

Integrative Disruption:

The rescue of the 33 Chilean miners as a live media event¹

*'We are not heroes and they are not heroes. They are victims of bad working conditions.
And the bad management of the mine'
(Lily Gómez, wife of Mario Gómez, one of the 33 trapped miners, interviewed in
Macqueen, 2011).*

Abstract

Theoretical approaches toward media events have tended to be dominated by a mostly Westocentric or 'Northern' perspective, paying limited attention to accounts coming from other regions. This chapter will problematize some current perspectives concerning disasters and media events, using a remarkable 'Southern' episode as a case study: the broadcast of the rescue of the 33 Chilean miners in October 2010. An analysis of videos of the live broadcast by the Chilean station TVN and BBC News suggests that, in spite of what some authors have recently proposed, the conceptualisation of media events should leave behind the categorisation between 'integrative' and 'disruptive'. In addition, it appears that the inclusion of global media organisations in what used to be mostly national events does not guarantee that alternative or disruptive accounts will be given a voice. Finally, this story is a reminder of the potential political uses disasters may have, such as this case, in which the communicative controls imposed by the government and the responsibility of the company owning the mine were overlooked in order to benefit the Chilean authorities.

Keywords: Media events, disasters, television, Chilean miners, BBC, TVN

Introduction

It may not commonly be taken into account, but the different theoretical approaches toward media events should always be viewed in relation to the wider political and sociocultural contexts in which they emerge. As Dayan admits (2008), when he and Elihu Katz published *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992), their emphasis

¹ Some of the ideas discussed in this chapter draw on previous publications by the author, particularly Jiménez-Martínez, 2014 and Jiménez-Martínez, 2013.

on hegemony, integration and reconciliation was partly influenced by the mood of the aftermath of the Cold War, particularly the ideas popularized at that time by Francis Fukuyama about the 'end of history' (1992). Similarly, later revisions made to the concept, which argued that traumatic events such as terrorism, disaster and war were taking centre stage in detriment of more celebratory occasions (e.g. Katz & Liebes, 2007), were an answer to 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror (Sun, 2014, p. 459).

Although these and other similar revisions have represented a significant contribution in pushing forward the understanding of media events, they have also been dominated by a mostly Westocentric or 'Northern' perspective. As such, they have paid limited attention to approaches coming from other regions, which on occasion may provide divergent accounts. For instance, some examples from China have demonstrated that the classic model of media events, which aims to celebrate national unity in a ceremonial way, has not been completely upstaged by traumatic occurrences, but is in fact 'still alive' (Cui, 2013, p.1220; see also Sun, 2014).

This chapter will problematize some current perspectives concerning disasters and media events, using a remarkable 'Southern' episode as a case study: the broadcast of the rescue of the 33 Chilean miners in October 2010. Watched live by an estimated audience of 1 billion spectators around the world, the rescue has been considered a historical media event as well as a source of inspiration and feel-good for people (Bachman, 2010; Brooks, 2010; Stanford, 2010). Despite this high visibility, it remains an understudied episode. A quick glance at the literature shows that only a few works have attempted to analyse it (e.g. Ferry, 2011; Malešević, 2013; Philips, 2011; Prieto Larraín, 2011; Scandura & Sharif, 2013; Useem, Jordán & Koljatic, 2013). Interestingly, while all these works have agreed on the key role played by media organisations, with few exceptions (e.g. Rossi, Magnani & Iadarola, 2011), the contribution of media and communication studies to a better understanding of this episode appears to be minimal.

Based on an analysis of videos of the live broadcast by the Chilean station TVN and BBC News, I will argue that this case suggests that, in spite of what some authors have

recently proposed, the conceptualisation of media events should leave behind the categorisation between ‘integrative’ and ‘disruptive’. In addition, it appears that the inclusion of global media organisations in what used to be mostly national events does not guarantee that alternative or disruptive accounts will be given a voice. Finally, this story is a reminder of the potential political uses disasters may have, such as this case, in which the communicative controls imposed by the government and the responsibility of the company owning the mine were overlooked in order to benefit the Chilean authorities.

