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Master Suppression Techniques and Gender Stereotypes as a Means to Discredit Female Leadership in the Media Representation of a President. A Case Study (Argentina 2011–2015)*

Las técnicas de dominación y los estereotipos de género como un medio para desacreditar el liderazgo femenino en la representación mediática de una presidente. Un estudio de caso (Argentina 2011–2015)

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ABSTRACT

This article focusses on the media representation of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner as portraited in the covers of the weekly magazine Noticias during her second mandate as president of Argentina, 2011–2015. Through a feminist review of the documental evidence, this text aims to determine the most prevalent patterns in the use of master suppression techniques and gender stereotypes in the media, discussing the representation of female politicians in visual and written narratives as it usually reinforces gender stereotypes in disadvantaged ways, damaging to the public image of female candidates and representatives. The results show how five identifiable gender stereotypes (the narcissist leader or the frivolous diva; the suffering lonely widow vs.

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the wicked widow; the hyper-sexualized or uncontrolled woman; the mentally sick or psychically unbalanced woman; and the unbearable woman) interplay with seven not exclusive but complementary master suppression techniques (making invisible; ridicule; withhold information; double bind or double punishment; blaming and humiliating or put to shame; objectifying; and violence, force or threat of force) in this media's rejection, underestimation and mockery of female political leadership.

KEYWORDS: *master suppression techniques, gender stereotypes, female leadership, media representation.*

RESUMEN

Este artículo se centra en la representación mediática de Cristina Fernández de Kirchner en las portadas de la revista semanal Noticias durante su segundo mandato como presidenta de Argentina, 2011–2015. A través de una revisión feminista de la evidencia documental, este texto tiene como objetivo determinar los patrones más prevalentes en el uso de técnicas de dominación y estereotipos de género en los medios de comunicación, discutiendo la representación de mujeres políticas en narrativas visuales y escritas, ya que generalmente ésta refuerza los estereotipos de género, perjudicando la imagen pública de las candidatas y representantes femeninas. Los resultados muestran cómo cinco estereotipos de género identificables (el líder narcisista o la diva frívola; la viuda solitaria frente a la viuda malvada; la mujer hipersexualizada o descontrolada; la mujer mentalmente enferma o desequilibrada psíquicamente; y la mujer insoportable) interactúan con siete técnicas de dominación complementarias (hacer invisible; ridiculizar; retener información; doble constreñimiento o doble castigo; culpar y humillar o avergonzar; objetivar; violencia, fuerza o amenaza de fuerza) para rechazar, subestimar o burlarse del liderazgo político femenino.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *técnicas de dominación, estereotipos de género, liderazgo femenino, representación mediática.*

"A los hombres ningún defecto los bajaba del pedestal,
a las mujeres las hacía rodar al sótano"
(G. Belli, *El país de las mujeres,* 2010, p. 197)[1]

Introducing the research questions

This article addresses the media representation of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner – hereinafter referred to as CFK – as portraited in the covers of the weekly magazine *Noticias* during her second mandate as president of Argentina, 2011–2015.[2]

[1] "To men, no defect made them come down from the pedestal; to women, that made them roll to the basement" (my translation).

[2] This article will not address the "media war", a seven-year long and brutal conflict that started in 2008, between the Argentinean president and the hegemonic media holding Clarín Group,

Participation in politics is far from being a universal acknowledged right for many Latin Americans. The conditions of access and permanence in political positions form a complex reality and, as it has empirically been verified, requires refined and combinable methods and techniques, if we want to study this reality as a system of structural barriers that hinder or simply impede women's participation in political institutions.

Political scientists have already pointed out with alarm the ineffectiveness of quota laws to guarantee political participation. Quantitative studies were not enough to explain such disparate phenomena as the ineffectiveness of apparently perfect quota laws or the notable increase in female participation in countries without quota laws. However, this "normative revolution", as characterized by Mariana Caminotti and Flavia Freidenberg (2016), through the quota laws, made even more evident its own inefficiency to solve the structural causes of the exclusion of women from politics. With the incorporation of qualitative methods, we are verifying, on the other hand, the dangers of the replacement of quota policies by parity policies, especially when these are not based on feminist premises and, therefore, do not seek to revert unjust patriarchal power nor promote a true feminine power in politics (Piscopo, 2015). Parity as a final objective in search of an objective gender representation is incomplete if it is not aimed at achieving also a substantive representation – that is, qualitatively emancipating – of women in Latin American political spaces.

The major impediments to women's access and permanence in politics in Latin America can be classified according to their form and effect in three groups: (1) the legal norms (the legal and jurisprudential system in each country); (2) the cultural practices within political institutions (or intra-institutional political culture); and (3) the gender ideologies that structurally permeate those same political institutions (such as *machismo* or *marianismo*) (as discussed in Medina, 2015). Previous studies, as those included in Dosek *et al*. (2017), have also pointed out that female politicians are the target of media violence not only in their condition as public officers but also, and especially, in their feminine condition (see e. g. García Beaudoux, 2017). Even those women who have reached the top of the political pyramid as heads of State are treated by the press as second-class citizens, and are permanently exposed to the criticism of features that have very little to do with their public function, such as physical appearance, private behavior or temperament. The glass ceiling for female politicians is, then, never completely broken, not even despite their access to the highest political positions in their countries because the window of opportunity within which to build a political career is so narrowly defined for women as to prevent most of them from succeeding (Murray, 2010, p. 18).

