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A contribution to the study of *pathos* in political speech: The case of Kirchner Argentina, 2003-2010

Mariano DAGATTI

Universidad de Buenos Aires / CONICET, Buenos Aires, Argentina

mjdagat@yahoo.com.ar

This paper is the result of an ongoing doctoral research about public image and passion in political speech of former Argentine President Néstor Kirchner. The overall objective is to demonstrate the relevance of emotions in shaping new political subjectivities in contemporary societies.¹ It proceeds on the assumption that all rhetorical persuasive speech, including political one, needs to convince and to affect his audience, since the intellectual dimension is not enough to trigger the action. Any political discourse, in this sense, constitutes a fundamental aspect of the construction of political subjectivities bringing into play emotions and reasons.

Political discourse is intended to mobilize different sectors of the social body around certain objectives or slogans. It's an instance of mediation that intervenes in managing the link between the political forces and citizens, regulating social demands, forms of delegation and horizons of expectations. As discursive typology, it could explain, in some of its constitutive levels, the functioning of political system, whatever its origin, its institutions and its government effectiveness. It involves identification processes that account for social and imaginary practices of a particular community: their common values, their modes of representation and delegation, as well as the usual ways to organize networks of trust with public policy. This paper addresses the political oratory through a rhetorical-argumentative study of the 'passional dimension'; that is, taking into account the process of marking emotions, feelings and moods in the speeches of a political actor. We should bear in mind that this is particularly important in the construction of the link between different social actors and, therefore, in the configuration of political subjectivities.

Different political actors and the government in particular are constantly seeking to create networks of public trust by the staging of reasons and passions that are related to certain communitarian ideal. The crisis of major political ideologies, the more individualized approach to politics, the *mediatization* of contemporary developed societies have led to a progressive predominance of the staging of political issues at the expense of traditional programs of political parties and other mediating institutions.² We could say, as stated by P. Charaudeau in *Discurso político*: "The value of ideas depends on the speaker that

¹ Without ignoring the different meanings, in this paper we take the notions of passion and emotion as synonyms. See: Christian Plantin, *Les bonnes raisons des émotions. Principes et méthode pour l'étude du discours émotionne* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011).

² See: Pierre Rosanvallon, *La legitimidad democrática. Imparcialidad, reflexividad, proximidad* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2009); Pierre Rosanvallon, *La contrademocracia. La política en la era de la desconfianza* (Buenos Aires: Manantial, 2007); Eliseo Verón, "Interfaces. Sobre la democracia audiovisual avanzada", in *El nuevo espacio público*, ed. Jean-Marc Ferry and Dominique Wolton. (Barcelona: Gedisa, 1992), 124-139.

discloses, express and applies these ideas” (2006, 118). Our proposal, then, is to make a contribution to the state of art in the field of political oratory, based on a study of the dominant emotional topics in speech of former Argentine President Néstor Kirchner. The specific objective is to outline the possible relationship between *pathos*, social imaginary and politics in Argentina in the last decade.

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Firstly we will outline a brief history of the notion of *pathos*, so that allows visualizing the framework of our approach. This, as you all know, arises in the context of the ancient rhetoric. According to Aristotle,

[...] the orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his own character look right and put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind. Particularly in political oratory, but also in lawsuits, it adds much to an orator's influence that his own character should look right and that he should be thought to entertain the right feelings towards his hearers; and also that his hearers themselves should be in just the right frame of mind. (2012, 1378a)

The affectation of the listeners, the orator's ability to mobilize the emotions of the audience, it is essential in the Aristotelian art, to the point that the passions are conceived as “all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure” (2012, 1378b). Equally, the relevance of the ‘passional dimension’ in rhetorical art was part of the Latin tradition. Cicero, for example, in *De oratore*, states that in order to persuasion it is necessary “to prove the truth of our statements, to conciliate our audience, and to give them that bias which is demanded by our case” (1870, 84). For him, mobilization of feelings occupies a prominent place: “admirable eloquence” is for Cicero that eloquence of character (*ethos*) and emotions (*pathos*):

