

Journalistic narratives and collective memory of an urban catastrophe: The case of the April 22 explosions in Guadalajara's newspapers

Narrativas periodísticas y memoria colectiva de una catástrofe urbana: el caso de las explosiones del 22 de abril en la prensa de Guadalajara

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On April 22, 1992, nine explosions destroyed a neighborhood populated by workingclasses in Guadalajara (Mexico). Casualties included 210 people killed and many wounded. Through a textual and narrative analysis of 160 articles published in the local press, this research analyzes the narratives that the journalists crafted to commemorate this catastrophe. The article explains how narratives were highly influenced by a religious discourse, and how journalists used the concept of “space” and “body” to explain the explosion's aftermaths.

KEYWORDS: collective memory, journalism, narrative analysis, Guadalajara.

En la mañana del 22 de abril de 1992, nueve explosiones destruyeron un barrio popular en Guadalajara. Las víctimas incluyeron 210 muertos y cientos de heridos. A través de un análisis narrativo de 160 artículos publicados en la prensa local, esta investigación indaga las historias que los periodistas elaboraron para conmemorar la catástrofe. El artículo explica cómo las narrativas estuvieron moldeadas por un discurso religioso y cómo los periodistas utilizaron los conceptos de “espacio” y “cuerpo” para explicar las consecuencias de la explosión.

PALABRAS CLAVE: memoria colectiva, periodismo, análisis narrativo, Guadalajara.

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INTRODUCTION

Guadalajara, which is Mexico's second largest city, suffered the worst disaster in its history on April 22, 1992. In the early morning hours, nine explosions demolished several kilometers of an area known as Analco, one of the city's oldest working-class neighborhoods located on the west side of the city. According to official reports, the explosions were caused by a gasoline leak in pipelines operated by the state-owned company *Petroleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX). The leak ended up in the city's sewers. The explosions left 210 people dead, 1 400 injured and caused severe damage to 22 streets (Petersen Farah, Núñez Bustillos, & de Dios Corona, 2002).

The tragedy, which affected thousands of people and forever changed the city's urban landscape, forms part of the Guadalajara's history and the collective memory of its inhabitants. Hundreds of people lost family members, friends, and property, and many people living in the neighborhood of Analco relocated to other neighborhoods and cities as a result. In addition to the loss of life and property, victims of the catastrophe also suffered the mental and physical consequences of the bodily harm and psychological trauma of the tragedy.

The repercussions of the catastrophe extended to the whole population. After the event, the response of the entire political and governmental apparatus was terrible. The mayor of Guadalajara and the governor of the state of Jalisco ignored reports from citizens in the area that the sewers smelled of gasoline, which led many to believe that the tragedy could have been avoided if these reports had been investigated. After the explosions, authorities were slow to arrive, and it was the citizens themselves who rescued the first victims. Finally, when rescue efforts concluded, the process of rebuilding the city, compensating victims, and identifying those responsible, began. Authorities again failed in this process, not only taking a long time to rebuild the area, but to date have still not compensated all the victims, and there is no legal certainty to indicate who is responsible for the tragedy. Thus, after 25 years, the event remains in a liminal space in society's collective memory, where the tragedy's meaning and its causes are still being constructed.

Several scholars have studied the political, economic, social and cultural impacts of the explosions (Alonso, 1992; Ferguson Peralta, 1992; Gómez Naredo, 2012a; Gómez Partida, 2003; Macías, 1993; Padilla, 1993; Ramírez Sáiz & Regalado Santillán, 1995). However, to date, none of these have analyzed how local journalists' narratives have contributed to shaping the collective memory of the tragedy. Therefore, this paper draws from academic studies on collective memory and journalism to formulate a critical analysis of the narratives written to commemorate the April 22 explosions.

Through the narrative analysis of 160 articles published in Guadalajara's newspapers, this research explores the stories written by journalists in commemoration of the disaster. The results of the study provide a detailed explanation of the development of two primary narratives. The first is the narrative of events held to commemorate the tragedy in various urban spaces around the city, such as memorials, churches, and streets, and through practices like masses and silent marches. The second is the narrative that uses the concept of "body" to describe the urban damages caused by the explosions (city-as-body), positioning the collective memory in the bodies of victims (mnemonic-human-body), and the collective memory of the tragedy as a social body that cannot heal its wounds until those responsible for the explosions are identified (mnemonic-social-body).