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undermining the other's credibility in defence of their own (see Driver, 2017). However, this "media war" will remain a significant background during the publication of the magazine covers here analysed, that sustained the same confrontational line with the president, even after 2015.

In specific regard to media coverage of female candidates and female politicians, the models of perfection that stipulate the social expectations of gender on how an "excellent" woman and an "excellent" man should be, respectively, are easily recognizable in media representations. Different gender stereotypes come into play in the visual and narrative construction of representations of power when it is performed by a woman or by a man. The most common gendered stereotypes about female candidates or politicians detected in the press by communicational psychologist Virginia García Beaudoux, are at least ten:

1. *Good women put other people's needs first, because above all they are mothers.*
2. *They feel responsible for the happiness and welfare of the people around them, and they make sacrifices for them.*
3. *They are modest and they neither self-promote nor show off what they achieve.*
4. *They are neither assertive nor bossy.*
5. *They wait to be asked, because initiative is male.*
6. *They don't make money since ambition is male.*
7. *They are not into power since power is about men.*
8. *They are feminine.*
9. *They are unattractive if they hold power.*
10. *They feel more comfortable and happier in the private than in the public space.* (García Beaudoux, 2017, p. 78)

These and other stereotyping practices previously highlighted by Jennifer Piscopo in 2010 and Celina Van Dembroucke in 2014, will be comparatively explored here in contrast to the techniques of domination and discipline – also called master suppression techniques – proposed by Berit Ås (1978 and 2004) for the study of the discrimination of "unwanted" groups in spaces of political power.

Historical and social settings

The phenomena of female chiefs of state is not unknown in the Latin American political scene. Since the 1990s, female presidents as Violeta Barrios in Nicaragua or Mireya Moscoso in Panamá, set the path for a, in global sense, unique wave of female leaders in 2006–2013. Precisely, it is in 2013, when an unprecedented situation is experienced in Latin America, since four women simultaneously hold executive power as presidents of their respective countries: Cristina Fernández in Argentina (first term 2007–2011 and second term 2011–2015); Laura Chinchilla in Costa Rica (2010–2014) and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (2010–2014); while Michelle Bachelet is elected president of Chile for

a second time.[3] Adding Portia Simpson as prime minister in Jamaica (second term 2012–2016) and Kamla Persad-Bissessar in the same position in Trinidad & Tobago (2010–2015), this will turn the Americas into not only the first but also the only region in the world with so many female political leaders as head of state simultaneously.[4]

This phenomenon is a logical consequence of the undeniable advances in the exercise of women's political rights in most Latin American countries during the last decades. The road, however, has been conflictive and marked by notorious setbacks. The above mentioned female heads of state had shown until 2013 great political ability to establish their own agendas and, although their gender policies are not explicitly considered in any of their government programs, they share a common vision in their public policies, focusing primarily on the social aspect. Which in turn will lead, directly or indirectly, to the attainment and consolidation of some rights for gender equity in each country.

The study of the political trajectories of the presidents has revealed up to now the multiplicity of paths that exist for women who wish to reach the executive power, but also the unavoidable barriers that they must overcome to fulfill their objective. The presence of so many women exercising the presidency simultaneously in the same region denotes that, although the political itineraries are varied, access to maximum power for Latin American women is still very difficult but not impossible. History and current societies in Latin America show us that, although there is no trace of a leadership style that we could call specifically "feminine", the female presidents represented, although in different styles of leadership, a relational-type power tendency based on the legitimacy that the popular vote grants them and the permanent communication with the majority of the local population that identifies itself with them, especially at the beginning of their mandates (see further discussion in Magaña, Medina & Florido Alejo, 2017).

In 2007, CFK became the second female president of Argentina, but the first to be democratically elected.[5] Before succeeding her husband Néstor Kirchner (president 2003–2007) in the executive office, CFK had had a long political career, rising from student college representation to national senator and leader of the Higher House (the Senate) in the Argentinean parliament.[6]

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[3] Bachelet's first presidential term run in Chile 2006–2010 and her second one 2014–2018. Between 2010–2013, Bachelet conducted UN Women as its global Executive Director.

[4] "Of the 33 countries in the LAC region, nine have elected female presidents or prime ministers to serve full terms, an achievement unparalleled elsewhere in the developing world" (Htun & Piscopo, 2010, p. 3); or in the developed one.

[5] In 1974, the Vice-president Isabel Martínez de Perón succeded her husband Juan Perón in the Argentinean presidency after his death and stayed in office until the civil-military coup of the state in March 1976.

[6] See Piscopo's elaboration of the parallel political careers of CFK and Néstor Kirchner between 1989–2007 (2010, p. 201).

During the presidential term of her husband, CFK refused to be called "first lady", becoming the "first citizen" instead and acquiring high popularity, which would be crucial for her to win the presidential elections for the first time in 2007 (see Ruiz Seisdedos & Grande Gascón, 2015; cf. Piscopo, 2010). During both her administrations, CFK would always be scrutinized by the Argentinean press, more as a woman in a traditional male position than as a political actor. In pictures and texts, media would constantly influence the collective subjectivity by constructing – mostly detrimental and often violently hostile – representations of CFK in magazine covers, tv shows and daily newspapers.