Media events: integrative or disruptive?

Dayan and Katz’s seminal work has been praised for its mixture of semiotics and mass communication research, as well as its emphasis on the extraordinary rather than on the ordinary or average (Hepp and Couldry, 2010). At the same time, it has been widely contested due to its focus on mostly hegemonic, integrative and reconciliatory situations (e.g., Cottle, 2006, 2012; Couldry, 2003; Fiske, 1994; Hepp & Couldry, 2010; Hepp, Höhn, & Vogelgesang, 2003; Kellner, 2010; Mihelj, 2008; Scannell, 2002; Seeck & Rantanen, 2015). In particular, episodes such as 9/11, the Iraq war, the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 and hurricane Katrina, have prompted several authors to rethink the theoretical framework of media events, developing a dualistic model which, using different terminologies, categorises these episodes as either ‘integrative’ or ‘disruptive’ (e.g., Katz & Liebes, 2007; Liebes, 1998; Mihelj, 2008; Seeck & Rantanen, 2015). Thus, while the ‘classic’ celebratory model of a media event is seen as integrative, episodes of war, disaster or terror are considered disruptive.

The main arguments can be summarised as follows: first, disruptive media events are non-preplanned situations driven by anxiety, conflict, disagreement and tragedy, which upstage celebratory occurrences in a time characterised by a higher degree of cynicism, segmentation and disenchantment. Second, in terms of their media coverage, while journalists would tend to be aligned with the mainstream during ceremonial media events, in the case of disruptive media events they would follow the interests of the anti-

establishment. Third, the negative effects of these disruptive episodes would be felt not only by authorities or elites but also by ordinary citizens. Fourth, unlike celebratory media events, which are considered essentially conservative because they would aim to reinforce the established social order, disruptive media events would be capable of encouraging social conflict and transformation, challenging values and power relations in a given society (Dayan, 2008; Katz & Liebes, 2007; Liebes, 1998; Mihelj, 2008; Seeck & Rantanen, 2015).

While this critique to the work of Dayan and Katz has offered valuable insights, it appears that some of these authors, particularly when it comes to the analysis of disasters, have adopted a somewhat simplistic perspective. Approaching disasters as mere exceptions or disruptions to the status quo can overlook the fact that, on occasion, they may actually be a consequence of long-term social phenomena. As such, disasters can be seen as an endemic feature of the current global social environment, intrinsically related to issues of power, structural determination and cultural performativity (Calhoun, 2008; Cottle, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014; Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen, & Cottle, 2012; Tierney, 2007). Moreover, disasters are not simply communicated by the media. They are actually constituted and performed within communication flows and infused with cultural or political meanings. As such, they can become spectacles or be kept silent, and may highlight different kinds of potential responses depending on the way they are reported (e.g., Chouliaraki, 2006; Orgad, 2012; see also Cottle, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014; Pantti et al., 2012). Thus, whereas some disasters may prompt political, social, or cultural transformations (e.g., Mihelj, 2008; Seeck & Rantanen, 2015), others –particularly their symbolic or discursive construction- can be appropriated by elites to promote particular agendas or reinforce positions of power (e.g., Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007; Klein, 2008; Tierney, Bevc, & Kuligowski, 2006; Schneider & Hwang, 2014; for a more detailed discussion about this point, see Cottle, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014; Pantti et al., 2012).

Consequently, while the call to include conflicts, natural disasters and terrorist acts in the analysis of media events has been a welcoming update in view of recent episodes –

particularly those occurring in the West or affecting Western citizens-, the proposed distinction between ‘integrative’ and ‘disruptive’ media events seems to be ill-equipped to deal with the complex nature of these occurrences. Moreover, focussing only on the apparent disruptive characteristics of these acts may overlook their political connotations, given that they – exactly like the more celebratory or ceremonial media events – can also become communicative platforms that may serve the interests of particular actors, as the broadcast of the rescue of the miners in Chile illustrates.