And nothing, Catulus, can be of more importance to the advocate than to gain the ear of the judge, and to throw his mind into such a state of perturbation, that he may be swayed in his decision rather by the impulse of passion than by the sober dictates of reason and judgment. Men are influenced in their opinions much more by the emotions of hate, love, or desire, anger, grief, or joy, by hope, or fear, or prejudice, or some other affection of the mind, than by truth or any settled maxim, by any rule of right or judicial form, or any established law. (1870, 98)

Quintilian, meanwhile, claimed that “it is in its power over the *emotions* that the life and *soul of oratory* is to be found” (2006, 7), and believed that move the spirits of the audience is “of far more difficulty than any of those [duty] already noticed” (2006, 1). Role play and theatrical appeal, the rhetorical technique requires the speaker a staging of the word and the body, because “whatever we wish to appear like truth, let us assimilate ourselves to the feelings of those who are truly affected and let our language proceed from such a temper of mind as we would wish to excite in the judge” (2006, 27).

Greek and Latin, the early exaltation of the ‘passional dimension’ in the ancient rhetoric would be devastated by centuries of “war against emotions”, according to the synthetic expression of C. Plantin. Indeed, this “war” was parallel to the ornamental reduction of rhetoric between the centuries V and XV. Emotions were stigmatized for centuries because they were considered pathological and sources of sins. Heirs of the Enlightenment tradition, when the founders of the “new rhetoric” retake the ancient one, passions were neglected, given the weight that takes the debate on *logos*: rationality, normality, opinion, would be, for instance, the central dimensions of *The New Rhetoric. A Treatise on Argu-*

mentation, by C. Perelman and L. Olbrecht-Tyteca and *The Uses of Argument*, by S. Toulmin, both published in 1958. Yet, in the last thirty years, discursive study on emotions has regained a central role, driven by research in the field of semiotics, discourse analysis, rhetoric and argumentation. Despite the persistence of a conviction for passions, either in defense of democratic rationality or as a review of manipulation and deception, different schools and analytic trends claimed the heuristic potency of emotion studies in order to understand social phenomena. The books by R. Amossy, P. Charaudeau and C. Plantin are, whatever their specific differences, examples of this renewed interest in the passions. Notions such as figures, topics, *pathemas* and body appear in this context as operational categories of analysis.³ As part of this rhetorical-argumentative perspective, *pathos* includes concern for pathways of emotions marking in persuasive speeches, that is, by the inscription of affectivity in the materiality of analyzed discourse. A question arises as a guideline: how a persuasive oratory creates the conditions for auditoriums' projection on the imaginary stage provided by the speaker? In order to answer it, it's possible that any rhetorical-argumentative analysis should try to deal comprehensively with the emotions, relying on a coherent model of the discursive construction of passion articulated with a logical dimension.⁴

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This article carry out, of all possible approaches to the 'passional dimension' from a rhetorical-argumentative perspective, a study of the emotional topics⁵ in the political speech of former Argentine President Kirchner. I want to underscore those orator's discursive topics that reconstruct a given situation as exciting; in other words, that restore a situation under a narrative-descriptive format which leads to certain types of emotions.⁶ It is known that emotional topics differ among types, genres and discursive sceneries; in the case of political discourse, these topics organized, as described by P. Charaudeau in his book *Discurso Político*, three rhetorical-argumentative acts: denounce a situation of social decline; designate a source of evil, which is associated with the space of the opponents, and propose a solution whose guarantor is the speaker's political force. These three acts, structured simultaneously under an utterance device, display a dramatic discursive strategy which results from the confrontation with a political adversary, the establishment of a force or an undisputed leader, and the exaltation of values of social ideality functioning as a regulatory horizon of social expectations.