Sadly, violence against women in politics is a long-term social phenomenon in Latin America and the media is never innocent when reproducing violent gender ideologies, especially when it comes to portrait female politicians, candidates, or social activists. The 2016 survey of female parliamentarians by the Inter-Parliamentary Union underlines the global dimension of this trend: across 39 countries, 44% or respondents reported having received threats of death, rape, assault, or abduction; 1/3 said to have been subjected to sexual violence; and 87% have been verbally and graphically harassed and /or discriminated by their countries' media (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016).[7]

Under similar premises, the 2010 research lead by Rainbow Murray proved that media framing of politicians usually reinforces gender stereotypes in disadvantaged ways, damaging to the public image of female candidates and representatives. Particularly powerful is this tactic when applied to the often-masculinized office of the presidency (Murray, 2010, pp. 9–12).

The journalistic media that will be analyzed here is the weekly magazine *Noticias,* founded in Buenos Aires in 1989 by the publishing house Perfil. From the beginning, the content of this magazine has been mainly oriented to political issues, entertainment and social news. In the period between 2011–2015, approximately 250 issues of the magazine were published, of which 52 issues have President CFK on the cover. Our analysis shows that, of these 52 covers, 48 emphasize some feature related to the president female condition as harmful or, at least, potentially dangerous for her proper performance of the public function. Hence, almost 19% of the issues of *Noticias* published during those five years have a cover dedicated to the president and the particularities of her gendered political performance.

The president herself addressed this medial phenomenon during the electoral campaign in 2015: "I have been portraited in more than 30 covers that have nothing to do with my management or government style, but with my status as a woman saying that I am bipolar, knowing that I have a family

[7] On the eve of the oral presentation of this paper, on March 15, 2018, black, lesbian city councilor and human rights activist, our Brazilian colleague Marielle Franco was assassinated in Rio de Janeiro after participating in a political act with Afro-descendant women; a tragic and violent reminder of the high price that women politicians must still pay for their public militancy.

member with this disease. Not to mention the demeaning covers where I am pictured as having orgasms of power" (my translation). This reference points to one of the three covers of *Noticias* about CFK as president that triggered strong controversies in the Argentinean social arena at the time – here given according to their repercussion in other Argentinean media and social networks debates: the cover with her alleged "orgasms of power" (September 8, 2012); the cover where CFK is branded as "bipolar" and mentally unbalanced (October 24, 2015); and the cover representing the president with traces of bumps and bruises on her face and the text "The business of hitting Cristina" (with emphasis on the word "hitting", published on January 16, 2010).

Two authors have previously addressed the representation of CFK in the Argentinean press and their contributions are central for the analytical settings in this article. On the one hand, Jennifer Piscopo (2010) explores the media treatment of female candidates to Latin American presidencies, in particular, the dealing with the figure and career of CFK in three Argentinean daily newspapers such as *Página/12*, *Clarín* and *La Nación* during her first presidential campaign from July to October, 2007. Focusing on these media's framing of gender stereotypes and double binds, Piscopo quantitatively and qualitatively analyzes gender biased press coverage of CFK's first executive campaign, as a process of transfer of power from one spouse to the other (2010, pp. 203–214).

On the other hand, Celina Van Dembroucke (2014) examines media representations of CFK in the newspapers *Clarin* and *La Nación* between 2007–2011, analyzing the discursive operations with which both media build gendered subjects in the Argentinean political sphere. Van Dembroucke identifies three roles that these newspapers assign to CFK during the years: the "Frivolous Diva" (2003–2007); the "Stupid Girl" (2007–2009); and the "Wicked Widow" (2010–2011), successively. Van Dembroucke discusses these stereotypes and the resulting media portrait of CFK as strategies for a gendered and discursive operation to weaken the female president public image (2014, pp. 1065–1066).

Master suppression techniques or "domination techniques" as instrumental for gender-based violence

When social psychologist Berit Ås entered the circles of Norwegian political power as a young parliamentarian in the early 1970s, she was surprised by the daily practices of rejection, underestimation and mockery, not only of the opposition's male politicians, but above all of her own fellow party members (the Norwegian Social Democracy). Over the years, Ås would gain fame as "rebel", "impossible", "difficult" between her political co-religionists and opponents for refusing to comply with what was expected of her, as a female member of parliament: to remain silent, submissively signing the papers proposed by her

colleagues and raising her hand to vote when they indicated it. As a result of these experiences, Berit Ås decided to adapt the 9 techniques of domination that make up the analytical model already developed by the Norwegian psychologist and philosopher Ingjald Nissen in 1945 to explain the phenomenon of Nazism as "the dictatorship of the social psychopath" (Ås, 1978).

In 1978, Berit Ås reduced these 9 techniques of domination to 5 and defined them as "strategies of social manipulation by which a dominant group maintains its hegemony in an explicit or tacit hierarchy". Applied to the political space, these master suppression techniques proposed by Ås are "techniques of discipline and repression" that the powerful and hegemonic groups employ against the powerless and subordinated groups in order to keep them away from the spaces of decision (or policy making) and / or neutralize them as agents of political change. Applied concretely against women in politics, these techniques are very effective strategies that reproduce unjust power relations and slow down women's rising towards formal or institutional power. These domination techniques methodically censor female behavior in political areas as "anomalous" and "odd", that is, place it outside the "universal" masculine norm that imposes a passive, submissive and repressed behavior on women.

