listened to broadcasts from Brazil and Paraguay—which, in the words of local historian Carlos Villalba, “entered like gunshots.”¹ Therefore, many Iguazúenses grew up speaking Portuguese or *portuñol*, a colloquial mix of Portuguese and Spanish. “The signal of Argentine public television barely reached this place and it was very bad. We did not know whether we were living in Argentina or in Brazil,” explained one popular radio director. It was in these infrastructural and legislative gaps of the state that the local media outlets in Iguazú were created. Though in 1972 the strategic town was selected as the location for the regional branch of the national radio, most of the other radios founded in the area were known as *FM truchas* (fake FMs) or *radios piratas* (pirate radios). Together with the first local cable television channels, these radios were not legal because they bypassed official registration and did not possess licenses from the Comité Federal de Radiodifusión (COMFER, the Federal Broadcasting Committee²). However, border residents welcomed them as legitimate: these pirate radios broadcast locally relevant news in Spanish, thereby incorporating Iguazúenses into the Argentine national public sphere. Private Argentine media multiplied on the border with Brazil and Paraguay *despite* the inefficiency of the state and, in addition to promoting Spanish language and extending an Argentine imagined community towards the periphery, took on even some of its more practical functions.

Merging anthropology of journalism with political anthropology, this article analyzes media practices on a remote border, where official governmental policies and actions are tentative and uneven. I will show how media production on the margins of the state includes creating a patchwork of substitute social services that form the basis of governance. This argument builds upon and expands the scholarship that criticizes the separation between state and society. An elusive object of examination, the state has often been studied from two levels of analysis: as the state-system and as the state-idea (Abrams 2006:122), where the former is “a palpable nexus of practice and institutional structure centered in government,” whereas the latter is an ideological project, “an exercise in legitimation.” Following a similar approach, anthropologist Akhil Gupta (1995) distinguishes between daily encounters that people have with government bureaucracies and symbolic representations in the press that shape their imaginings of the state. I argue that in studying the media as a form of governance, we can see how these two dimensions of the state—the institutional and the discursive—are intertwined. In Iguazú, although institutions and discourses of the state might appear to be weak from a political science perspective (Migdal 1988, O’Donnell 1993), to borrow Begoña Aretxaga’s formulation, “there is not a deficit of state but an excess of statehood practices: too many actors competing to perform as state” (2005:258). Here, the state-making project is comprised of public and private initiatives that overlap, contradict, and expand each other, eventually achieving the same structural state effect (see Mitchell 1999, Trouillot 2001). Focusing on border journalists as local state actors, this article further expands the discussion started by Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004), who argue that physical spaces and administrative practices that constitute the margins, experienced or undone through their local illegibility, are central to understanding the very nature of the state.

Media and the state are interconnected in a number of ways. As state ideologues, journalists often reproduce state power; news media create, legitimate, and circulate national imaginaries and state ideologies (Anderson 1991, Herman and Chomsky 1988). However, as the “Fourth Estate,” journalists are also civic intellectuals, criticizing the government from an, at least partially, autonomous public sphere (Habermas 1989), advocating for transparency and questioning governmental policies. A decade after the military dictatorship, known as the Dirty War (1976-1983), ended in Argentina, media inquiries were even seen as capable of

replacing legal investigations (Martini and Luchessi 2004:145). Enacting the hallmark functions of democratic free press on the national stage, Argentine journalists assumed roles that other actors were poorly fulfilling, such as reviving debates over social injustice, corruption, and impunity (Grimson 2002:39, Romero 2002:331). As scholars working in Latin America have shown, the media contributes to the quality of democracy and the level of governmental accountability (Hughes 2006, Lawson 2002, Porto 2012). However, the media also encounters difficulties in their role as an independent watchdog (Waisbord 2000) because, historically and to this day, governments in the region have been successful in using the media as a tool of power, manipulating their complacency through state advertising, clientelism, and corruption, as well as violent repression (Rockwell and Janus 2003). When the largest Argentine daily, *Clarín*, began supporting the protests of the agricultural sector in 2008, then-president Néstor Kirchner started a crusade against the media critical of the national government. His wife Cristina Fernández, when elected as president, continued antagonism towards the powerful media companies. In 2010, she signed into effect a new media law, aiming to break up the monopoly of the largest multimedia conglomerate, Grupo Clarín. Though many Argentines celebrated the democratization of the media that the law was thought to bring about, critics abounded both inside and outside of the country. This law was accompanied by other governmental practices, which were internationally criticized for withholding public advertising from news outlets that questioned the policies of the Kirchner administration. The conflict between popular over-reliance on the state, historically fostered by Peronist governments, and a suspicion of the state due to the legacy of authoritarian rule is at the core of the way Argentines, including journalists, relate to their government. The media embody this contradiction and uncertainty by maneuvering between discursively strengthening and destabilizing ideologies of the rule of law, democratic citizenship, and the politics of accountability.

Yet, in addition to nationwide disagreements between the Argentine government and the mass media monopolies, the media replace the re-treating neoliberal state on a more pragmatic level, particularly locally. In this article, I focus on the role of Iguazú media producers in local governance. In an important attempt to draw attention to the relationship between journalism and the state, sociologist Silvio Waisbord (2007) suggested that democratic journalism is not viable as long as states are

unable to meet their basic obligations, such as the provision of security and enforcement of the rule of law and order. Yet, Waisbord argues, even in situations of statelessness, which are hostile to the functioning of the press, journalism—in addition to defining nations and strengthening civil society—can use its capacity to monitor state actions, identify mechanisms of accountability, and form news agenda, in order to contribute to state-building. In this article, I focus on the more direct, hands-on work of enacting the state, in which the local media engage. Building on ethnographic scholarship that analyzes the complex nexus between media and state practices (Abu-Lughod 2005, Bishara 2008, Hasty 2006), particularly the communal uses of media production as a means of participation in the national state (Himpele 2008, Schiller 2011), I move beyond their primary concern with the media as a contested space of representation for enacting certain political communities and performing state sovereignties. Rather, extending the work on how the media helps people solve social problems, such as providing health or legal assistance (Himpele 2008), I show how through their routine news itineraries and agendas Iguazú journalists perform certain pragmatic functions ordinarily understood to be the task of the government. I call this locally embedded performance of the state, separate from official policies and projects, *capillary governance*, in reference to Michel Foucault’s (1977) theory of capillary power.