I will attempt, now, to describe the emotional topics that structure Kirchner's oratory in two crucial periods of its political action: the construction of legitimacy in the beginning of his presidency, from May 2003 to May 2004, and the crisis of legitimacy in the early days of the presidency of Cristina Fernandez, partner and successor of Nestor Kirchner, from March 2008 to July 2009. In order to do that, I will take two Kirchner's speeches, one for each of these two instances; these were chosen because they synthesize significantly those topics traversing the *corpus*. The first of them is the president's inaugural address, delivered on May 25, 2003 at the National Congress; the second is the one in la

³ See: Ruth Amossy, *L'argumentation dans le discours politique. Literature d'idee, fiction* (Paris: Nathan, 2000); Patrick Charaudeau, "Pathos e discurso político", in *As Emoções no Discurso*, vol. 1, ed. Ida Lucia Machado, William Menezes and Emilia Mendes (Rio de Janeiro: Lucerna, 2007). 240-251; Plantin, *Les bonnes raisons des émotions*.

⁴ See: Plantin, *Les bonnes raisons des émotions*.

⁵ See: Christian Plantin, "Les raisons des émotions", in *Forms of argumentative discourse / Per un'analisi linguistica dell'argomentare*, ed. Marina Bondi (Bologna: CLUEB, 1998), 3-50.

⁶ Of course, we should note that there are other ways of marking emotions, whether direct (declared emotion, e. g.), or indirect (e. g. a semiotics of the body).

Plaza de los Dos Congresos [Two Congresses Square], delivered on July 15, 2008 and considered the most important leader's address under the so-called "conflict with the farming sectors". My hypothesis is that the Kirchner's oratory staged in each of these two instances different emotional topics. The first one will be called "refunding topic": it is responsible for interpreting the early Kirchner's government in a emotional narrative, linked to the radical tone of a new era, "New Argentina's era"; the second one could be called "national and popular topic": it is an interpretation's grid of sociopolitical conflict between Kirchner's government and a society sector, the farming sector, in the form of a repeated historical struggle between popular and national forces and oligarchic forces. These two topics, in this sense, were interpretive strategies designed to generate political legitimacy through the social mobilization, by providing an emotional hermeneutics of each of these historical moments. In addition, the variation of these topics suggests the relevance of the discursive representation of emotions in building government legitimacy and in generating political commitment processes.

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New governments, whatever their time and space, try to symbolize a break with the previous government project, while promise a happy future, subject to successful government program itself. Kirchner's "refunding topic" is precisely inscribed within this attempt to define a political border between a demonized past and the desire of an auspicious future. Indeed, it characterizes the new government as a milestone in national history in line with the atavistic identity values of Argentina: work culture, welfare state, honesty, openness, sensitivity, rationality, and so on. Let's try to demonstrate the presence of this "refunding topic" with a few excerpt of Kirchner's inaugural address:

People have made a strong option for future and change. At the level of participation of that day it's clear enough that thinking differently and respecting diversity, the vast and overwhelming majority of Argentines, we want the same, even if we think differently. (...) No need to do a detailed review of our ills to know that our past is full of failures, pain, fighting, bad energies expended in sterile struggles, to the point of seriously confront the representatives with their voters, to the point of seriously confront Argentines each other. (...) In these conditions, it should stay absolutely clear that in Argentina, in order to be able to have a future and to not repeat our past, we need to address fully the challenge of change.⁷

We want to be the generation of Argentines that reinstall upward social mobility, but also promote cultural and moral change which implies respect for the rules and laws.

We think the world in an Argentine way, from its own model. This national project that we express convenes every Argentine citizen and above and beyond party alignments to put hand to the work of this task of refunding the country. (...) We know that this is a final era; behind it was the time of predestined leaders, fundamentalists, messianics. Contemporary Argentina should be recognized and refunded in integrating types and organic groups with capacity for mainstreaming on respect for diversity and compliance with common objectives.

I come (...) to propose to you a dream: to rebuild our identity as a people and as a nation, I come to propose to you a dream that is the construction of truth and justice, I come to propose to you a dream that is to return to an Argentina with all and for all. I come to propose to you to remember the dreams of our founders and patriots, of our immigrant and pioneers grandparents, of our generation that give everything and left everything thinking in a country of equals. But I know and I am convinced that in this historical symbiosis we are going to find the country that we the Argentines deserve. (...) I come to propose to you a dream: I want a united Argentina, I want a normal Argentina, I want us to be a serious country, but also

⁷ We tried to respect the syntax of the speaker in Spanish, even if it does not respect the grammatical rules to use.

a fair country. (...) I hope that for these roads would be lifted to the face of the earth a new and glorious nation: ours.