JOURNALISM AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

In the aftermath of an urban disaster like the explosions in Guadalajara, people search for ways to understand the sudden and dramatic transformation of their environment. For us to begin to understand what happened, we must describe and analyze the changes in our daily lives. In this process of analysis and reconstruction in the wake of a disaster, the act of remembering plays a crucial role in finding meaning. Remembering is defined as the ability to relate and narrate a past event (Zelizer, 1995). In narrating the past, individuals and societies can begin to understand the causes and consequences of a tragedy like that of the April 22 explosions in Guadalajara.

In a community, as small as a neighborhood, or as large as a country, every individual can remember the past and recount critical public events (Halbwachs, 1992, p.46). At the same time, each of these individuals also belongs to groups, organizations, and institutions that create collective narrations of the past. Together, the memories of these agents and institutions, as well as the tension that arises between them, represent the social network known as collective memory.

Within the framework represented by the construction of a community's memory, some agents and institutions have more power in the collective process of remembrance than others (Liñán & Leetoy, 2016). In modern societies, journalists have become one of the most powerful interpretative communities when the time comes for remembering issues of public relevance (Edy, 1999; Kitch, 2008; Zelizer, 1993, 2008). If remembering is the ability to relate and narrate a past event (Zelizer, 1995), then the work of journalists is closely tied to the construction of a society's collective memory. Journalists are charged with the task of witnessing events and then narrating them through text, audio, video and multimedia formats.

This task results in the production of a significant amount of information which people use to learn about the worlds they live in. Every day reporters are constructing narratives about these worlds. In the future, these stories become archives of knowledge and memory where people can find interpretations of the past (Martin & Jaramillo-Marín, 2014). Likewise, these archives also influence and form part of present-day journalism, as reporters use the past to frame and make sense of their daily work (Edy, 1999). This is how journalism is a practice that constructs memory, and which is materialized in the archives generated from the daily journalistic practice, which encompasses newspaper editing, recording TV programs, or writing a news text online. Consequently, journalism, as a practice and product, is an ideal space for studying the processes by which the collective memory of societies is constructed, assimilated and deconstructed.

There are various means of observing how the process of constructing collective memory works within the realm of journalism. One of these is to study how journalists remember and commemorate significant events such as wars (Choi, 2008), acts carried out by guerrilla groups

(Martin & Jaramillo-Marín, 2014), natural disasters (Su, 2012), or the death of a celebrity (Hearsum, 2012).

In this article, I analyze the role of an interpretative community (i.e., journalists), in the construction of the collective memory of an urban disaster.

METHOD

In general, journalists have been understood as social agents who produce knowledge to inform a society (Patterson, 2013), or as a group of individuals dedicated to monitoring the behavior of public powers in its role as a “watchdog” for democracy (Bennet & Serrin, 2005). However, journalists are also agents that form part of a community that creates common interpretations regarding important public events (Zelizer, 1993). Therefore, it could be argued that the reporters who worked at Guadalajara’s newspapers between 1992 and 2017 and who wrote texts to commemorate the April 22 explosions form an important part of the collective interpretation regarding this event. In this sense, a path for unpacking and investigating the collective memory is through the study of the newspapers, which operate as cultural and mnemonic artifacts (Gilewicz, 2014; Kitch, 1999, 2000, 2003; Zelizer, 1995). Thus, these artifacts contain part of the April 22 explosions collective memory.

The sample for this research consists of all the texts related to the explosions that were published in generalist newspapers and circulated on April 22 in 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2017. The decision to include texts from newspapers at five-year intervals is because more news space has been dedicated to commemorating the explosions during these years. The total sample consists of 160 articles found in the newspapers *El Informador*, *El Occidental*, *Ocho Columnas*, *Siglo 21*, *El Sol de Guadalajara*, *Público-Milenio*, *Milenio Jalisco*, *Mural*, *La Jornada Jalisco* and *NTR*. Only *El Informador* and *El Occidental* were circulating for the entire period included in the sample; as such, there were years in which some newspapers were not in circulation.² The

² To study the historical details of this system of newspapers and their classification, see Larrosa-Fuentes, 2014.

texts sampled were written by 82 different journalists, editorial writers, and columnists (not including 34 articles published without an author's name in *El Informador*). All the pieces were scanned from the paper editions and then transcribed into electronic files.³

Journalistic narratives about the commemoration of a tragedy reflect some of how journalism itself serves as the mechanism that weaves part of a society's collective memory. Journalists are social agents who tell stories that embody the values and norms of a community. By narrating the commemoration of a tragic event like the April 22 explosions, journalists use society's collective memory as a starting point, while at the same time contributing to its ongoing creation (Berkowitz, 2010).