Instead of undertaking social advocacy issues introduced by other civic groups (see, for example, Waisbord 2009), Iguazú journalists take initiative to practically patch up the failing state infrastructure. Thereby they take on the role of state actors, further blurring the artificial but politically pertinent separation between state and society (Mitchell 1999). This article will reveal how in a small border community, instead of being contradictory and incompatible, the major roles of journalists vis-à-vis the state—as critics and clientelistic supporters—overlap in surprisingly productive ways. In their proclaimed role as mediators between state and society, journalists simultaneously bridge the two domains, embracing their function in both, and produce the effect of their separateness. I pay special attention to the role of infrastructure that, as Brian Larkin (2008) has eloquently shown in his study of Nigerian media technologies, produce both signal and noise, directly affecting the modes of rule. In this case I look at how different infrastructural networks—from power and water supply to communications technologies—interconnect, at times enabling and other times disabling the work of journalists as media

producers and state actors. Criticizing negligent governments that fail to secure infrastructural connections and, at the same time, taking on the capillary functions of governance by providing these services, journalists do nothing less than perform the state.

Echoes of the Failing State

When it was founded at the beginning of the 20th century, Puerto Iguazú was initially settled by the families of the military, sent to the frontier, and later grew as the employees of Iguazú National Park and their families moved into the area. Though the town expanded slowly over the decades, it was left out of the large regional development schemes agreed upon by Brazil and Paraguay: including the construction of the Itaipú Hydroelectric Dam, these projects resulted in a significant growth of the neighboring cities—Paraguayan Ciudad del Este and Brazilian Foz do Iguaçu. However, due to its strategic site at the crossroads between low tax regime in Paraguay and the Brazilian and Argentine metropolises on the Atlantic Coast, cross-border trade—legal commerce as well as contraband and drug trafficking—formed the core of the nascent local economy (Hudson 2003, Lewis 2006). The recent influx of visitors to the Iguazú Falls, reaching its highest peak thus far in 2011, caused the expansion of the tourism-oriented service sector and, hence, contributed to further haphazard growth of Puerto Iguazú. All of these forces, directly or indirectly, combined to shape the media landscape in the area, eventually creating the niche for journalists to take on the roles of state actors.

On the evening of February 1, 2011, two days after the blackout, municipal officials, heads of the security forces, and other important state functionaries gathered in a small one-floor building on Córdoba Avenue. It was the annual inauguration of the town council session period. Organizers of the event opened the sliding wall to the inner yard to accommodate the press, but activists who had brought banners to the event were left to stand outside. Usually journalists and commoners share the space inside, separated from the councilors by a wooden barrier, but this time the entire room was filled with seats reserved for government invitees. Throughout the year, weekly sessions of Honorable Concejo Deliberante (HCD, Honorable Town Council) create the routine meeting space for the Iguazú media community, where, while recording hours of proceedings, they share *mate*, a traditional herbal infusion served from a gourd, and

information. This particular evening drew even more journalists than usual because it was the inaugural event after a two-month-long summer break. There were not more than a dozen of them, and their affiliations and connections to the different media organizations and branches of the state that they worked for were unstable to the point of being redundant, at the least, and at times contradictory.

Mario Antonowicz came as the correspondent of the Posadas-based state television channel controlled by the provincial government—Canal 12. He also owns and directs local Radio Yguazú Misiones, which has a partnership with Radio Provincia de Misiones and Radio del Plata from Buenos Aires, both pro-government stations. The latter is owned by Electroingeniería S.A., a large engineering company which has been favored by the Kirchner government in bidding for important public constructions in Argentina. Since 2010, Radio Yguazú has also been linked to the digital daily *Iguazú Noticias*, which in 2007 was created by a young web developer and entrepreneur from Buenos Aires, Pablo Longo. In addition to managing his own media business and a job in the General Direction of Migration, Pablo also worked for the president of the town council, Roberto Arevalo. A recent photography enthusiast, Pablo was taking pictures of the inaugural session. Darío Chamorro, the cameraman for C.V.I. Canal 5, the local cable television channel, set up equipment for live broadcasting, while TV news reporters Viviana Villar and Tomas Mema were mingling with their colleagues. Among them was Noelia Villa, local correspondent of the oldest provincial daily *El Territorio*, who was also recently hired by *Iguazú Noticias*; Horacio Valdés, who had quit C.V.I. in 2010 to become the director of his own radio, Radio T; Kelly Ferreyra, the director of a local digital daily *La Voz de Cataratas*; Jorgelina Bonetto, who quit *La Voz de Cataratas* for Radio Yguazú and later left the latter to accept a job in the municipal press department; and a few others.

Representing the ruling party Frente Renovador de la Concordia (Front for the Renewal of Concord, usually shortened to “Renovación” [Renewal], which in Misiones formed by uniting two main Argentine parties—Peronists and radicals), the mayor of Iguazú Claudio Raúl Filippa read a long document, detailing the accomplishments of the executive government in 2010 and their plans for 2011. He patiently named dozens of streets that had been paved and where drainage systems had been installed, citing the percentages of work completed. Then he indicated which streets would be fixed with the money from the national soya fund

in 2011, and presented the summary of other projects prepared by each municipal department. As the mayor, in his monotonous voice, continued listing the details of these future works, posters attached to the high windows by residents standing outside the building expressed in writing what they were prohibited to say aloud: “Without water, without power, with feces flowing...Long lives dengue!”

Disregarding them, the mayor continued: “Water: the new system lines have been finished; the old pipes are being connected to the new; the installation of house meters is about to be completed. The new water pipeline from Iguazú River has been finished; work on the Water Treatment Plant in the center and in the Water Pump Station on Río Iguazú is under way. It is estimated that the work will be completed halfway through the year.” Although only two days passed since the infrastructural collapse had paralyzed the town, this was the only remark regarding running water in the entire 45-page long document in the mayor’s hands. Oblivious of the actual situation Iguazú residents found themselves in, the speech did not mention the ongoing electrical power problems at all.

Filippa did not take any questions. After the mayor’s speech, the council declared the 2011-session period open and postponed the next meeting for one month, in order to complete renovations to the building. Repairs lasted longer than planned and the first regular HCD session was held on March 31. Journalists and common residents alike commented that with no scheduled sessions the councilors could focus on their campaigns for the upcoming June election instead of trying to solve current Iguazú problems. HCD sessions were broadly considered and used as the forum of complaints and debates, a rather deformed relic institution of the public sphere. In practice, the multiplicity of voices and destructive comments by the councilors and pro- and anti-government activists that would come to open sessions with banners, fishing rods, and rubber toys to express their agreement or discontent, interrupting the proceedings, rarely allowed for a consensus on action. Though unproductive and scandalous, council sessions were, nevertheless, a space of public conversation. One of the modifications in the building under renovation suggested by the local government was a glass wall separating the councilors from the audience, allowing them to watch the meetings but not be heard. The glass wall project caused such uproar among the supporters of both the ruling party and the opposition that, once completed, it lasted only a few months. Even though the alternative was a loud, chaotic, and disruptive public

attending the sessions, which were at times policed by local law enforcement agents, passively observing through the glass how elected officials performed power was even less acceptable to Iguazúenses.