The composition of the “refunding topic” inscribes the new government in a symbolic field of radical change. This spirit favors the representation of the Kirchner government’s inauguration as a recovery time of a certain national identity destroyed by neoliberal experience. Taking into consideration the excerpts, I would like now to highlight briefly some features of the emotional device.

Firstly, the fidelity of Kirchner’s address to classic political topic: the description of the neoliberal crisis as a decadent situation (“the hell”, according to the appellant Kirchner’s allegory); the identification of neoliberalism as a source of evil, and the announcement of “national capitalism” as an appropriate solution that only can be ensure by Kirchner’s leadership. In this regard, denounce neoliberalism, design dictatorial and democratic governments of thirty previous years as responsible for the national crisis, and claim Kirchner’s project as an historic moment in the saga of the independence struggles and truly national and democratic governments synthesized the emotional structure. Secondly, and providing the first proposition of greater specificity, the “refunding topic” informs the historical circumstances under a format that attempts to induce emotions from the registration of Kirchner’s government in a popular epic saga that began in the heroic deeds of independence, which was continued in the classic Peronist welfare model, and which was mutilated from the postponement of the seventies left militants by the implementation of the neoliberal model through a genocidal dictatorship. Kirchner called himself part of that generation. Thirdly, a quick review reveals the argumentative topic’s links: the identification between the will of the “people”, the desire of the “the vast and overwhelming majority of Argentines” and the new government’s project; the use of memory as a collective contract that allows even omit explicit references (“No need to do a detailed review...”), the mandatory nature of the “change” (“we need to address fully the challenge of change”), the promise of building a “national capitalism”, which refers to a previous shared experience (“to *rebuild* our identity”, “*reinstall* upward social mobility”); the criticism of a decadent situation (“our past is full of failures”), ensuring a “refunding” (“this task of refunding the country”) to put in place a break between past and future (“in order to be able to have a future and to not repeat our past”), reinforced by the declarative generational speaker enrollment (“We want to be the generation of Argentines”) and by the stereotyped induction of an exciting future in the proposal of “dreams” (“I come to propose to you a dream”); the exaltation of social ideality values (“the construction of truth and justice”, “an Argentina with all and for all”), towards a nation’s claim (“I hope that for these roads would be lifted to the face of the earth a new and glorious nation: ours”). Fourth element, and crossing entirely the emotional device, a romantic matrix:⁸ generational change and challenge of the previous generation, adoption of an ethic of conviction, refundacional gesture dominated by the melancholy of a lost destiny and the power of the foundation and dreams, productivity of pain, psychology of dissatisfaction and sense of originality; all are romantic tones that make up the speaker's perspective and than open a symbolic space to test a network of emotions.

Hence, the analysis of “refunding topic” suggests that the presidential assumption is represented in Kirchner's oratory in the form of a historic consecration of national project that the heroes of independence had started in the early nineteenth century. Kirchner’s force, thus, assumed missions invariably shown as deferred, standing as the main heiress

⁸ See, for instance: Paul Bénichou, *Le temps des prophètes, doctrines de l’âge romantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977); Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Teoría de la literatura del romanticismo alemán* (Buenos Aires: Eterna Cadencia, 2012).

and establishing a “policy transfer” between its legitimate authority and supreme sender, which is the people’s sovereignty. This affiliation binds new government’s assumption with relevant moments of national political history, appealing to a universe of emotions tied to old political experiences of our country, months after the major economic and political crisis of Argentina history. It’s possible to say, so, that the discursive conversion of an institutional fact in an historic event in the saga of the great moments of the country is, from a rhetorical-argumentative perspective, a way of marking emotions in oratory.