In 2003–2004, Ås conducted a new survey in the European Parliament in order to measure the permanence, rejection or replacement of the 5 domination techniques across the years on a European scale. The survey results proved then that the master suppression techniques not only remained in force, but that two new modes of repression were now unmistakably in practice (Ås, 2004). These reformulated 7 techniques of domination that determine female discipline and alienation in political institutions, as proposed and revised by Ås (1978; 2004), are not exclusive but complementary to each other: making invisible; ridicule; withhold information; double bind or double punishment; blaming and humiliating or put to shame; objectifying; and violence, force or threat of force.[8]

The master suppression technique of making invisible seeks to silence or marginalize the opponent by ignoring her presence, acts or words publicly. This technique, when successful, forces political women to seek to make themselves invisible and therefore insignificant to their environment, in a clear self-devaluation of themselves as subjects with a distinct identity, that is, "alienating yourself to survive in a hostile environment." (Ås, 2004, p. 79). The ridicule technique is based on the manipulation of the argument of the opponent to make it seem ridiculous or inconsequential. This domination technique is one of the most common in Latin American political institutions and practices (see e. g. Piscopo, 2010; Medina, 2015; García Beaudoux, 2017). By withholding information, the intention of the suppressor is to exclude or marginalize the opponent hiding or withholding information relevant for her public performance. This

[8] For counter strategies and confirmation techniques that neutralize the master suppression techniques see Medina (2015).

practice is based on conventional, excluding homosocial traditions that control who decides the political agendas, where the main decisions are made and by whom – in both routine and exceptional circumstances –, and who endorses who and why in the political debates within parties, agencies, councils and parliaments.The double punishment domination technique aims to penalize or disqualify the opponent, whatever her decision may be. In Latin America, this master suppression technique finds its philosophical justification in the gender ideology called *marianismo* by which the feminine ideal is a woman who can be a mother without having sexual relations and without ceasing to be a virgin after childbirth. This physiological impossibility characterizes this model of feminine perfection no longer as a utopia, but as an impossible ideal that condemns Latin American women to total failure. Applied as a domination technique, political women will suffer a double demand – in private life and political office – for perfection that will result, above all, in great frustration and individual discontent (see examples and further analysis in Medina, 2015).

The master suppression technique of blaming and humiliating or putting to shame aims to embarrass the opponent, attributing to her some personal characteristics which are regarded shameful. Usually combined with the domination techniques of ridicule and double punishment to make its effect more powerful, especially when mentioning personal features of one political woman ("is unreliable", "is gossip") as belonging to the entire female gender ("all women are untrustworthy", "all women are gossipy").

The objectifying of female politicians manifests itself as a domination technique in the criticism and out of context or unjustified comment of the physical aspect of the opponent. A common practice is the hyper-sexualization of young female politicians in words and gestures by their male colleagues during parliamentary debates or strategic discussions between and / or within political parties. This is an exercise of symbolic violence against young bodies, attributing to them an uncontrollable sexual capacity as object for male scrutiny and enjoyment before which men have the cultural and heteronormative mandate to react aggressively. Therefore, a political woman is fundamentally defined by her body and her emotions while a political man is described by his intellectual qualities and rational thinking. In consequence, the ambition for power – in Weberian terms – is also perceived as a legitimate male feature while, at the same time, a forbidden indulgence for women.

Finally, the domination technique of violence, force or threat of force presupposes the use of physical force on the opponent in order to make her act against her will. The definition of violence or political harassment in the recent legislation against political violence in Latin America includes not only the use of physical force but also verbal, psychological, economic, and symbolic aggression (see Medina, 2015). The same notion of gender-based violence is applied by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in its aforementioned report when it characterizes threats, harassment, verbal abuse and use of physical force against women parliamentarians as gender-based political violence (2016).

The case study: Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner in the magazine covers of *Noticias* (2010–2015)

> *(…) sé que tal vez me cueste más porque soy mujer, porque siempre se puede ser obrera, se puede ser profesional o empresaria, pero siempre nos va a costar más. Estoy absolutamente convencida.* (CFK, Inaugural Address, December 10, 2007)[9]

The rate of success of female political leadership has traditionally been measured based on the expectations, demands and assumptions on the qualities culturally assigned to one gender and denied to another. When these qualities are regarded as uniquely male, individuals with other gender identities will be alienated in the masculine normative and, as convincingly demonstrated by Virginia García Beaudoux in her book from 2017, it will be experienced by female politicians worldwide as difficult as dancing backwards in high heels (2017, pp. 18–20; 36–42). Particularly, in Latin America complementary gender ideologies such as *machismo* and *marianismo* reassure conservative social beliefs associating passivity and emotionality with femininity, while leadership and rationality with masculinity. These and other gender stereotypes are based on prejudices and develop a social hierarchy of which gender attributes are valued – and expected – in the political arena, and which ones are not:

> [In the media and popular culture nowadays] the oldest [gender] stereotypes are repeated:
> 1. *Leadership is male.*
> 2. *Women are good leaders when they behave like men.*
> 3. *A successful public life interferes with women's private life.*
> 4. *Unlike men, women do not have emotional intelligence and when they become emotionally involved, they lose rational thought and their good leadership capacity.* (García Beaudoux, 2017, pp. 67–68)

As studied by D'Adamo & García Beaudoux (2016, pp. 25–33), the media narrative as storytelling for political communication varies in each scenario, based on the content, but some characteristic features remain permanent. These features can easily be identified in the covers of one magazine as a visual but static storytelling when the stories are concrete and the red thread is evident; analogies are used with the purpose of making the message easily understandable and "familiar" to the reader; the raised conflicts or questions arouse the public curiosity and generate expectations on the rest of the message; an indication or "moral" always appeals to the reader's emotion; and to

[9] "I know that perhaps this effort will cost me more because I am a woman, because one can be a worker, one can be a professional or an entrepreneur, but it will always cost us [women] more. [Of that,] I am absolutely convinced" (translation from original as in Vitale, 2015, p. 258).

stories already installed in the popular culture, which are familiar to the reader and do not require of her/him to make any additional effort of attention or reasoning to understand the theme raised in every cover of the magazine. In this way, one magazine cover is a narrative visually structured in pictures and words for the political persuasion of the reader and, as such, a powerful tool of public influence.

The mainstream media has a tremendous influence on how gender differences are made visible. By visually constructing this gendered narrative, the media are usually determined to scrutinize the intimate sphere of political women as a decisive aspect for the assessment of their public governing. According to socially valid and patriarchal gender ideologies, female politicians will never be able to do anything completely correct: either they are too committed to their work and then neglect their family, or they are not very committed and then inefficient in their public office; either they are too young and inexperienced, or they are too old and stubborn; etc. Being the political power structured by the male normative, a woman would never be "just a politician" for the media because a woman is an irregularity in the representation of power as we know it. So, media will always adjectivize the female condition as a special label when mentioning a woman in politics. In this way, media transmit and legitimize stereotyped representations of power and gender prejudices daily, influencing the systems of knowledge, interpretation and valorization of several generations simultaneously.

In the 48 covers of *Noticias* (2011–2015) analyzed, five gender stereotypes can be identified, through which the public image of the president is constructed:

1. The narcissist leader (or the frivolous diva)

The stereotype of the frivolous diva was first identified by Van Dembroucke (2014, pp. 1063–1064) as a media damaging strategy used by daily newspapers against CFK during her first presidential term, but it is also possible to track it down during her second administration in the form of some master suppression techniques effectively blended with gender stereotypes.

Women politicians' appearance regularly receives disproportionate media attention in comparison to their male colleagues' almost since the establishment of the Western written press as political actor. As Murray assesses (2010, pp. 12–13), this domination technique diverts the public attention from substantive political issues to trivial ones, as the politician's clothes and hairstyles. The covers of *Noticias* about CFK as Argentinean president between 2011–2015 highlight "the new sex of the government" as a fundamentally aesthetic revolution, especially at the beginning of her second term (2011–2012), establishing the supposed feminine frivolity as a new label or state protocol. The fixation on the appearance and "typically" feminine features of the president – such as her use of makeup, high heels, cosmetic surgery, jewelry and

hair extensions – accentuate, according to Ross & Sreberny (as referred in Van Dembroucke, 2014, p. 1063 ff.) the illegitimate relationship between her particular way of expressing femininity and her political competence.[10]

Paradoxically, those same bodily marks of traditional femininity are represented in the covers as opposed to a personality with masculine attributes, such as firmness and temperament. If gender is a performative action with penalizing consequences, as Judith Butler states (as referred in Medina, 2010), then the magazine covers undoubtedly and publicly penalize CFK's gender transgression by over-emphasizing her – in Vitale's words – staging femininity (2015, pp. 257–259). This lack of "neutrality" of CFK's public image would be incompatible with the exercise of public power when exercised by a woman. As a result, CFK would not meet traditional gender expectations by avoiding embodying a "discrete gender" as expected. The magazine covers, subsequently, through their scrutinizing and merciless focus on the president's expressions of femininity, ridicule and embarrass her – and every other – female body that should be disciplined within the traditional roles of gender and its conventional relationship with power.

During her first executive campaign in 2007, CFK appearance shifted from not feminine enough to being too feminine (Piscopo, 2010, pp. 204–205). The unexpected "narcissistic turn" of the presidency – as *Noticias* called it – as a result of the "new sex" in power since 2007, was displayed on a couple of covers linking CFK's body to Argentina's long past history, almost as synonymous to, or anticipatory of, the current political present of the country. According to the press, eccentricity and coquettishness are the grounds of CFK's extravagant and artificial fixation on her appearance after 2007, that could easily become a political threat and liability. But soon after the death of Néstor Kirchner in October 2010, Cristina became for the press "the (definitely middle-aged) matriarchal widow figure of Argentina" instead (Ostiguy, 2013, p. 13).