Yet silence hung over Iguazú in those first months of 2011. With no council sessions and a mayor who never held press conferences, the town was left in the dark as to the reasons behind and potential solutions to the precarious nature of their infrastructural situation. In this void, the media became the messengers of the residents affected by the blackouts. Their coverage of state failures to provide adequate living conditions to the town's residents was a patchwork of official facts and individual opinions. As mediators between the government and the residents, from the top down they provided official information on technical aspects of the infrastructural collapse as well as the planning agenda and timetable. From the bottom up, they channeled voices of discontent that tired residents volunteered in order to be heard by those in power. The picture of the situation, emerging from their coverage, was as tragic as it was comic.

In Guaraní, *y* is the word for “big” and *ûasú* refers to “water.” “I put it as *Radio Yguazú* with a *y* because it represents what this area is. *Yguazú* means big water, while *Iguazú*, as everybody writes it, does not mean anything,” Mario Antonowicz liked to explain the improper official spelling of the town's name and how he corrected it. The town was built on the intersection of the Iguazú and Paraná rivers, a few dozen kilometers from the famous Iguazú Falls whose average annual flow of 1,746 m³/s (61,660 cubic feet) is the second greatest in the world. For years, in his morning radio show and on his Facebook account, Mario cited the figures of water volume for the falls and the number of visitors that come to see it every day. However, unlike the natural tourist attraction, the problem of urban water distribution, persistent for years, received much less media attention.

The Iguazú water system was originally designed to supply approximately 15,000 residents (*Primera Edición* 2010), but the town has been rapidly growing and, according to the October 2010 census, the population has increased to 82,227 (INDEC, Censo Nacional de Población, Hogares y Viviendas 2010). As a result of the fast and haphazard urban growth, municipal infrastructure has started to fail. In 2006, the utility company—Instituto Misionero de Agua y Saneamiento (IMAS, Misiones Institute of Water and Sanitation), created by the Provincial Ministry of Economics and Public Works—won a bid to remodel and expand the potable water system in Iguazú. IMAS constructed four new purification units, each of

them with a capacity of 100 cubic meters, in addition to a new reinforced concrete reservoir, which could hold 1,080 cubic meters. The modernization project also included the improvement of the distribution system by constructing more than 60,000 meters of pipes, and 2,260 new home connections, changing the deficient connections, and installing volume meters. As of 2011, however, the project was still under way.

For months at a time, the peripheral barrios, such as Santa Rosa, San Lucas, Barrio Obrero, or Las Orquídeas, were not getting running water. On December 29, 2010, one resident of Santa Rosa commented to *La Voz de Cataratas* that they had not received a single drop of water since September 1. The news article included the journalist's reflection that, "It is unfortunate that these problems continue and people keep suffering, while we publish heat alerts, informing that they need to drink a lot of water. What happens to those who don't have it?" (*La Voz de Cataratas* 2010b). Only once during the summer did the press get a hold of the mayor of Iguazú. He was accompanying the Minister of Health Juan Manzur and the Governor of Misiones Maurice Closs on a dengue supervision campaign in one of the barrios. "Historically Iguazú has had inconveniences with water; there were times when 80 percent of the population didn't have water," said Filippa, reassuring journalists that the problem would be solved when the major renovation plan was finished later that year. In the meanwhile, the municipality set aside one 7,000-liter tanker to circulate in the barrios and deliver a maximum of 1,000 liters of water per household based on an ever-expanding list. Siding with the angry residents, the mayor even admitted: "I don't have water in my house either, but I am conscious that it needs to be preserved" (*Radio Cataratas* 2011a). Governor Closs took a similar stance regarding the electricity: when on January 31, a follower wrote on the Governor's Twitter page that Iguazú had had no power for 24 hours, Closs responded with a tweet: "We need help. When we ask to reduce consumption, nobody cooperates."

The reason behind the collapse on January 30—when there was no running water at all, not even in the municipal deposits—was a power failure. A transformer that sends electricity to Iguazú broke down, causing an interruption in the pumping of water. Power, like water, is a structural problem in this border town: the supply is too scarce for the dramatically increased population. In January 2011, Iguazú was producing a total of 20 megawatts of energy, but the demand in town, which is visited each year by more than a million tourists who stay in air-conditioned hotels,

markedly exceeded the supply. During the crisis, in the beginning of 2011, the authorities were asking major hotels to use their own power generators to decrease demand during peak hours and promising to triple energy production to 60 megawatts during the first trimester of that year, which would be at least double the demand of 23-30 megawatts (*Radio Cataratas* 2011c). Though often whispered among residents, another reason behind such a high demand for electricity was the squatters who occupy municipal and private terrains and hook onto the power lines that bring electricity from the Urugua-í Dam, repeatedly causing system failures. Yet journalists did not cover this issue.

Rather, they focused on numbers, technical explanations, and new timetables for solutions offered by the government. They also frequently echoed doctors who warned about an increase in diarrhea and vomiting cases in the local hospital. “We are in a complicated situation. It is really worrisome to see children and entire families with symptoms of gastrointestinal illnesses [...]. We have a problem that needs to be solved soon because we are a center of global tourism and the issues of water and electricity are already creating alerts,” said pediatrician Gabriel Antueno to *Iguazú Noticias* (Gimenez 2011). The same doctor also spoke to *Radio Cataratas*, expressing his worries about the community’s well-being and warning residents not to purchase food in larger quantities because “we have so many blackouts and blackouts for so many days in a row that probably many food products have not resisted becoming contaminated” (*Radio Cataratas* 2011b). An investigation I conducted for *La Voz de Cataratas* showed that due to extended power cuts, health centers in the peripheral barrios, such as Barrio Belén, the area of “2 million *hectáreas*” (hectares) and the indigenous community Fortin Mbororé, neither of which have power generators, lost their entire supply of vaccines and other medications (*La Voz de Cataratas* 2011a).