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When a conflict calls into question the legitimacy of a government, it is well known that government’s social commitment depends largely on its ability to be credible in the eyes of society and to achieve intellectual and emotional identification of citizens.⁹ Analysis of the “national and popular topic” in Kirchner’s oratory during the conflict with the farming sectors could prove the relevance of ‘passional dimension’ in the creation of a commitment between a government in crisis and key social actors, needed to sustain a power structure. His address in Two Congresses Square, the second speech that we will consider in this article, was delivered in the context of a crisis of government’s hegemony, due to a farming sector’s reaction after the enactment of increased withholding on windfall profits. It seems to be an agreement on specialized studies that this conflict was, to put it in some way, the context and the possible reason for the main rhetorical variations of Kirchner's oratory.¹⁰ For sure, “national and popular topic” was a core element of this dramatic shift, redefining the public identity of Kirchner, the character of their opponents and the set of values that would feed its horizon of ideality. The topical configuration operated in reshaping the identity of the government as a political force and resulted in a progressive mutation of discursive modes of bringing together its allies, of arguing with their adversaries and of persuading the indifferent.¹¹ Considering previous arguments, we should now quote some excerpts from this second address:

I’m crying like never before because see this popular assembly strengthens the hope for change, strengthens the possibility of being at a turning point to build a new country, the country that contains us all Argentines.

When we come to a square like this, we come to say what we did, we come to criticize what we did wrong and we come to say what we need to do, because the important thing is to have your ears open and awakened heart for the people follows in the evolutionary process toward a better tomorrow. These days, these very days, the President said that it was essential, and listen well, that was crucial, I repeat, that to the table of Argentines arrive national prices and not international and put the withholding. And those who now have to be supportive, not all, but those of economic concentration jumped quickly because they don’t want to share any effort with the rest of the Argentines. (...) They talk about democracy and act like road protesters, they talk about democracy and leave short the fields; they talk about democracy,

⁹ See: Patrick Charaudeau, *Discurso político* (São Paulo: Contexto, 2006)

¹⁰ In July 2008, when he gave this speech, Kirchner was president of the Partido Justicialista [Justicialist Party], the main political force in Argentina in the last sixty years. He had been succeeded as national president by his wife Cristina Fernandez, who had taken over three months before the start of the referred conflict with a high percentage of positive public image. Arguably the ‘passional dimension’ was critical in the outcome of this conflict, especially considering the progressive erosion of political forces in government time. Most studies on Kirchnerism coincide in pointing out this conflict as an instance of mutation in its global strategy. See, specifically, Ricardo Aronskind and Gabriel Vommaro, ed., *Campos de batalla. Las rutas, los medios y las plazas en el nuevo conflicto agrario* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo, 2010); Norma Giarracca and Miguel Teubal, ed., *Del paro agrario a las elecciones de 2009. Tramas, reflexiones y debates* (Buenos Aires: Antropofagia, 2010).

¹¹ See: Eliseo Verón, “La palabra adversativa. Observaciones sobre la enunciación política”, in Eliseo Verón et al., *El discurso político* (Buenos Aires: Hachette, 1987), 11-26.

and listen well, please this, as the worst periods of 55 and 76, they come as civil commands or task forces to attack those who disagree with them in a shameful way.

I now can assure you that I came to this place to call all Argentines from the national and popular field ... and those, watch carefully, that when I say that here permanently wanted to dismiss the national and popular government, I say it with the force of reality. Today they are showing all those who was operating in the dark, where they are, how they moved. Today they began to be showed in the newspapers, embracing each other. They were those who were and those who want to destabilize the country. (...) There they are those who want to tarnish the flags of Perón and Evita giving in to that oligarchy which chase up the corpse of Eva Perón; there they are those who giving in and muddying or trying to cover in mud the memory of Perón and Evita embrace with Rojas and all those who historically were against national and popular interests. There they are, there you saw them. It happens also during the dictatorship and liberal night.¹²

[...] our middle class, which was unfortunately often instrumented, have to realize that they will never find the solidarity of the sectors of the Argentine oligarchy; yes they will find solidarity of workers, intellectuals, students, of the whole country.