Live - from 688 metres below ground

The chain of events leading to the rescue of the Chilean miners begins on the 5th August 2010. On that day, the San José copper mine, located in the north of Chile, collapsed leaving 33 workers trapped 688 metres underground below tonnes of rock. For seventeen days the men survived in complete isolation with almost no food or water, until they were able to attach a note to a drill that reached them: ‘We are all well in the shelter -the 33 of us’ (Franklin, 2011). Although a private company owned the mine, in a risky political decision, the government of then Chilean President Sebastián Piñera took the rescue into its own hands, aware that the authorities would be made responsible for the failure or success of the operation and that the reputation of the country would be put at risk (Prieto Larrain, 2011; Toro & Canales, 2010a; Useem, Jordán & Koljatic, 2013).

A quick look at the media coverage at the time shows that, while in Chile the story was followed immediately after the accident occurred, it was only when the men were found alive that it also seized attention abroad. In the weeks after the miners' message was found, more than 1,500 journalists, photographers and cameramen belonging to 250 media organisations from all over the world gathered around the mine (Bachman, 2010; Prieto Larrain, 2011), covering an array of issues such as the technical details of the upcoming rescue operation and the fact that, outside the mine, some of the miners were awaited by both their wives and mistresses (e.g. Penhaul, 2010; Govan, 2010). The visibility of this event reached its climax on the 12th and 13th October 2010, when an exciting, emotional 22-hour rescue operation was carried out. One by one, each miner

was safely shuttled up to the surface by the *Fénix 2* capsule through a meticulously contrived borehole, to be received by a cheering crowd of onlookers, a medical team, relatives and authorities.

Just as the rescue operation had been carefully planned during the previous weeks, so was the way in which it would be communicated through the media. Arguing that the large number of journalists trying to cover the story at the same time would be a source of chaos (“Director de la transmisión oficial”, 2011), the Chilean government produced an official television broadcast. Eight cameras, including one inside the mine, were installed in different areas restricted to journalists and a crew of 45 people worked under the guidelines of the Secretary of Communications (“Más de 1.600 periodistas,” 2010). Although the authorities were keen to emphasise that there were no underlying political intentions and that they were committed exclusively to ‘the truth’ (“Encargado de la transmisión,” 2010), several reports have claimed that the government actually gave instructions to avoid close-ups of the miners if they were found to be in particularly poor health (Toro & Canales, 2010b). Additionally, a giant Chilean flag was placed in front of the accredited media, in order to prevent alternative shots from photographers and television cameras (Franklin, 2011). But this communicative control was not limited to the rescue. In fact, although the Chilean President had assured audiences that they were using cameras to be visible ‘in the good times . . . and bad ones’ (Useem, Jordán & Koljatic, 2013), when the miners were found alive and the first footage of them inside the mine was released, any images of the men crying or ill were edited out (Franklin, 2011).

Two reasons have been proposed to explain the careful management of how the rescue was communicated. First, for a Chilean audience still haunted by mismanagement of the centre-left authorities during the 8.8 earthquake and tsunami of February 2010, a successful rescue could serve to highlight the efficiency of the first democratically elected right-wing government in 50 years (Franklin, 2011; Prieto Larraín, 2011). Second, for the rest of the world, the operation could be used to distance Chile’s image from the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and position it as an example of efficiency, with the miners, the rescue team and the authorities embodying the solidarity, strength

and organisational capacity of the country (Franklin, 2011; Prieto Larraín, 2011; Toro & Canales, 2010b). In fact, once the rescue was over, President Sebastián Piñera made explicit his hope that the country could be seen in a different way by the rest of the world:

Piñera: I think that today Chile is more united and is stronger than it was before . . . because of the example given to the whole world by the miners and their families . . . I am sure that today Chile is more respected and people know more about this small country, so far away from the rest of the world. (“Sebastian Pinera,” 2010)

Piñera: I hope that from now on, when people around the world hear the word Chile, they will not remember the coup d'état or the dictatorship; they will remember what all we Chileans have achieved together, because all Chileans are united, committed to this rescue effort and that is an example for the whole world. (Wilcox, 2010)