The Voice and the Wolf

Iguazú journalists who lived through the blackout of January 30, 2011, aware of the double-sided nature of news as both representations and productions of social reality, responded to their experiences in different ways. The most direct criticism of the government came from Kelly Ferreyra, the 41-year-old owner and editor-in-chief of *La Voz de Cataratas* and a single mother of two teenagers. Both spheres of her

life—the family and the media business—merge under the roof of a rented house in Barrio 155 Viviendas, a neighborhood of nearly uniform houses constructed by Instituto Provincial del Desarrollo Habitacional (IPRODHA, the Provincial Housing Development Institute). In an editorial published the day after the blackout, Kelly complained about the obstacles to a *todo terreno* (four-wheel drive) journalist: as she juggled between the role of a single parent and the director of the most widely read digital daily, household chores were just as important as reporting breaking news, and kitchen appliances mattered as much as the tools of journalistic production. Kelly admitted that due to continuous blackouts her new refrigerator broke down, but EMSA would not admit their responsibility and would neither compensate her for repair services nor the family's lost food. She wrote:

I am really hurt and I feel powerless in my job to inform. I did all I could from my laptop, until its battery died, and from my cell phone, which I managed to charge in a hotel. Nobody answered me. Why are we not given explanations as to what is happening? Iguazú, a tourist city *par excellence*, was without power. This is the truth, although you, dear colleagues, want to cover it up because you can't go against the government. It's a sad reality and media powerlessness. (Ferreya 2011)

Local writer and journalist Hugo López eloquently conveyed the parody of the situation in which Iguazúenses found themselves. In an opinion piece published by *La Voz de Cataratas*, Hugo satirized how Iguazú residents, among them local journalists, failed to be good actors of the Argentine state. It was their presumed ignorance vis-à-vis their proper role as citizens that resulted in the collapse of the very state infrastructure that entrapped them:

Look at this. There is a lack of fuel in Iguazú because we are consuming too much. We—they said—you and me, my dear neighbor. Such was the conclusion Iguazú councilors and official representatives made in a meeting held to “look for solutions.”

It is not because our governors are unable to “realize” that it is necessary to build new distilleries in Argentina, to fill more fuel deposits in the provinces, or to find a way to promote the production

of alternative fuel; in fact we consume too much. How cruel! How stupid we are!

And we are not only guilty for the lack of fuel, but also, according to our governor, we are guilty for the infinite power cuts and that the new transformer that the province bought does not work. How dare we turn on the light! How brutal we are!

[...] Don't be ignorant, friend! How would you blame the government?! And even more, how would you dare to hook onto the power lines in areas where you have been promised cables would be installed a while ago! You should not plug in your fridge and—even less—your computer, if all you want to do is check your Facebook!

It is the same with the water. It is not because the government is taking longer than expected to finish the works [...]; in fact, you should not bathe that much! Why do you drink so much water? You should protect the environment. Use a wet cloth and that's it!

But you can't complain about the incomplete sanitation system either. [...] Understand once and for all, “*Nãnde jeyma la culpable*” [“We are the guilty” in the mix of Guaraní and Spanish]. That is why they say we need to consume less. Don't you see that this new pipe gets clogged fast? It is not because the government calculated wrong. I shit too much, friend! (López 2011)

Due to logistical problems—no electricity meant no computers, no Internet, and no radio nor television broadcasting—news about the infrastructural collapse started to hit the headlines only the following day. It did not get homogeneous coverage. Many local media outlets, including the television channel and the national radio branch, were still closed for summer vacation. In the capital of the Misiones Province, *Primera Edición*, which has their own correspondent in Iguazú, published a few extensive articles putting the blackout into the larger context of infrastructural development in the province, but most of the other media outlets, receiving advertising from the provincial government or companies linked to it, avoided the subject or reported that the issue had been completely resolved. Finally, the national press in Buenos Aires, with the exception of *Perfil*, was quiet because the information from Iguazú—silenced, manipulated, and incommunicable without power—was unable to get through to the capital.

In reaction to infrastructural uncertainties, Iguazú journalists were carving out the citizenry and the state as two domains of action: whereas the anti-governmental media sided with the former, the pro-governmental media supported the latter. While *La Voz de Cataratas* (translated as *The Voice of the Waterfalls*) struggled to overcome technical limitations in an attempt to speak up about the situation and denounce the failing state, the director of *Radio Yguazú*, Mario Antonowicz, recalled the tale of the wolf in order to justify withholding news that would damage the government's image for the sake of greater trust between the residents and the ruling party. Months before the collapse, he explained to me why his media company was called *oficialista* (pro-government):

I think they call it oficialista because we want to handle information responsibly. [...] Complaint for a complaint's sake is of no use because among so many complaints serious, real issues that need solutions do not get through. It is like in that tale about the wolf [...]: when it finally came, nobody believed, nobody went hiding, and a disaster happened.³

Many Iguazú journalists and politicians are used to swapping their roles, that is, exchanging their positions in the media for those in the government office and vice versa, thereby erasing any clear separation between media and politics. By the beginning of 2011, the town had three local television channels, at least seven local radio stations, and two digital dailies. Except for the national radio, which had very limited broadcasting, these companies, some of which had only a few employees, were private and owned by local politicians and businesspeople. Hence, it is not surprising that their local news production was tactical in the larger struggle to gain or to maintain power. Choosing what events or situations become public stories is driven by the competition for resources: political assignments translated into economic benefits. However, Iguazú media, although usually split in fights between political alliances, were generally united in their widely pronounced aim to *cuidar el destino* (to save, or care for the destination), ensuring that tourists come to the waterfalls and spend their money to fuel the local economy. This agenda required that the news circulated beyond the town, and especially in the national media, be filtered. Instead of the common formula, which measures the

newsworthiness of stories based on how bad an event described is, in Iguazú quite often only good news was news.

Yet neither the pro- or anti-governmental orientation of journalists and media politicians, nor their silence resulting from economic incentives to attract visitors to the area are sufficient to explain the relationship between the Iguazú media and the state. Even their criticism of the government's failures often results in practical solutions to social problems that journalists themselves provide. That the circulation of media messages, both critical and supportive of the government, was constrained by the fragmented, unreliable infrastructure was a problem for all journalists in both their professional and personal lives. Electrical power is a necessity for news making, distribution, and reception, just as well as for household chores. Instead of signal, transmitting messages between the border and the capital, there was noise, or technical interference (Larkin 2008), which contributed to creating and maintaining the social breakdown of news from Iguazú, preventing them from entering the national agenda. Without electrical power, the news did not get through to the capital, leaving Misiones even further marginalized. As the rest of this article will show, working under such infrastructurally precarious conditions, where state functions are tentative and uneven, rather than circulating discontent, journalists more often end up enacting capillary governance by literally extending social and infrastructural services, including electricity and even security, to residents that lack it. Though divided into political factions, striving for municipal power and engaging in, at times, counterhegemonic projects, as journalists take on the role of governance, they uphold rather than undermine the state.