One way of understanding and deciphering the journalistic mechanisms that produce collective memory is narrative analysis. As Kitch (2007) has explained, the goal of this type of analysis is to find regularities and ruptures in the narratives constructed by journalists in their daily and collective work. This task entails finding the people and stories that emerge throughout time in a communicative system like the case study at hand.

I employed two questions to guide the analysis: 1) which pieces of narrative journalism dominate the commemoration of the April 22, 1992 explosions in Guadalajara on the five, ten, fifteen, twenty and twenty-five-year anniversaries of the tragedy?; 2) what are the regularities and ruptures that emerge from these narratives?

In carrying out a detailed analysis of the articles, I was able to explain how reporters remembered the 1992 explosions. To do this, I read several times the materials included in the research sample. I first read the texts in their original formats, from the pages of the newspapers themselves. This was useful in observing how journalists and editors put together, with texts and photographs, the pages published in print. Next, I read the digital versions of the articles, which allowed me to condense all the material into a single electronic file. I used the file to search for actors and topics that repeatedly appeared in the articles. Through this, it became clear that space and body were recurring concepts in these narratives, making previous works regarding collective memory and

³ Undergraduate students did these tasks.

journalism useful in interpreting the results (Berkowitz, 2010; Hoguea, 2013; Kitch, 2007; Serazio, 2010).

Lastly, I include two notes on regarding the method. First, it is important to mention that newspapers contain only a part of the collective memory of the disaster; consequently, this research does not offer a complete version of this memory. It contains an analysis of the commemorative texts produced by an interpretive community made up of journalists. This community, as I have explained above, is highly influential, as it has the privilege of publishing its interpretations in widely distributed media.

The second note explains the scope of this research. The sample is composed of all the articles published by daily newspapers in Guadalajara on the anniversaries of the tragedy but does not include material published on all of the anniversaries, as it includes only the publications released on five of the 25 years that have passed since the explosions. Also, newspapers have published articles related to the topic in their daily coverage, and not only on the anniversaries. This means that this work is limited to an analysis of the narratives constructed by journalists in the articles published on the selected anniversaries, not at any other times or in any other media.

TWO JOURNALISTIC NARRATIVES TO COMMEMORATE THE EXPLOSIONS

The journalistic narratives contained in the research sample were composed of 1) chronicles of how April 22 was commemorated; and 2) articles explaining the ways the city and its people were transformed as a result of the tragedy.

To produce these narratives, year after year journalists returned to the Analco neighborhood to attend the masses held to remember those who died, and the silent marches held to protest the impunity and corruption of authorities. Then, journalists visited the neighborhood to describe how it was transformed and to speak with survivors. The following two sections contain an analysis of these stories.

The Religious Symbol: Practices, Spaces, and Memory

According to Winter (2010), sites of memory are public places where people come together to share knowledge and feelings about a shared past and where they congregate to engage in commemorative acts. After the explosions, several sites of memory emerged to remember and commemorate the tragedy. Some of these sites consistently appear in the journalistic narratives analyzed. There are three spaces where people congregated to remember, and which played a prominent role in journalistic pieces analyzed for this article. First is a public memorial for remembering victims, second are the churches where those killed by the explosions were remembered, and third are the streets where people held silent marches in protest. These three sites were constructed out of a discursive foundation linked to Catholic religion and spirituality. This religious sign, which has influenced narratives on the explosions since they occurred, is an extension of the research carried out by other academics on the April 22 explosions (De la Torre, 2004; Reguillo, 1998).