The *Noticias* magazine has antecedents in its history of gender-biased representations of Argentinean presidents and politicians in its covers. From its very beginnings, the magazine shocked the political arena when on July 22, 1990 published a photo of the secretary of Environment at that time, Maria Julia Alsogaray, pretending to be totally naked, with bare shoulders and covered only by a fur coat. During the same decade, however, several covers were dedicated to President Carlos Menem (1989–1999) but almost all of them focused on his style of ruling and / or family conflicts, none on his physical appearance or his frivolous or pompous behavior, at least not negatively. In 2001, a *Noticias* cover by a photographic trick illustrated President Fernando de la Rua as napping on an armchair, under the title "Basta de siesta", anticipating the social protest that would cause his resignation just some months later. However, none of these cases would show so entirely the magazine's gender

[10] See similar examples of praising or criticizing media comments about the outfits of female politicians or women involved in a political activity in García Beaudoux (2017, pp. 82–86).

bias and its fixation on a president's looks as the covers dedicated to the female president a decade later.[11]

2. The suffering lonely widow / The wicked widow

Van Dembroucke describes the stereotype of the wicked diva as it first was applied by some Argentinean newspapers during the first year after Néstor Kirchner passed away in 2011 (2014, p. 1061–1063). Nevertheless, after 2011 the same stereotype would find its counterpart in an opposite one, the suffering and lonely widow. Again, a combination of master suppression techniques would support and reproduce gender stereotypes as persistently valid.

After the death of her husband on October 20, 2010, the widowhood of CFK is represented on the covers of *Noticias* in a dual, even contradictory way. On the one hand, there is a critique of the emotional response of the cold and ambitious lady who is mourning her husband for a year, supposedly seeking to take political advantage of this sad situation. Mentioning her solitude and wearing black dress are recurrently presented as attempts of populistic seduction, while her public display of sorrow is condemned as an intent – in Ostiguy's words (2013, p. 11) – "to create a strong sense of bonding" in order to increase her popularity.

A magazine cover shows CFK crucified, dressed in mourning-black but happily smiling (April 17, 2014) while other covers highlight instead her loneliness, her almost "unhuman" (and by some point, "almost masculine") toughness in such moments of grief and, at the same time, her "lack of control" in the absence of a man at her side. It is indeed a fact that "the strongly experienced hardship of the mourning of Cristina Kirchner, after the sudden and premature death of her life-long partner, was truly felt and publicly displayed" (Ostiguy, 2013, p. 11). Private sorrow becomes public spectacle, a familiar ritual practice of mourning and disposition of private corpses as public goods across the Argentinean history (see Cornell & Medina, 2001), as well as fundamental part of what is commonly called "the Peronist liturgy", with its own dogma and cult rituals for the deceased leaders.

The already ongoing speculations about CFK's bipolarity – as a sign of her inability to govern – are accentuated on the covers after her widowhood. On December 27, 2013, a photomontage shows the president without clothes on one cover under the headline "The Queen is naked" while the subtitle announces "secrets of a disturbing absence", despite of the affirmation that "CFK is given as healed".[12] This violent objectification that represents the female

[11] See some Latin American and European examples of this media fixation on female chief of State's physical appearance or looks, such as in the case of Bachellet, Rousseff, Rodham Clinton or Merkel (García Beaudoux, 2017).

[12] Regarding the emergence and development of the moniker "Queen Cristina" in the Ar-

president, once again, as a body without control and in apparent mental debalance, is an evident psychological and symbolic aggression and, at the same time, reaffirms the representation of CFK as a diva that requires special – and condescending – treatment.[13]

3. The hyper-sexualized or uncontrolled woman

The objectification of women as sexual and visual rather than intellectual and powerful remarks one of the double binds – or "lose-lose scenarios" that female politicians are compiled to adapt themselves to: femininity/competence (Murray, 2010, pp. 15–16). CFK's political leadership was questioned by the Argentinean media already during her first executive campaign in 2007. She was often portraited as a "spotlight hungry starlet" (Piscopo, 2010, p. 215) and, at the same time, as frigid, distant, self-promoting and self-obsessed (Piscopo, 2010, p. 204).

During both her administrations, the press treated her marriage as a burden, undermining *de facto* her credibility and competency as the private "puppet" of her husband. Portrayed by the media as artificial, cold and bearish, CFK is punished for disrespecting traditional gender normative about women and feminine public behavior. In Piscopo words, "the end result of this media treatment, as in other cases, was constructing Fernández as *not a serious politician*" (2010, p. 215; italics in original).

The hyper-sexualization and, at the same time, ridicule of the figure of the CFK is evident in all the covers that emphasize her physical appearance as a symptom of her lack of suitability to be president and direct the political destiny of the country. It is illuminating that terms such as "carefree", "sensual" and "predacious" are the most used by the magazine when defining CFK as "inappropriately sexy" for political investiture. Image and speech denote on the covers the eroticization of the ambition of power when it is expressed by political women, a phenomenon that must be ridiculed and doubly penalized, as expressed in the title of a 4-page article, "The libido of the CFK power". In terms of traditional gender roles, female sexuality is understood only as functional for reproductive purposes and without the possibility or need for enjoyment; consequently, the female libido is something that must be denied or hidden, as stipulated by the gender ideology of *marianismo*.