“We Are 9-1-1”

Cable Video Imagen (C.V.I.) was still on summer break during the January 30 blackout: The regular 2011 broadcast season was not to start until late February. However, in their everyday news coverage both before and after this particular event, the company had been persistently denouncing the absence of the state in Iguazú. Ironically, against their political intentions to take over the municipal government in 2011, rather than challenging and destabilizing the government, the company's provision of social services to local residents was a mode of enacting state functions—a role they continued even after one of their candidates, Marcelo Sánchez, became the new mayor of Iguazú. Such commitment to social support, often

mobilized for political projects, but other times carried out with less fanfare, was the staple of the media outlet. Created as a risky entrepreneurial project over the years, the company formed a clientelistic relationship with the town's residents, pragmatically enacting the very state that the channel's politicians were pronouncing as being weak or even absent in the peripheral border area.

Established in 1989, Cable Video Imagen (C.V.I.) Canal 5 is an LLC (limited liability company), to this day owned and directed by its original founders: Claudio Alvarez is long-term leading politician in the Peronist Partido Justicialista and a former member of the Misiones Chamber of Deputies; Juancho Montejano is a member of the oppositional Radical Civic Union who, despite his political views, continues his job in the *repetidora* (broadcast translator) of the governmental Canal 12; and Oscar Perrone is a local candidate of Partido Justicialista (the fourth major shareholder, Victor Bareiro, remains the only associate not heavily involved in politics). According to data from August 2010, C.V.I. had 3,650 subscribers, though the number of viewers was likely many times bigger, if the whole household is accounted for. In addition to the cable television service, which is the main activity of the company, C.V.I. has a radio station, FM Visión 101.9, opened in 1997, as well as a free-to-air (FTA) channel, Canal 22UHF, officially aimed at people who could not afford to pay 118 pesos (approximately \$30 USD) per month for cable or who lived outside of the cable coverage area, even though in practice the signal was too weak to reach most of the peripheral barrios.

C.V.I. news coverage has been consistently critical of the failing state in Iguazú. In 2010 and 2011, governmental neglect was treated as social emergencies, requiring an urgent media intervention. Iguazú residents would call the media company or contact journalists via their personal cell phones to express outrage about the ignorance or injustice on behalf of different municipal offices in charge of solving their specific problems. Television news crews would then conduct daily newsgathering trips to report on the perceived critical situation by interviewing distraught residents. An excerpt from my fieldnotes, taken while I was accompanying C.V.I. news reporters Darío and Vivi, shows how often citizens directly influenced the news itinerary:

Fieldnotes, June 28, 2010. Today our first destination is Barrio Belén. Back in 2007 the town council approved a project to pave

the road and construct gutters in the area; however the promise has not been fulfilled, as two women who called the news team, Fabiana and Monica, complain. Darío prepares the camera, while Vivi takes out the microphone. Fabiana says that the previous week when a neighbor’s house was burning, firefighters could not pass through the flooded path to reach it. The muddy stretch of red soil, already overgrown with weed, would not allow for an ambulance to pass either. Monica adds: “They promise, promise, and never do anything. We are ten families living here.” After the interview Darío, who has been the cameraman for the channel for more than ten years, goes further down the path to film the burnt house and the buildings surrounding it.

As soon as we get back to the car Darío receives a call from the C.V.I. office: There is a woman who wants to make an announcement about her son’s disappearance. When we return to the headquarters in Villa Alta señora Dominga, a blond middle-aged woman takes out the national identity card of her son and holds it in front of her chest to be filmed. In tears she says that her thirteen-year-old son had gone to school and has not returned home. He has no cell phone. She visited the school, but he was not there. Darío tries to comfort señora Dominga, and Vivi tells her she should file a complaint with the police. She is escorted to the radio studio to make an announcement in the morning show. TV news is at 9:00 pm, and the matter is urgent. Back in the car Vivi comments: “We are 9-1-1. People call us about traffic accidents, about missing children.”

Next we go to the town center, carefully maneuvering the white Renault Transporter van with C.V.I. logos down the busy Avenida Republica Argentina, trying to avoid the dangerous potholes in the cracked asphalt. Behind a building that belongs to the provincial government and right next to Banco Nación on the corner of the major traffic artery, Avenida Victoria Aguirre, there is an unattended backyard full of weeds and trash. On the other side of the yard there is a kindergarten. Gladys Inglan, the director of the kindergarten, laments they need to close the windows because of the odor of trash. They have seen spiders in the patio. Worried, she asks what would happen if a spider bites a child. When the interview is finished, Darío stays on to do more shots of the backyard from different angles, whereas Vivi returns to the car and fetches some mate.

We make a few more turns around town, visiting the police to hear the updates on traffic accidents and crime, before returning to the studio, where Vivi and Darío pre-record the evening news program. Apparently after hearing the report on the radio the missing child came back home, so the interview with señora Dominga is not included in the evening news.

Later that week when we passed the intersection of Victoria Aguirre and Martha Schwarz, the news team noticed that the kindergarten had been cleared of weeds and trash. Two out of three reports yielded immediate results.

The focus of such news is primarily the failure of the municipality and the provincial government to provide adequate living conditions for the residents of Iguazú: impassable roads, potholes in the streets, lack of gutters, and neglect of public spaces are among the most common, almost daily, topics covered in the evening news next to other recurrent themes such as water shortage, unpredictable electricity cuts, and lack of fuel and gas. In Iguazú, the media are not careful in distinguishing between *estado* (state) as an abstract political community and *gobierno* (government) as a particular, short-term ruling group administering it. Even though in everyday usage people often refer to the state or the government by specifying one of the three administrative levels—*Municipio*, *Provincia*, and *Nación* (usually they use only the first two, signaling that the national government is too remote to matter)—there is little difference between them. For example, in 2010-2011 both the municipality and the provincial government belonged to Renovación, which supported the Kirchner national administration. Most of the stories point to the absences of the official state (in all its forms) in the border area, where the media take on certain functions that are ordinarily the responsibility of different governmental institutions. They use the news agenda as well as media infrastructure as a means to fill in the gaps of the state by achieving practical consequences that improve everyday life in Iguazú.