A site that consistently appeared in the articles over 25 years of journalistic commemoration was the empty lot where a member of the Analco neighborhood created a public memorial. The memorial lies [emphasis added]:

In an approximately 50-square meter lot abandoned by its owner and which is located on Calle Gante 644 where it crosses with the street Gabino Barreda, ... there is a solemn garden created in memory of the 208 people who lost their lives in the April 22, 1992 explosions. One can observe crosses and the names of 50 victims, as if it were an extension of the cemetery ... [The memorial] stands out for its modesty, but more than anything because *it immediately brings back the memory* of the tragic day and its consequences (*El Occidental*, 1997).

This empty lot turned memorial has become, according to its creator, a part of the “spiritual heritage of the Reforma District” (*El Occidental*, 1997). However, the memorial’s most important role in the pages of Guadalajara’s newspapers is visual. The image of the wall with a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the names of the victims was

published four times on the front pages of the newspapers, and another four times on the inside pages.

The popular memorial, especially in its visual appearances, is significant because it serves as a “visual reservoir” that represented, in a spiritual and religious sense, many of the stories commemorating the explosions. According to Meyers (2002), a visual reservoir is an image, or a collection of images, which condenses an interpretative framework. This is how the wall, mainly because it contains the Virgin of Guadalupe and the names of the dead, condenses—in a single image—the dominant political, social and cultural influence of the Catholic discourse on the journalistic interpretation of how the inhabitants of the affected area experienced the tragedy. The Virgin was a symbol that united the community of Analco to overcome difficult times, and which was also useful to journalists in constructing their stories and making a connection between people in the neighborhood of Analco and potential readers of their work.

The church (as a space) was another place that constantly appeared in journalistic narratives. The word ‘mass’ appears in 28 different articles in reference to the religious practice carried out in a temple. On each of the 5-year anniversaries over 25 years of journalistic coverage, reporters wrote chronicles of the masses held to remember those killed by the explosions. These masses took place in the Guadalajara’s Cathedral and the temples located in the neighborhoods of San Sebastián, San José, and San Carlos Borromeo. The pieces describe that the purpose of the masses was to remember the explosions and those who died in their wake. Journalists visited these sites of memory to witness how the inhabitants of Analco, along with other citizens, remembered the explosions, mourned their consequences, and found solace together. The churches were described as places for mourning, and the masses as a ritual for remembering victims of the explosions. In 2012, twenty years after the tragedy, a reporter wrote that a mass performed in the San Carlos neighborhood became a “session for venting and expressing discontent about the tragedy” (Rivera Alvear, 2012).

Moreover, churches were spaces where residents of Analco spearheaded efforts to ensure that the injustices of living in a country where the government has been unable to name those responsible for

the explosions would not be forgotten. In 1997, a newspaper published an article entitled “Mass to be Held Today to Remember Those Who Disappeared on April 22,” announcing a mass to remember that:

Authorities should take advantage of this fateful date to reflect and capitalize on these painful experiences in benefit today’s society because Guadalajara is not immune to such a scene of horrific death like this happening again (*El Informador*, 1997).

In an article from 2002, Agustín del Castillo described how the “marchers lit candles, blessed an image of the Virgin de Guadalupe, and asked for truth,” outside the San Sebastián Temple.

During the first ten years following the explosions, the Cardinal, priests and the Church as an institution, dominated the newspapers’ agenda. The Church became a highly influential actor in constructing the political discourse about the explosions, as well as their causes and effects. *Ocho Columnas* and *Siglo 21* reported that José Tiscareño Ruiz, parish priest of San José De Analco, questioned the number of deaths reported by the authorities, as he suspected that the actual number was far more significant (Gómez & León Martínez, 1997; Xanic, 1997). At another mass, the then Cardinal Juan Sandoval Íñiguez, demanded answers from the government using a religious explanation:

If it were an earthquake, a hurricane, a cyclone, there wouldn’t be anyone to blame; these are things that happen in nature that only God controls, but this is a tragedy for our city caused by men—someone must be held accountable, and justice must be served (Mayorga, 2002).

This declaration was printed in all of Guadalajara’s daily newspapers in circulation in April of 2002. As time passed, these religious actors and institutions began to disappear. On the 15th, 20th and 25th anniversaries of the disaster, journalists narrated the masses celebrated in commemoration of the explosions, and the churches continued to serve as spaces for remembering. However, priests no longer played a central role in the texts, which marks a rupture from previous journalistic narratives.