I will try to summarize at this point some of the key aspects involved in this emotional topic, knowing that many others are momentarily out.¹³ To begin, the emergence of a “national and popular topic” expresses the conflict with the farming sector –as we said before– as a new battle, a new chapter, of the historical struggle between national and popular forces and elites forces in Argentina. This format implies a redefinition of the subjective positions of the actors; namely: first of all, an exacerbation of Kirchnerism popular facet which is consistent with the identification of adversaries as exponents of the Argentine “oligarchy”; in the second place, and most importantly, the registration of the conflict in the historical saga of fights between Peronism (mainly embodied by Justicialist Party), treated as the broader expression of national and popular movement, and anti-Peronism, understood as an authoritarian exercise of elites.¹⁴ Thirdly, the interpretation of the demands of the farming sectors as an undemocratic activity, a strictly civic version of civil-military coups of the past, whose mission was to undermine the foundations of government legitimacy in order to benefit the elites and against the popular interests that the government represents. Finally, the criticism of the middle class because of its alienation in favor of the powerful: the “national and popular topic”, unlike the “refunding topic”, part of the representation of an internal border between the people and the oligarchy. In this strict dichotomy, the middle class is seen as a disturbing element whose persuasion is needed for reasons of political stability. In summary, Kirchner’s topical outlining of the conflict makes equivalent Kirchner’s government crisis with significant crises of political history in Argentina, appealing to a universe of emotions tied to old political national experiences. Experiences, it must be said, that had already been interpreted as experiences of postponement of the people, destruction of the middle class and benefit of the ruling elites. As follows from the analysis, the emotional format of this second instance is another way of marking passions in Kirchner’s oratory.

¹² Juan Perón and Eva Perón (“Evita”) are the two main referents of the Peronist movement. Isaac Rojas was a naval military, a fervent anti-Peronist, who led the coup against the constitutional government of Perón in 1955. The terms “civil commands” and “task forces”, used in the previous excerpt, also refer to groups that supported that coup.

¹³ For instance, opposition between popular sovereignty and privilege of powerful, between federalism and centralism; or, militancy, ethics of conviction and ethics of responsibility; mobilization and parties, anti-imperialism.

¹⁴ Significantly, Kirchner mentions the two military coups that were inflicted on Peronist governments, but he does not mention those that were inflicted on Unión Cívica Radical’s government, the other major Argentine party, in 1930, 1962 and 1966.

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In conclusion, this paper was aimed to demonstrate the relevance of the ‘passional dimension’ in shaping political subjectivities in contemporary societies. Of all the possible approaches in the context of a rhetoric-argumentative perspective, we decided to carry out a study of the emotional topics. To do this, and after making a brief historical development of the concept of *pathos*, we took the case of Argentine leader Néstor Kirchner’s oratory during the last decade. Our corpus was the result of the selection of two of the most significant addresses in two central moments of legitimacy design of Kirchnerism as a political force. Discourse analysis allowed us to observe a change in emotional operations, taking into account two different topics: the first was called “refunding topic”; the second, “national and popular topic”. Preliminary results indicate that the “refunding topic”, belonging to an inaugural moment, conducted an opposition between neoliberalism and “national capitalism”, seeking to persuade all the Argentines of the benefits of the new government project, based on a romantic matrix of generational change. Differently, the “national and popular topic” opposed the popular and the elite’s forces and, at the same time, no longer sought to persuade the whole of society, but to a specific sector: “the middle class”, considered as a fundamental factor of stability. Justicialist Party and Peronism as a movement were invoked, in this context, on behalf of the people as institutional and organizational reinsurance of popular struggle. In this regard, Kirchner's presidency of Justicialist Party charged singular importance.

The use of different emotional topics, in short, is not irrelevant when thinking about the construction of different subject positions of social actors. Emotions seem to be decisive in the construction of political legitimacy, bringing up historical conflicts, changes constantly renewed and latent collective memoirs. Passion manifests then its relevance in the consolidation of the dynamics of political loyalty and its influence on the layout of affiliations and full length symbolic confrontations that modulate the ideological framework of society in Argentina. Trust has on the emotions a compelling reason for setting up a legitimate public policy: Kirchnerism’s ample victory in 2011 national elections encourages arguments in this direction.

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