This special role of capillary governance that the media in Iguazú have acquired is articulated and justified in the discourse of journalists. Oscar Perrone, one of the co-founders and co-owners of C.V.I. and an active member of Partido Peronista, commented: “We help the people a lot. What the state does not do, we do as the media. And not only us—all the media of Iguazú. There are people who come here and say they don’t have

money for a bus ticket; then we find who can give them a ride. This means collaborating with the community.”⁴ He continued: “The services we have are not very good. The quality of life is poor. We don’t have intensive care therapy. In the hospital we only have 44 beds. There are many uncertainties. However, the state is not appearing.” Oscar explains the exclusively local nature of everyday journalism in Iguazú: “We have a local news program. All is local. We don’t do anything national or international. We do everything local...that a doctor is needed in primary care, that there is no water at school, that teachers have not received their salary—everything social, everything that is happening in Iguazú.”

Another co-founder and co-owner of C.V.I., Juancho Montejano, argues that they act as intermediaries between public institutions and common citizens. He points to the fact that there is much reciprocity on behalf of the people since Iguazú residents also willingly participate in the programs and affect their content. Helping Iguazúenses on a daily basis, the C.V.I. team works like an office of social services, as the cameraman Darío commented to me: “The nexus between the individual and the authorities that the media create is more effective than that of the municipal department of social services. C.V.I. is distinguished for its social activity.”⁵ Therefore, the local media company can be placed among other informal state actors across Latin America that have been performing social functions (such as NGOs, grassroots civic associations, religious groups, private entrepreneurs, or even guerrilla fighters and drug cartels) as a site of capillary governance. The news is a means for people to get money, medicines, toys, etc. Oscar says that this would not be the case if the municipality performed its functions properly: “The state should appear. We are a private media. We are not a social support agency.”⁶ Reflecting on the problem of governmental neglect further, in 2010 one political commentator working in C.V.I. suggested that persistent state absence could soon become a condition for crime: “The problem is that not all Iguazú lives from tourism, as is usually believed. Maybe 70 percent does, but the other 30 percent are excluded, they remain outside of the system. If there is no place for a child in a classroom, they are simply left out of school. Therefore, in three or four years the situation can become very bad, if the state does not intervene immediately.” “These 30 percent,” he said, “realizing they are not incorporated, will choose crime.” Seeing the state and violence as opposites, the commentator invoked Hobbesian discourse, where life without the government is considered “a condition of war of every one against

every one,” where “there is [...] continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short” (Hobbes 2009), to hint at the dire consequences of the failing state on the border.

Much of this media discourse was ideological and had clear political goals during the June 2011 elections, where the CEOs of C.V.I. competed against the then incumbent government of Filippa. A little over a month before the elections, C.V.I. launched a campaign called “Ayúdanos a ayudar” (Help us to help), one of many initiatives of solidarity they organize all year round to distribute food products, clothes, toys, and more to residents in a big televised public event. In exchange for material goods, the television station was encouraging residents to vote for its CEOs in the elections. This mediated spectacle served to mobilize a clientelistic relationship between the viewers and the politicians who owned the media company. In the television discourse, the word *vecino* (neighbor), popularized in Oscar’s scandal-driven afternoon program “Sálvese Quien Pueda” (Those who can save themselves), was broadly used to interpellate (in the Althusserian sense of the term) the viewers-citizens, hailing them horizontally as neighbors—humble, familiar, local—rather than vertically as inferior subjects of the government.

Aspiring to be a parallel government performing the state, C.V.I. employed tactics used by the Peronist governments in Argentina: material assistance increases economic dependency and, consequently, political loyalty. A few journalists siding with the radical party have insisted that such a paternal understanding of the state has created the main problem in Argentina, which was acute in Iguazú: receiving everything directly from the government is an obstacle in the formation of active, independent citizens and a strong civil society. As an alternative system of governance, C.V.I. used the paternalistic strategy to lure people from dependency on the municipality to dependency on the company. Primarily, it was the political campaign strategy of the CEOs preparing for the upcoming municipal elections. But the consequences of building the nexus between the media and the residents of Iguazú far exceeded such partisan interests. In one of his shows, Oscar congratulated the viewers who helped to obtain a wheelchair for one person in need. He criticized the government for not taking care of the problem: “The state did not solve the problem, you [the viewers] solved it, although you also have to pay taxes” (“Sálvese Quien Pueda,” November 29, 2010). The remark was a direct criticism of the government, which is expected to be more responsive to residents. It implies that by

paying taxes citizens have bought membership in the state, which, in turn, has obligations towards them, in an uncannily similar way as paying cable fees enables residents to be part of the social services provided by C.V.I.

Those Iguazúenses, on the other hand, who live in peripheral barrios or in illegal settlements on occupied terrains and do not pay taxes nor get infrastructural services are not included in the formal state. However, not limited by law, Iguazú media extends governance through services to those left outside of official policies. Vecinos are constituted as a public by their inclusion and responsiveness to the circulating discourse of governmental neglect and their unmet needs. But media also expresses solidarity with them in more practical terms, as evident in one peculiar connection between the capillary governance of the television company and the failing state. In September 2010, I accompanied the major shareholder of C.V.I. — Claudio Alvarez — to see a new squatter settlement in Barrio 1ero de Mayo. We drove towards the outskirts of Iguazú: up the winding Avenida Republica Argentina, passing Barrio Primavera and the colorful Las Leñas, and turning right onto a narrow unpaved road, above which dozens of cables were forking out from the power lines and leading into houses. Hooking onto electricity lines was a common practice by squatters who occupy municipal lands and cannot have legal power supply, residents who avoid paying taxes, or those living in new neighborhoods without electrification. Locally these people are referred to as *los enganchados* (those hooked on). Alvarez explained that people come to C.V.I. headquarters to ask for old television cables and then use these to steal electricity by attaching them to the main lines. As a result of such behavior, other residents who are paying for electricity get a weak and disrupted flow. The fact that C.V.I. cables are used for illegal hook-ups to power lines is ironic: the company does not cause the blackouts intentionally, yet their practice of providing the residents with cables, which results in blackouts, gives them another excuse to criticize the government for not solving Iguazú’s continuing electricity problems.