The US\$ 20,000,000 rescue operation not only brought all the men alive to the surface, but, at least in first instance, also seemed to have paid well from a communicational perspective. Some official reports released at that time by the Chilean government claimed that, along with the aforementioned estimated audience of 1 billion people, more than 16,000 newspaper articles were published on the days of the rescue operation, two million tweets were written on the 12th October alone, Facebook posts were at almost 1,300 per minute and, at the start of the rescue, more than 4 million websites related to the operation were visited (Prieto Larraín, 2011). Moreover, some of these official reports, written from a public relations and advertising perspective, argued that if the Chilean authorities had wanted to pay for all that coverage, they would have had to spend US\$ 2,300,000,000 (Prieto Larraín, 2011).

Emphasis, performativity, loyalty and shared viewing experience

Due to its historical relevance, omnipresence in the media, and apparent reconciliatory mood, the rescue of the Chilean miners seems to fit the classic definition of a media event (Dayan & Katz, 1992). However, I suggest that a more productive approach can be provided by Dayan's reformulation of media events (2008), who stripped them down to four relevant features: *emphasis*, *performativity*, *loyalty* and *shared viewing experience*. The reason being, this perspective embraces some criticisms made to Dayan and Katz's original work, but crucially, it still assigns relevance to the live aspect of these episodes. Although liveness has always been an essential feature of media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Katz, 1980), some authors have tended to overlook it (e.g., Eskjaer, 2007; Fiske, 1994; Krotz, 2010; Trandafoiu, 2008; Volkmer, 2008), describing instead the intense coverage of one specific story, more in the line of news waves or media hypes (Vasterman, 2005; Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009). Conversely, Dayan's approach makes it possible to examine a matter that has not received much attention lately, that is to say, the *performative details of a live event as it unfolds*.

The four features proposed by Dayan (2008) can be observed in the rescue: *emphasis*, due to its omnipresence in local and global media, particularly television; *performativity*, due to the interest of the Chilean government in controlling the communicative aspects; *loyalty*, in the acceptance or rejection of the proposed meaning of the event by the media; and, although the exact manner in which audiences endorsed the event is beyond the scope of this research, it was arguably a *shared viewing experience* for the one billion people who watched it in real time. In this chapter, I have focussed mainly on performativity and loyalty, examining the narratives produced during the live coverage by Chilean television station Televisión Nacional de Chile (TVN), which at that time topped the audience ratings of its country ("TVN volvió a imponerse," 2010). Additionally, I have also analysed BBC News, which in the United Kingdom alone had its third-best ever audience numbers thanks to the live coverage of the operation, with almost 7 million people viewing it (Williams, 2010).

Methodologically speaking, the data was obtained from 61 short videos, corresponding to the live footage originally broadcasted on the 12th and 13th October 2010, available on the

websites of both TVN and BBC News. The chosen videos featured the actual moment in which each miner was rescued, moments that were precisely the ones of highest interest for global audiences (Pujol, 2010). For their analysis, I employed an interpretative qualitative method based on critical discourse analysis, that has already been used in media studies (e.g., Chouliaraki, 2006; Orgad, 2012; see also Fairclough, 1995), and which explores the production and legitimization of meanings as well as the symbolic production, reproduction, and transformation of power relations, hierarchies, and authorities (Orgad, 2012).

As such, I have understood discourses not only as written or spoken language, but also as visual images, non-verbal communication and other semiotic actions. The aim is using this methodology not to unveil the ‘reality’ behind a particular occurrence –an assumption already questioned by Fiske when arguing that media events are not discourses ‘about an event’ but ‘discursive events’ (1994, p. 4)-, but rather to identify the narratives proposed by the government and the media, as well as the ideologies and power relations challenged or supported during the live coverage. What have been analysed are the images, sounds, language and their respective ‘texture’ (Fairclough, 1995), in order to observe who was allowed to speak during the coverage, what was shown and not shown, and how the miners, the authorities and the families were portrayed.