After the masses, it became a tradition for family members of those killed or injured by the explosions, to hold a silent march demanding justice. So, the third site of memory in this story is the street; a place where citizens marched to speak out on two issues. On the one hand, they demanded compensation for all victims of the explosions; and on the other, they demanded that investigations on the causes of the tragedy be reopened and that the parties responsible for it be named. All the commemorative editions included in the sample for this research mention these marches at least once.

The street, as a site of memory, was an extension of commemorations held in temples. Marches began at the doors of churches and ended in downtown Guadalajara, or occasionally, at another church. Because of this, the religious tone and nature of the marches extended into the street. This is reflected in the use of “silence” in this public commemoration—a characteristic that is more typical of worship and a procession than of the public harangue of social groups vehemently demanding their rights be protected. The journalist Agustín del Castillo noted this characteristic:

These doubts do not exist for those affected by the death and misery of ten years ago: the symbol of the cross is also the one from their memories. Consequently, upon leaving mass, there is a second commemoration. It is non-secular, but still religious: the silent march. Though the “silent” part is only in name, as there is little recluse amid city buses and police sirens. All in all, a group of some 120 people spill out of the doors of the Cathedral around 7:35 p.m. [...] [marchers] walk towards the heart of the city towards another temple, that of San Sebastián de Analco, in the heart of the area damaged by the 1992 explosions (2002).

One thing that stands out in analyzing the sample is the little attention paid by journalists to the sculpture created by artist Alfredo López Casanova entitled “Estela contra el olvido” [Stele against the oblivion], which is located in the atrium of the San Sebastián Temple in Analco in commemoration of the urban tragedy. The sculpture is only mentioned in 8 of the 160 articles. Six of the eight are references to journalistic texts which anticipate a commemorative act as a calendar

event, and the sculpture is only mentioned in one of the stories about how the explosions are commemorated (Reséndiz de la Mora, 2007).

Transformations of the Mnemonic Body

The second narration to commemorate the explosions consisted of reporters telling stories of the how the city, and inhabitants of the Analco neighborhood, were transformed. It is clear in these narratives that journalists, as an interpretative community, used the concept of “body” to evoke what occurred in Guadalajara in 1992 and to describe how the city’s inhabitants, and particularly those in the affected areas, remembered the tragedy. The explosions destroyed not only the urban materiality of the neighborhood, but also hundreds of human bodies along with it, some of who lost their lives, and others that suffered a wide range of mutilations and atrophies. The explosions left wounds and scars not only on the city itself and the bodies of its inhabitants but also on a section of its collective memory.

In the first years of commemorations of the explosions, the city’s journalistic community described the city as an injured and damaged body that needed to heal its wounds. This metaphor of the city as an injured body can be found in various journalistic commemorations on disasters, as a useful trope for explaining how an external element affects a city’s physiognomy and life. According to this narrative, the city is a collective body that needs to heal after a traumatic event (Hogea, 2013; Serazio, 2010).

The city-as-body narrative appears in texts written by journalists to commemorate the explosions. In these pieces, reporters describe Guadalajara as a “body wounded” by the explosions. This concept appears in an article written by Paulina Martínez in the *Mural* newspaper [emphasis added]: “The tragedy left an open *wound* on the city measuring 14 km in length, covering 98 city blocks and affecting over 250 000 homes, with another 2 000 being partially affected, and which damaged 600 vehicles and 500 businesses” (Martínez, 2012a). The neighborhood of Analco was further described as a body that had “lost its soul, heart, and life” (*El Occidental*, 1997), that had suffered from “peritonitis” (Chávez Calderón & Ramírez Álvarez, 2007), that “it’s face had been changed” (*El Informador*, 2012b; *Navarrete*,

2012), and even 20 years after the tragedy, still had its “veins open” (*El Informador*, 2012a).

As the city slowly recovered from the tragedy, scars began to appear. In their texts and photographs, journalists described the reconstruction of the body and painted a portrait of a city with wider streets, abandoned houses, and empty lots. The following passage illustrates this transformation [emphasis added]:

Little by little, the open streets and damaged buildings in the neighborhood of Analco and the Reforma District were rebuilt. Images from 1992 and those taken 20 years later are testimony of the *changing face* of a city that struggled to *close the wound* and learn to live with the *inevitable scars* (*El Informador*, 2012b).