This curious detail shows how in Iguazú journalists extend governance to those not incorporated into the state. In the gaps left by official governmental action, especially its function of providing social services, journalists literally embody and enact the state. C.V.I. often broadcasts complaints by squatters in the occupied municipal terrains of Barrio 1ero de Mayo and the area of 2 million hectáreas when they demand water and electricity services as well as land property titles. In one such television report regarding disputed land, a woman not only personalized the media in

the figure of one journalist-politician, but saw it as the last pillar of the state in the context of governmental paralysis: “I called Oscar [Perrone]. He is the only one who helps the poor. He is the only hope. I called the police five times. I went to the municipality. Nothing” (*Cable Noticias*, September 27, 2010). Germán Montalvo, the municipal Director of the Land Department, commented to me that occupation of fiscal land is a political issue, as squatters form an important vote pool both for the incumbent government and for those who seek to replace them. Iguazú media actively contribute to normalizing this unlawful situation. “C.V.I. reports that these poor people have no water or no electricity, but they don’t mention that they are all illegally settling in municipal lands,” Montalvo told me.⁷ Many of these settlers are undocumented migrants from Paraguay, Brazil, or landless Argentines from other areas—details that the media ignore. This role of mediators between the legal state and illegal subjects who are potential voters is not only taken up by the paternalistic C.V.I. media company, but also by other journalists. In January 2011, during the water and electricity system collapse, Radio Cataratas broadly discussed the petition to extend rural electrification to the illegal settlers in 2 million hectáreas (*Radio Cataratas* 2011d), even though the town’s demand for energy was already exceeding the supply.

Concerned with social and infrastructural problems that Iguazú residents face on a daily basis and offering practical solutions, which range from financial assistance to the donation of old cables, journalists leave their partisan political projects and competition for power behind to become one type of informal actor of capillary governance. Through their routine journalistic work—which involves arbitration between the formal state, the company, and residents, both legal and illegal—they perform an alternative, yet overlapping, generally more inclusive form of statehood.

The Gaze of the Cameras

In 2010, C.V.I. had one more project, which could be seen as an attempt to perform governance. According to the widely quoted definition, Weber calls the state “the form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a particular territory” (2004:33), which aims at “dispossessing the autonomous, ‘private’ agents of administrative power who exist in parallel” (2004:37). Therefore, the state is responsible for the provision of security within its territory,

and, as Waisbord (2007:118-120) argued, where the government fails to do so, the actions of journalists are severely limited by violence. But what happens when the media attempt to take over even this basic obligation from the state? The official aim of the project that C.V.I. developed was to expand the area of fiber-optic cable coverage to deliver fast Internet and connect these cables to video cameras in public spaces. They called it a *vigilancia urbana* (urban security) project, in which they provided the technical means and relinquished the management of the cameras to corresponding state institutions. However, fearful of the increasing power of the company, which was allegedly attempting to take over the provision of public safety—one of the key functions of the state—and potentially invading privacy of individuals, the local government and the rival media named the project “panopticon.”

In a meeting of the town council that took place on September 2, 2010, the secretary read a five-page letter addressed to the town council by the attorney of preliminary investigations, Alejandro Monzón. Monzón wrote that his was “an opinion grounded in solid scientific principles related to the field of law.” Too theoretically sophisticated to be understood by the secretary who read it and many in the audience, the letter paraphrased the Weberian definition arguing that the state “holds monopoly of the use of public force to avoid the occurrence of any act against public safety.” The attorney established the quintessential relationship between security and the penal system, and expressed concern about the violation of human rights and the legal protection of privacy. As Monzón wrote:

Security cameras in public spaces, *el ojo vigilador* (monitoring eye), *el panoptismo* (panopticism) of Bentham, cited in the work of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, refers to a ring-shaped construction with a tower in the center, which has large windows opening up to the inside face of the ring; the peripheral construction is divided into cells, each of which extends the width of the construction.

Defining the concept of panopticon as a permanent gaze, he explained the role of the *vigilante* in the central tower: “Constant surveillance sustains a mode of power which is independent of the one who exercises it. The essential part is that they know they are being watched.” The cameras, Monzón emphasized, would “bring postmodern panopticism” to Iguazú.

Curiously, in 2010, C.V.I. already had a version of such an ojo vigilador: it had a camera mounted on the highest antenna above their headquarters on the hill in Villa Alta. Controlled from the studio down below, the camera was broadcasting live 360-degree panoramic views of Iguazú. It had the ability to zoom into particular streets and buildings. Live images were extensively used in the morning and afternoon television shows and in between programs.

Monzón continued, “cameras would be placed in strategic locations of Iguazú: the intersection of seven streets, known as *siete bocas*; the bus terminal; near Banco Macro; near the YPF fuel station; at the intersection between Victoria Aguirre and Brazil avenues.” According to the attorney, these central areas were already controlled by law enforcement. “It would show tourists that we have cameras, but major crimes occur in the peripheral areas, where the more vulnerable population lives.” He even cited statistics of crime to justify that there was no need for enhanced security. Finally, Monzón argued that Iguazú is very small in comparison to Santa Fe, Córdoba, Rosario, or Buenos Aires, where such cameras were installed. The attorney recommended declining what he called a precarious “anti-project” as “superfluous, secondary, accessory, unpremeditated need for *nuestros márgenes* (our margins).”

Opposition councilor Alicia Franconi was the first to speak. She commented that evaluation of the projects that are presented to the HCD is not the function of the attorney. Salvador Morel, a passionate radical with impressive acting skills, who through the alliance to Juancho Montejano, one of the CEOs, had partial control over C.V.I. news coverage, added that Monzón was part of the executive government, and, therefore, had no right to intervene in the legislative process. Roberto Arevalo, representing the Renovación, took the side of the attorney. He said that he had never been against installing the cameras. The only issue was that a private body should not operate the cameras for fear that they could violate citizen privacy. Arevalo noted the significance of the date: these discussions in the town council were taking place the same morning that the new Argentine media law was coming into effect. The intent of this law was to break up the monopoly of Grupo Clarín, who, according to the councilor, manipulated how the entire country thought through the management of information. For Arevalo, C.V.I. was the local version of the evils of media concentration. Hence, opposing the urban security project was seen as a step in breaking up the monopoly of the cable company.

Although, with the support of the Governor of Misiones, surveillance cameras were installed in a few other towns across the province, cameras for Iguazú were postponed. Nevertheless, C.V.I. continued expanding fiber-optic lines and enjoying its monopoly as the only cable television provider. Subscription to the cable service was a form of membership in the informal state performed by the media company, which was restlessly exposing the failures of the government and in parallel creating an alternative, solidarity-based but equally paternalistic form of governance. Those who could not afford paying the fees would hook onto the cable lines, the same way they would hook onto the electricity lines—using old television cables that C.V.I. provided. Still others, seeking inclusion in the broader national (and sometimes international) news and entertainment community, would buy satellite dishes in Ciudad del Este and smuggle them into Argentina. Everybody was looking for alternative ways to participate in the community created through capillary governance. The fact that being part of the televised viewer-citizen polity required the violation of laws, which many residents criticized for their inadequacy to do justice to their lives on the border, paradoxically increased people’s loyalty to the media. The media monopoly acted as a parallel polity, whose functions overlapped with and extended multiple other, formal and informal, state-making practices.