Analysis: Narrating the rescue as it unfolds

Due to the aforementioned communicative controls imposed by the Chilean authorities, practically every television station that followed the story in real time had to rely on the images provided by the government. Because of the repetitive nature of the rescue, the visual construction of the official broadcast was somewhat formulaic: it started inside the mine, showing the preparations before each man entered *Fénix 2*; it was then followed by a few shots of the rescue capsule coming back to the surface; afterwards, images of the relatives allowed to await their loved one; later, the man’s arrival with his first reactions and the crowd welcoming him; and finally, a brief reunion, first with the family member

and then with the Chilean President or another authority. The miners were always happy and spent more time with the President than with anybody else. In fact, it was only when they talked to Piñera that it was possible to clearly hear the conversation. In most cases, several close-ups on the face of the President accompanied that conversation. In contrast, when the miners met their relatives, the conversations were barely audible and other family members were portrayed in groups, often standing in darker areas.

Additionally, national symbols were constantly displayed during the broadcast. For instance, Chilean flags of different sizes could be seen inside and outside the mine, as well as on the machines used for the rescue, on balloons and on the clothes worn by the miners. Despite the authorities' claim for neutrality ("Encargado de la transmisión," 2010), a specific narrative arises from these patterns: in the images, Chile is showcased as a united country with efficient, committed authorities; a nation whose example is worthy of admiration and that, based on the aforementioned statements made by Piñera after the rescue, is leaving behind painful moments of its recent history. However, were the national and global stations analysed here *loyal* to this proposed narrative? Or did they challenge it with counter-narratives?

Celebrating a united nation

To this official broadcast, both TVN and BBC only added their own narration and, occasionally, some complementary shots. Still, commentators play a crucial role in media events, given that they provide the audience with the first accounts and interpretations of what is seen on screen (Dayan & Katz, 1985; Kennett & de Moragas, 2008). On TVN, what seemed to prime was a celebratory mood, with journalists and anchors permanently adopting a cheerful tone. An atmosphere of happiness around the rescue was portrayed, with constant descriptions of the applauses and ovations that each miner received upon reaching the surface. Even images of apparent sadness were interpreted within this frame:

Reporter: A little boy cries . . . of happiness. (Rescue of Florencio Ávalos, 0:50)

The descriptions given by TVN's journalists not only centred on what happened in the area surrounding the mine, but they also characterised the rest of Chile as united around this particular rescue. Thus, every single Chilean was portrayed as part of this media event:

Reporter: Applause everywhere, cheering, [people are singing] the national anthem, people are screaming C-H-I . . . (Rescue of Florencio Ávalos, 0:35)

Reporter: This is the moment when the country is about to explode. (Rescue of Luis Urzúa, 0:09)

Reporter 2: The sirens can be heard not only in the San José mine; there are horns and bells all over Chile, an immense happiness. (Rescue of Luis Urzúa, 1:02)

This unity was also depicted at a more individual level. For instance, when Franklin Lobos was rescued, one of the anchors explained that, during Lobos' underground captivity, he patched up his relationship with his until then estranged daughter. Similarly, the hug between Luis Urzúa and the President was interpreted as the encounter between 'the boss of the 33' and 'the boss of the country'. And interestingly, when Carlos Mamani, the only non-Chilean of the group, reached the surface, Bolivia was described as 'our brother country' and Piñera's gesture of carrying the Bolivian flag was read as an act of 'fraternity and integrity'.

Both the heroism of the men and the historicity of the occasion were emphasised by the journalists. Several miners were affectionately referred to as 'Minerheart' (*Corazón de minero*, in Spanish), and their endurance, sense of humour and even their manners were praised. Additionally, there were several remarks concerning the historicity of the rescue, stressing its unprecedented nature and the low chances of survival that the men originally had. This historicity was interpreted as both a source of pride for Chile and admiration from the rest of the world:

Reporter 2: Congratulations to the rescue team and to everyone who participated in this historic and heroic occasion, of which we are all proud. (Rescue of Luis Urzúa, 0:48)

Reporter 1: We are witnessing a very moving moment, a historical moment of international, planetary dimensions; this is a moment at which Chile must feel proud. (Rescue of Luis Urzúa, 2:03)

Most of the shots, provided by the official broadcast, tended to focus on the miners and the Chilean authorities, showing the surroundings only in panoramic views. TVN did on some occasions break this visual pattern, when an additional camera displayed images of the cities of Copiapó and Santiago, close-ups of relatives or even interviews with them. However, every time a miner was brought to the surface, this additional camera was relegated to a secondary role and never took full control of the screen, allowing the visual narrative proposed by the government to remain unchallenged.