An age-related double bind applies when women "of a certain age" access to the presidential office. As young politicians they are trapped within stere-

gentinean press during 2007, see Piscopo (2010, p. 2005)

[13] It is relevant to notice here that the mourning of President Carlos Menem after the death of his son Carlos Facundo, better known as Junior, occurred while piloting a helicopter in March 1995, was reported by *Noticias* in a completely different way, without mentioning nor emphasizing the psychic consequences of this loss for the mental health of the president and, subsequently, his ruling capacities.

otypes of compulsory motherhood but as middle-aged women they will face aging-based stereotypes like unattractiveness, weakness and menopausal disorders (Murray, 2010, pp. 17–18). Gender-based age discrimination is, thus, directly related to the "expiration date" of the female reproductive capacity and, therefore, to the sexual practices after a woman's fertile years. That is the case when the sexual life of a middle-age female president like CFK becomes a matter of state and media discusses her libido as a political liability. Once more, male presidents' libido – as Menem's, de la Rua's or even Néstor Kirchner's – played no role in the media representation of their ruling time. On the contrary, the hyper-sexualization of CFK's image demonstrates, again, the intention to embarrass and punish a sexually active woman in political office.

CFK's unforgivable transgression, then, is the reason for the gender-biased press to display her ambition of power as a source of pleasure and personal satisfaction. Let's be clear here: the combination of the master suppression techniques of ridicule, double punishment and objectification constitutes violence when conjoining to make visible female sexual pleasure as shameful; as well as linking sexual desire to the even more shameful female ambition of power. In other words, the intended disciplinary effect of the domination techniques is here not so much on the female physical and sexual desire but on the desire of power by women politicians that needs to be censored or, at least, restricted.

4. The mentally sick or psychically unbalanced woman

One of the stereotypes identified by Van Dembroucke (2014, pp. 1059–1060) in the representation of CFK in two Argentinean newspapers during her first term – the so called "stupid girl" – has been replaced in the covers of *Noticias* by the "crazy and uncontrollable woman" (that is, without the restraint of a husband or another man), just after the first weeks of her widowhood at the end of 2010. In both cases, the media stereotypes question CFK's capacity as Head of State because of her supposed lack of self-agency, due to her female condition, and consequently, her political incapacity of acting rationally and not emotionally.

From the earliest postulates of the philosophy of the Enlightenment during the XVIII century, rationality takes on a special value in modern societies as a prerequisite for progress and development. But it is only in contrast to the notion of "mental insalubrity" that the concept of rationality acquires its full meaning. Like the idea of power, rationality will be assumed as an attribute of masculinity while emotionality and sentimentality will be of femininity. The relationship between masculinity, rationality and capacity for action, and its opposite, the nexus between femininity, irrationality and passivity are inextricably linked to notions of social power and the gender systems of each era. Strictly, these attributions to gender identities are nothing more than cultural representations of differences in access or denial of power. These relationships

are complex and difficult to solve, but it is important to emphasize that they also constitute one of the mechanisms for the reproduction and maintenance of generic power relations (see Medina, 2010, pp. 135–138). Nonetheless, as a master suppression technique of double punishment, it could be also perceived as psychological and symbolic violence, as "when women [politicians must] keep their emotions in check and are reserved about their work, (…) [and be at the same time] also criticized by the press for being cold, distant and calculating" (García Beaudoux, 2017, p. 81).

The "Enigma of Cristina", or the "Cristina Syndrome" is represented in the covers of *Noticias* as "psychic disorders of power". Even a series of political conflicts and errors of judgment since 2013 has been attributed to the president's "emotional default" or "emotional breakdown".[14] On a couple of occasions, the covers wonder if CFK is under psychiatric treatment and even venture a diagnosis of bipolar personality, and picture this wondering in two almost consecutive covers where the first showing her smiling face speaks of the "euphoric stage of Cristina" and the other, remarks "the depression of Cristina" after the missed "Néstor factor", which is criticized as a supposed state secret in the magazine. The insistence on characterizing the behavior of the president as mentally questionable not only legitimizes the stereotype of "temperamental woman = crazy woman", but also dismisses any political act of the president as a result of emotional, hormonal or psychic imbalance. It is not the first time, however, that an active and perceived as multifaceted woman is characterized as irrational and cracked by her contemporaries in the Argentinean public space (see Medina, 2010). Media's contradictory demands and expectations on a female president with masculine attributes but a feminine leadership style at the same time is a good example of a double bind of impossible resolution, that generates "(…) media construction of CFK as both aggressive and authoritarian (and therefore too masculine), as well as self-obsessed and vain (and therefore not effortlessly feminine) (…) [that coexists with an image of] Cristina Fernández as a masculine diva" (Piscopo, 2010, pp. 205–206).

5. The unbearable woman

If, as García Beaudoux remaks (2017, pp. 43–47), leadership and masculinity are mirrored stereotypes that match each other, then, and in order to climb on the political pyramid, female politicians would adapt to the male norm by violating their gendered identities and assuming eccentric – as in "out-of-

[14] Paradoxically, the lack of gender policies during this period is never considered as a political failure of the female president by the Argentinean press, disregarding the fact that, according to the Gender Development Index elaborated by PNUD for 2013, Argentina was rated as #45 in the human development index and as #71 in the index of gender inequality (as explained in Ruiz Seisdedos & Grande Gascón, 2015, pp. 155–157; cf. Magaña, Medina & Florido Alejo, 2017).

my-center" – attributes of power and leadership styles. Female politicians that chose another political pattern of behavior will easily experience their (un) trustworthiness – and particular mode of leadership – constantly evaluated and debated in the mainstream media, as the magazine *Noticias* does.