In Iguazú, the media and the government seemed to compete in creating publics that legitimized them by providing loyalty which translated into a mandate to govern. They both used the circulation of material assistance to establish clientelist links with the residents. The news agenda and infrastructure was employed performatively to enact statehood through capillary governance. Despite the petty personal and ideological struggles between the government and the media in Iguazú, elected officials, bureaucrats, and journalists together performed the state by enacting the totality of its functions. The media produced state effects by patching up inconsistencies in infrastructure and imposing competing or overlapping layers of security regimes. Despite the fierce criticism that a few journalists directed against the government, the overall effect the media had during recurrent infrastructural crises was that of stabilizing, not fragmenting, the state. Such a conclusion illustrates the parallels between this particular ethnographic case and studies that show the role of the media on the national scale to be of maintaining state power throughout Latin America. Clientelist relationships that the media form with residents,

often seen in terms of services in exchange for electoral votes, shows the same pattern of dependency between media and powerful political and economic actors. Yet it is the local character of the Iguazú media that enables it to perform the more pragmatic tasks of capillary governance. Created outside of the legal framework, due to their historical and geographical particularities, Iguazú media have a trajectory of working to strengthen the state by performing some of its functions. One reason for their success could be the legal flexibility that enables journalists to maneuver the boundary between legality and illegality in order to achieve state effects where the official government cannot.

The End (With a Double Meaning)

On February 15, 2011, Jorge Taglioli, a journalist who extensively wrote about the Iguazú water and electricity crisis for the provincial daily *Primera Edición*, was discovered dead in his rental apartment. As we learned later, the 53-year-old suffered a heart attack three days earlier. Firefighters arrived to remove the body, but together with the entire Iguazú press community, they had to wait for almost four hours in unmerciful midday heat. The van that belonged to the local funerary home had an accident, and there was no other vehicle to transport the deteriorated corpse. Eventually, the body of the journalist was put into an improvised wooden box, mounted on the bed of a police truck with rope, and in the blazing sun taken 300 kilometers away to Posadas for an autopsy. There was no ice added to cool the corpse, so the stench of rotting human flesh permeated the air in the streets as the vehicle moved onto the highway.

Obituaries for Jorge proliferated in local media and gossip regarding the cause of his death, including a theory that he might have been murdered, circulated among journalists. But attention to the humiliation and the lack of respect in treating a dead colleague was absent. Jorge was what would be considered a good state actor in this border town. In an interview conducted in June 2010, he explained to me that the government was investing in Iguazú, but the results of their work, such as the new water and sewage system, were not visible in the short-run. It was his task as a journalist to write about this, to help the state: “Today we are collapsed, but it’s improving. We need to bear with it a little longer.”⁸ Yet the self-conscious and patient state actor, a zealous protagonist of capillary governance, fell through the cracks of the very state he had tried to perform so diligently.

Jorge’s death revealed one more bizarre and uneasy dimension of the failing state in Iguazú: though the living are subjected to and blamed for the everyday shortage of water, power, fuel, and gas, the dead are so unexpected that there is no place for them in the state-structure at all.

Local media are central to carrying out state-like functions that blur the dichotomy between the state and the public. Journalists are active mediators between the two sides, which, though being intertwined, are often addressed as separate in political projects. Performing journalism in a peripheral town is the act of performing the state itself where it is rather weak. Although journalists have not been government tools or used as loudspeakers of its power in the peripheries, neither have they been completely detached from the state. The irony of their position is that journalists take on the role of the state, providing moral models for the welfare of its citizens, while also subverting the incumbent governments by challenging its capacity to govern territorial margins. However, even if they form part of this broadly defined state, the project of Iguazú media is local and, as seen in this article, much more ambivalent and legally unstable. Journalists perform the patchwork of the state on its margins, at times complementing and extending it, other times tearing it apart and replacing it. The state they enact through capillary governance is often more inclusive as participation is not based on legal status, but on the circulation of needs and assistance, both in representation and practice. Their complicated relationship with the state is conditioned by the everyday production of news on the border. As cultural producers, they may be exposing failures of the government, both the historically constructed national political body that treated Misiones as a periphery and particular ruling groups that do not address accumulating border issues. However as local actors, journalists also live (and die) in these state gaps, so reporting news is often determined by how their own material-practical conditions improve or deteriorate depending on the speech or silence in the public sphere. They are well aware of the performativity of news in creating publics and that through participation in the circulation of media discourse, media can uphold or contest the social order. Though journalists often use this knowledge to gain an advantage in their specific personal, business, or political projects, even their wrestling with the government and the construction of alternative media-society formations is a mode of enacting and stabilizing the state, not of absolving it. ■

Endnotes:

¹Interview, September 28, 2010.

²In 2009, COMFER was replaced by AFSCA (Autoridad Federal de Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual, the Federal Authority of Audiovisual Communication Services).

³Interview, June 9, 2010.

⁴Interview, May 11, 2010.

⁵Interview, June 28, 2010.

⁶Interview, August 31, 2010.

⁷Interview, November 2, 2010.

⁸Interview, June 10, 2010.

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Foreign Language Translations:

For Social Emergencies “We Are 9-1-1”: How Journalists Perform the State in an Argentine Border Town
[Keywords: Border, media, journalism, state, governance, Argentina, Triple Frontera]

Por las emergencias sociales “somos 9-1-1”: Cómo los periodistas realizan el estado en una ciudad fronteriza de Argentina

[Palabras clave: Periodistas, medios de comunicación, estado, frontera]

Para Emergências Sociais, “Nós Somos o 9-1-1”: Como os Jornalistas Executam o Estado numa Cidade Fronteiriça Argentina

[Palavras-chave: Fronteira, mídia, jornalismo, estado, governança, Argentina, Tríplice Fronteira]

任何社会紧急事故“请打九一一”：媒体工作者如何在阿根廷的边境小城“表演”国家
关键词：边境，媒体，新闻业，国家，治理，阿根廷，三国边界

Для социальных ЧП «Мы — 911»: Как журналисты заменяют государство в одном аргентинском пограничном городке

[Ключевые слова: граница, медиа, СМИ, журналистика, государство, правление, Аргентина, Тройная frontera]

للطوارئ الإجتماعية “نحن ٩-١-١”. كيف الصحفيون يؤدون مهام الدولة في بلدة حدودية بالأرجنتين
 كلمات البحث: الحدود، الإعلام، الصحافة، الدولة، الحوكمة، الأرجنتين، الفرتورة الثلاثية