Only at few brief moments this atmosphere of unity, fraternity and celebration was interrupted. For instance, when Mario Gómez reached the surface, one of the anchors adopted a more dramatic tone stating, ‘this is a symbol of the strength, but also the suffering of our country’. Later on, another journalist explained how, just a few days before the accident, Gómez had warned the management of the San José mine about the potential danger of a collapse. But perhaps, the most illustrative comment was made once the rescue was completed:

Reporter: 70 days of overtime pay is what [the men] expect from the owners of the mine; this is another issue we will be analysing in the following days, the level of responsibility behind this accident that the courts are already investigating. (Rescue of Luis Urzúa, 9:33)

This type of statement was not predominant during the live broadcast, and it is perhaps revealing that it was made once the media event was over. In fact, during most of TVN’s

transmission, Chile was described as a united country that successfully faced an extremely difficult and unprecedented situation, winning the admiration of the entire world. The miners were heroes, and, fundamentally, the authorities were seen as the key actors behind this historic achievement. Thus, TVN's account was loyal to the one proposed by the Chilean government.

Two (un)equal men

The narrative constructed by BBC shared some of the features already discussed in the case of TVN, such as the historicity of the event. When José Henríquez was brought to the surface, the journalists highlighted the complexity and unprecedented nature of the rescue. Similar remarks were made with other miners, for example, with Florencio Ávalos and Franklin Lobos. The workers were portrayed as heroes as well, although the emphasis was on different aspects. In several moments –like with Carlos Mamani, José Ojeda and Juan Illanes-, the journalists expressed their surprise at their impressive physical condition, praising the diet the men received while still trapped and perhaps implying that they *should* have been in a much worse state. Still, for BBC, many of these features were seen as a source of pride for Chile, as this comment about the capsule especially conceived for the occasion exemplifies:

Reporter: Look at *Fénix 2*. It's a bit battered, the paint is cheap, but it's worth its weight in gold. The Chilean Navy must be immensely proud of this. They designed this capsule. (Rescue of Raúl Bustos, 0:36)

Just like TVN, BBC also followed the story using images of the official broadcast. Only very rarely –much less frequently than TVN – it included images from a complementary camera. Their journalists talked continuously, probably because they not only had to narrate and interpret what was on screen but also translate it. Their tone was generally cheerful, repeatedly praising the operation, but -with the exception of the rescue of the first and last miners- it never reached the same heights of excitement expressed by TVN.

Their remarks were more descriptive, using expressions such as ‘this is the most exciting human drama you can imagine’ or simply talking about scenes and pictures:

Reporter: Oh, fantastic pictures from here, from this mine. (Rescue of Juan Illanes, 1:14)

Reporter: Fantastic pictures here from the top of this mine shaft. (Rescue of Carlos Mamani, 1:25)

Reporter: These extraordinarily close-up images, of the emotions that these people are experiencing, and always these beaming smiles. (Rescue of José Henríquez, 1:28)

Reporter: Here we go, Jimmy Sánchez now. My goodness, what scenes here tonight. (Rescue of Jimmy Sánchez, 0:05)

Unsurprisingly, BBC did not adopt a nationalistic tone. Instead, the journalists focussed more on the emotions of the miners and families, perhaps appealing to cosmopolitan values:

Reporter: [There are] always emotional hugs, kisses, tears. (Rescue of Carlos Barrios, 0:30)