In order to be perceived as proficient and reliable, a female president has to be masculine as well as feminine. As beauty is associated with superficiality and fragility rather than power, to be smart and attractive is an unviable dichotomy for her (Murray, 2010, pp. 16–17). In a society under the patriarchal rule, a female president will never conform the social expectations of femininity and, of course, masculinity. The domestic/professional double bind calls for the excessive critique of the private life and professional traits of the women politicians at the same time.

Several domination techniques are combined in the covers of the magazine to pigeonhole and stigmatize the female president as a transgressor against the gender system of her society and social class. The most common representation of CFK in the covers of *Noticias* is as an insolent defiant of specific Argentinean and upper-class patriarchal norms, as well as practices of male, political homosociability. The presumably exacerbated femininity of the president is permanently ridiculed by the covers and the attempt to double blame her is evident when, on the one hand, her dependence on her husband (or other men) is graphically highlighted while, on the other, she is represented as indomitable and "unbearably independent".[15] Scholars will not agree, though, in the appreciation of this "co-dependency" issue. For one, CKF's political leadership has been labelled by Ostiguy (2013) as "her peculiar brand of Peronism", especially during her firs mandate (2007–2010) that the author characterizes as *de facto* years of joint presidency. But while Piscopo also characterizes the Kirchners as a political power couple of 2003–2010 (2010, pp. 197–199), Peruzzotti (2017) will analyze the *Kirchnerismo* as a political phenomenon from three theoretical perspectives on populism but without even mentioning and / or analyzing the influence of CFK in the elaboration and political-ideological implementation of the common project/movement.

Nevertheless, whatever the K-leadership style was, it is the capacity of self-determination of CFK that would be "tremendously irritating" for the press and, hence, openly punished by the magazine covers representing "the second loneliness of Cristina" as a permanent search for the substitute of Néstor Kirchner. The urgent need to restore the heterosexual and binary patriarchal order compels *Noticias* to dedicate some covers to "Cristina's public and private solitude" and to speculate about the men surrounding her, both in Argentina and internationally, and even evaluating them as potential successors of her late husband in her bed as well as in her political rule. And once more, the sexual and affective life of the president is in the all-seeing eye of the gender-

[15] "(…) the problem for Cristina Fernández was the perception that she lacked any nurturing or friendly instincts at all" (Piscopo, 2010, p. 204).

biased press that discusses CFK's options for sublimation of her sexual desire into political ambition as a shameful and exasperating choice.

Even the introduction of a more inclusive and no sexist language in CFK's political speeches will trigger irritation, mockery and criticism from the press. As well pointed by Vitale (2015, p. 257), during CFK's first presidential term, she "brought the gendered nature of the Spanish language into play, using it to call attention and affirm her ground-making difference (…) [CFK] gave the presidency gender, making space for both herself and her husband as compatible but distinct within the office." Since what is not named does not exist, to name it, then, makes it visible. And when the first female president elected uses language as a powerful weapon for social change, acknowledging women's mere existence by duplicating and gendering nouns, pronouns and adjectives in Spanish, and including for the first time both female and male citizens ("ciudadanas y ciudadanos") in her first Address to the Nation in 2007, the revolutionary potential of female power will become more palpable and feasible. As a reaction against this, on the magazine covers there are some intents to ridicule and to make this empowering political practice invisible again, in a couple of ironic or sarcastic headlines.

In the same harmful way, the stereotype of the dangerousness of CFK as an "unpredictable, alone woman" (or "a woman without a man") – in combination with the master suppression techniques of ridiculing her physical appearance and double shaming her by the insistence on her psychic imbalance – will become a perfect and widely used tool between 2013–2014 with the purpose of deteriorating the public image of the ruling president, anticipating the electoral campaign of 2015 and CFK's exit from the executive office.

Closing remarks

Why media representation of female politicians matters? Public figures have an impact on our representation of power, shaping our collective subjectivity and world perception about what is "normal" and what is not. Every single minute, the mainstream media bomb us with gendered representations of power, exposing our minds to the effect of visual, also gendered narratives. Thus, how female leaders are (re)presented by media matters as a set of meaningful gendered tales that shape our (pre)conceptions of political power.

As it has been analysed in this text, the covers of the weekly magazine *Noticias* dedicated to President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner between 2011–2015 reveal an intense campaign of unrestricted blaming with the double objective of disciplining and punishing her as a transgressive woman against the patriarchal norms for her female condition while damaging her public image as an accountable politician.

Gender stereotypes are used by the media as recurrent metaphors that outline the public opinion and affect the societal assessment of women's achieve-

ments and engagement in politics. The interplay between gender stereotypes and master suppression techniques in the media representation of female candidates and representatives is studied here as a harmful and destructive association for the maintenance and reproduction of unjust power structures and the *status quo* of an unequal sociopolitical landscape. Fortunately, with their mere existence and public action, the women presidents can modify the same social landscape in Latin America, incorporating the possibility of access to the political sphere and the highest executive positions on the future horizon of new generations. And by that, naturalizing equal opportunities for people of all ages and / or sexes in the – until now restrictive but significant for possibilities of social empowerment – political power hierarchies.

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