A significant part of the collective memory of the disaster lies in the human bodies also damaged by the explosions. Starting in the 2002 editions (10 years after the explosions), survivors of the disaster began to appear more frequently in the texts, and their bodies took on great symbolic importance in narratives. Articles describe the damage caused by the explosions to the inhabitants of Analco and narrate the pain and difficulties they endured from fractured bones, damage to internal organs, medical treatments, and surgeries, as well as their psychological trauma. In photographs of the commemoration, it is common for survivors to be shown in wheelchairs or using canes to walk.

However, regarding memory, the fascinating aspect of these narratives is how survivors and journalists established a material and symbolic relationship between the physical body and memory. In 2002, Juan Carlos Núñez published an interview with one of the April 22 victims, Ana Lilia Ruiz. In their conversation, the journalist comments that there are people who say that it’s better to forget the tragedy, to which Ana Lilia answers, “How can we forget it when we relive it every day. I wake up and need a walker to get around; when I take a shower, I need a chair. Just being awake reminds me of it; I’d like to forget it, but I can’t” (Núñez Bustillos, 2002). In the article, Ana Lilia and the journalist depict the injured body as an element that does not allow the tragedy to be forgotten and is a constant reminder of what happened. Ten years later, a journalist expanded on this idea:

Those who were injured are victims, but they are victims in a peculiar way in that their injuries were not material, but physical. [...] They carry the tragedy inside their bodies and will never get rid of it. [...] Where did April 22 go? Did we lose it? Look no further: April 22 is right there, in those who were injured (Gómez Naredo, 2012b).

That is how the bodies of survivors serve as both physical and symbolic artifacts containing the memory of the explosions. These bodies were described and photographed in the journalistic narratives commemorating the tragedy.

The use of the concepts of city-as-body and mnemonic-human-body as central elements in the journalistic narratives commemorating the tragedy lead to a third meaning of the idea of body—that of the mnemonic-social-body. A social body that cannot forget until justice is served. For journalists and victims alike, mourning over the April 22 explosions remains in a liminal space where wounds are open and in the process of forming scars. The reason for this liminality is the lack of a public process that identifies those responsible for what happened. The wound in the mnemonic-social-body is linked to the physical and emotional pain of the event, and especially of the pain caused by the government's negligence and corruption. Examples of this can be observed in numerous headlines. In 1997, *El Sol de Guadalajara* published a front-page article with the title "Still Many Open Wounds Five Years After the Explosion" (Murillo Gutiérrez, 1997); in 2007, *El Occidental* printed this headline for their eight-column story: "April 22: Still an Open Wound" (Chávez Calderón & Ramírez Álvarez, 2007); and this same year *Mural* published a photo report entitled "Scars on Memory" (Rangel, 2007).

Political and critical aspects also emerge when reporters invoke the mnemonic-social-body. Journalists, and the victims whom they gave a voice to, denounced over and over—five, ten, fifteen, twenty and twenty-five years after the explosions—that no one has been named as "responsible" for the explosions, as pointed out by two reporters from *El Occidental* and *El Informador*. The headlines, respectively, read: "Twenty Years, the Open Wound, and We're Back Where We Started: No One is Responsible" (Chávez Ogazón, 2012). And:

The wounds, maybe cauterized, are still open, some festering, many still hurting, because no one in the Mexican government has had the valor to acknowledge the criminal negligence of this disaster and ask for forgiveness. And because victims still have not been adequately compensated (Castro-Golarte, 2017).

These wounds, which are the result of the government's negligence and corruption, will not be easily erased from the memories and minds of the inhabitants of Analco and Guadalajara. A reporter from *El Occidental* shared the testimony of a victim who said that the wound would never heal until justice is served. "The debt has not been settled; despite authorities insisting the case is closed, the wound will never heal. It will remain present in minds because this indolence has been ignored" (Luvina Díaz, 1997). In an editorial piece, *El Informador* published that, "Time will never erase [victims'] memories of what happened" (*El Informador*, 2002).