Reporter: Big smile, big hug for his daughter, his partner, his mother. A cluster of reunion and affection. (Rescue of Claudio Acuña, 0:50)

Reporter: Oh, what can beat a mother and child reunion. (Rescue of Daniel Herrera, 1:30)

The focus on emotions may be due to a limited knowledge of the local situation (Kennett & de Moragas, 2008). However, emotions can also play social and political roles while a

disaster is unfolded through the media (Pantti et al, 2012). Here, this approach was also extended to the authorities, with the Chilean President becoming much more personalised in comparison with TVN. He was praised for the way he handled the crisis and there were constant references to his feelings and the popularity gained during the rescue. Moreover, the fact that, unlike the miners, he is a billionaire was not seen as evidence of a conflict of classes, but as another element emphasising the unity of Chileans. TVN had hinted this point, but BBC made it more evident when the last miner was rescued:

Reporter: The boss below ground hugging the boss above ground. They come from totally different backgrounds. One is a millionaire, born to great wealth and the other is a simple miner, not making bad money, but certainly not wealthy. They come from two totally different ends of the spectrum, and here they are, united. (Rescue of Luis Urzúa, 1:40)

The visual construction of this scene is of particular interest. The shots of the official broadcast focussed on Urzúa and Piñera, with a few general images of the surroundings but several close-ups of the faces of both men. While this could be seen as a manner to represent them at the same level, most of the time these shots actually followed the facial expressions of the President. Moreover, while BBC split the screen in two in order to add a second camera, this additional camera only represented the families in a distant, barely visible panoramic shot, which hugely contrasted with the close-up centred on the face of Sebastián Piñera.

The narration emphasised this focus on the authority as well, and probably inadvertently, it avoided giving place to issues that might have disrupted this cheerful and moving atmosphere. Thus, when Luis Urzúa talked to the President, one of his first statements was 'I hope this will never happen again'. However, the BBC journalists missed the translation of the phrase and instead, they commented on how the eyes of Piñera were filled with emotion, and how much they expressed his admiration toward the courage and loyalty of the miners. Consequently, although the narrative of BBC does not follow

exactly the same patterns of TVN and has some distinctive features, it still remains loyal to the one proposed by the government or, at least, it does not challenge it.

A fleeting glimpse?

One of the main observations made to the original framework of Dayan and Katz was that the diversity of representations of a media event would increase when looking at it from a global perspective (e.g. Hepp & Couldry, 2010; Price, 2008). On a superficial level, the fact that TVN and BBC had somewhat different accounts could be seen as a confirmation of this argument. Furthermore, it may also support the claim that media events, instead of having an articulate identity, actually possess a thematic core around which different depictions and meanings arise (Hepp and Couldry, 2010; Hoover, 2010). Accordingly, it has been implied that this abundance of narratives would increase the possibility of reinterpretations or ‘hijackings’ of the event (Dayan, 2008; Price, 2008). However, as discussed earlier, in this case, there was actually little space for radical reinterpretations or counter-narratives. In spite of some specific remarks made by TVN, both stations remained fairly loyal to the narrative proposed by the Chilean government, representing the miners as heroes, displacing the families to a secondary role and constantly praising the role played by the authorities.

It is interesting to take into account what was not said by the commentators. While contentious issues such as the poor security conditions of the mine, the responsibility of the company owning it, or the fierce control of communications imposed by the government were known before and after the rescue (e.g., Macqueen, 2011; O’Shaughnessy, 2010), they were barely mentioned *during* the live broadcast. This observation echoes other studies that showed how, for instance, despite the controversies surrounding the preparations of the Beijing Olympics, their live broadcast remained largely apolitical (Fernández Peña, de Moragas, Lallana, & Rezende, 2010; Kennett & de Moragas, 2008).

Some authors (Qing, 2010) have argued that the lack of criticisms during the Games is due to the high cost of the broadcasting fees and their level of attraction among audiences. Similarly, Dayan holds that in the Olympics, due to legal and contractual impositions, ‘variability is accepted but only within limits’ (Dayan, 2008, p. 392). Perhaps, this issue may illuminate why in this case, while the coverage of TVN and BBC differed in some areas, it was actually fairly loyal to the narrative proposed by the government. Like every other television station that transmitted the operation in real time, they depended heavily on the images provided by the government. This point is extremely relevant because, according to some reports, the authorities were able to manipulate the images during particular moments in order to, for instance, cover up the fact that an avalanche occurred inside the mine while they were still rescuing the workers (Franklin, 2011).

Given the extraordinary nature of this event, it could be suggested that a “sphere of consensus” prevailed in the media, in which the most contended issues regarding the accident and the rescue were suspended in favour of more important interests (Hallin, 1986; Schudson, 2006). In fact, according to Dayan and Katz (1992), media events tend to be exempt of criticisms because of the awe they inspire in journalists. However, if one of the main features of a media event is its *performativity*, who defines what that higher interest actually is? The Chilean government? The media? Dayan expresses concern about the persistence of this sphere of consensus beyond exceptional moments (Chin, 2010; Dayan, 2008), but what is the cost of its predominance *during* the live unfolding of the event? And who benefits from it?

At least at first instance, the rescue appeared to have a positive effect for the Chilean authorities, with President Piñera increasing his popularity to 63% (Rayner, 2010; Terra, 2010) and Chile was praised abroad as an example of success, efficiency and free-trade policies (Phillips, 2011; Prieto Larraín, 2011; Jiménez-Martínez, 2013). Still, these accomplishments seemed to be quite fleeting. In spite of their newly acquired status as celebrities, one year after the rescue, some of the miners were unemployed, facing health difficulties, and even more, 31 of them sued the government and the company owning the

mine (Macqueen, 2011; Steffan, 2011). Around the same time, due to a conflict with the students of his country, the popularity of Piñera plummeted to 27%, one of the worst evaluations received by any President in Chile after the return to democracy in 1990 (Adimark GFX, 2011). However, that does not mean that the miners fade into oblivion. In 2014, a couple of weeks before the start of the World Cup in Brazil, a television ad of a Chilean bank showed the 33 miners encouraging the national football team of their country and some of them collaborated with *The 33*, a movie based on their story, starring Antonio Banderas and Juliette Binoche (Stone, 2014; “Antonio Banderas to play ‘Super Mario’”, 2014).

Concluding remarks

The limited nature and scope of this article—a qualitative study, focused on the coverage of one specific event by two media organizations— makes generalisations problematic. Still, there are some implications arising from the analysis that may be relevant for the field. First, the understanding of media events should go beyond the proposed distinction between integrative and disruptive. That dualism seems to come mainly from a Western-biased perspective, which has attempted to understand some episodes of conflict, disaster or terrorism that have affected mostly the West – or Western citizens. That framework may prove to be problematic when examining cases like the rescue of the Chilean miners, given that this story could perfectly belong to any of those categories. Second, and in relation to the previous observation, this dual categorisation appears to dismiss the extremely complex nature of disasters. Although they seem to be disruptive on the surface, they may actually correspond to long-term social phenomena and, through the way in which they are staged and performed through the media, may also have specific political connotations (Cottle, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014; Cui, 2013; Pantti et al., 2012).

Third, although media events may not have an hegemonic and single identity, they might be, at least *during* their live broadcast, much more cohesive and restricted to what has been claimed by some recent literature. Interestingly, Dayan and Katz had already discussed in some of their early work the ambiguous characteristics of media events as

well as how different interpretations by broadcasters and audiences can be united around one particular celebratory moment (Dayan & Katz, 1985, 1988). Perhaps, the rescue of the Chilean miners could be seen as a kind of *integrative disruption*, that is to say, an event that –like probably other disasters, but also conflicts and even terrorist attacks- apparently alters the status quo, yet is actually used by elites to reinforce their position of power or promote specific agendas. In this case, this live media event showcased in a positive light both the Chilean authorities and the country as a whole, but overlooked issues such as the responsibility of the mine owners, the poor security conditions at the excavation site, and the fierce control of communications imposed by the government.

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