Thus, the wounds and scars appear not only in the streets and plazas of the neighborhood, on the bodies and psyches of the victims, but also in the collective memory of the victims and journalists of Guadalajara.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research provide evidence in analyzing the journalistic narratives about an urban disaster. An evident regularity within the commemorations of this tragedy is that year after year, reporters visited the affected community to accompany survivors in Analco. Journalists used their narrative and interpretative skills to describe practices distinct from the daily beats and regular activities. This reflects how the interpretive community of Guadalajara's journalists brought together the practices and rituals of the people commemorating the tragedy. Journalists abandoned their roles as informers and watchdogs over the public powers and joined an aggrieved community in commemorating a tragedy (Carey, 1987).

From a normative point of view, journalists' role in this commemoration was significant in that they dedicated their time and energy to describing and interpreting a working-class neighborhood

and community that has historically been marginalized. Guadalajara is a city with clear territorial divisions between its upper, middle and working-class citizens. This segregation is the result of a political economy that created the conditions for this tragedy since the explosions happened in an area that is densely populated by working-class citizens and located near an industrial plant. Guadalajara's inhabitants are aware that the city is divided by a street known as Calzada Independencia, which separates the working-class neighborhoods from the middle and upper-class ones. A victim of the explosions points out this reality in his criticism of the government's intervention:

The government has completely forgotten about all this; I mean, I don't know where they got the idea or the imaginary dividing line that the Guadalajara on this side of the Calzada [Independencia] is a different Guadalajara [...] What we [the citizens of Analco] need [...] is for the authorities to show up, not just remember us or have a reason to visit each year on April 22 (Martinez, 2012b).

Journalists' work was also notable because the narratives they wrote about the commemoration of the tragedy were not directed at the community affected by it, made up of working-class people, but at the city's elite, who have historically been the readers of the local newspapers and who, in general, have never lived in the area where it occurred. In Analco, in contrast, generalist news is consumed very little, and other publications, like police tabloids, are more commonly circulated (Blas Alvarado & Contreras Serratos, 2012). In this way, the journalistic narratives analyzed connect a part of the city's collective memory made up of a working-class community with sections of the mnemonic network produced by other agents and institutions, and social classes, like Guadalajara's elite. In summary, journalists brought attention to people, spaces, and practices that normally go unnoticed in the local press' public agenda.

Journalistic narratives describe a highly religious community that mourned their dead from churches and streets and demanded justice from the government. As has been documented by various anthropologists (De la Torre, 2004; Reguillo, 1998), religious discourse was a strong

pillar in life after the explosions, and as such, also structured the collective memory (not only journalistic terms) of the tragedy. The Church is a powerful political institution in the city that dictated how the explosions should be remembered, demanding from its temples and churches that authorities name those responsible and find out what occurred. However, after the second decade of commemorations, there was a rupture in the narrations, and priests were no longer portrayed as protagonists in stories and chronicles, with the significance of the religious symbol being relegated only to a cultural level.

In the stories analyzed, there were residual and less important stories that also offered interpretative elements for the case study. As Polletta (1998) has explained, in studying the processes by which collective memory is constructed, it is crucial not only to ask who is present but also who is absent. In this case, there is a notorious absence of political actors from various levels of government. In the sample consulted, only one newspaper interviewed Guillermo Cosío Vidaurri and Francisco Rivera Aceves, who were top-level politicians when the explosions occurred (Mellado, 2002). This absence reveals how politicians were excluded from the commemorations of a tragedy they are identified as responsible for, a responsibility that to date they have not assumed.

In narrative terms, the concept of “body” was a useful discursive tool in journalists’ commemoration of the event. The concept was used to describe an urban space damaged by the explosions and that, little by little throughout the years, began to heal (city-as-body). Furthermore, as years passed, journalists sought out victims to interview and photograph and to show how their bodies were physical objects containing the tangible collective memory of the explosions. Victims ask themselves the question, “how can we forget the explosions when our bodies are marked by them?” (mnemonic-human-body).

Lastly, the concept of mnemonic-social-body was useful in giving form to the collective memory of a city. Guadalajara’s citizens, who have produced and reproduced this collective memory for 25 years have sought to open a new chapter in which they can find political and social reconciliation. However, the process remains in a liminal space, as the mnemonic-social-body cannot forgive and forget until justice has been served. This means identifying those responsible, fully compensating

victims for their losses, and guaranteeing that this will not happen again, as well as a public apology from the Mexican government. This has all resulted in the collective memory of the April 22 explosions remaining in a liminal space—a space composed of practices and rituals, some of which have been richly described and commemorated by Guadalajara’s journalists.

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