

"SHE" AND THE WAR: A FEMININE-SPANISH-JOURNALISTIC APPROACH TO THE INVASION OF IRAQ

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Presentation of the research

Despite the invasion of Iraq was unusually short in its duration (less than a month and a half to gain control of an entire country), its wide media coverage goes far beyond those just forty one days of armed struggle.

It is in this dual scenario, the media and the Arab and Islamic world, where the main "characters" of my study, the women journalists of the Spanish public television (TVE) during the invasion of Iraq, are situated. The five names I am going to analyze (Angela Rodicio, Almudena Ariza, Maria Oña, Raquel González and Letizia Ortiz) were, at different times during the course of the invasion, the eyes and the voice of the Spanish population that followed the conflict through the public television.

Why women journalists, why TVE? The objective of my study will be checking if their gender signifies a distinct discourse in relation with the one of their male counterparts or, on the contrary, it does not have any influence on their work. The analysis does not focus merely on the Spanish women journalists, but also in the women they talked about in their media production: Were Iraqi women a priority of their pieces? In short, have the pieces of the five journalists elements that allow us to speak of a gendered information?

Why the choice of TVE? The public television continues to have today the wider network of correspondents in Spain, with a total of 16 permanent offices (of which only one is located in the Middle East, Jerusalem, that together with the one of Rabat are the two ones in the Arab-Muslim world)¹. Another element that adds interest to the selection of this channel as an object of study is the fact that TVE is the governmental television in a context, the invasion of Iraq, in which the positions of government and the Spanish population were totally divergent. While the executive of Aznar supported the invasion, the massive demonstrations under the slogan "No to war" ("No a la Guerra") showed that the view of society was very different.

¹ The network of correspondents is available on the following link:
<http://www.rtve.es/tve/informa/correspo/index.html>.

In short, my goal with the work that I present here is to make an approach, both journalistic and gender, to the coverage the five TVE selected women journalists made on the invasion of Iraq (between March 20 and May 1, 2003). I am interested in checking, in this sense, what was their profile (the "who"), but I also want to find out how they presented their discourse about the reality in which they moved (the "what"): what was the picture given to the Spanish audience about the Arab-Islamic world? Is it an image based on stereotypes or that tries to break them? Do the journalists studied use Iraqis as essential sources of information or do they give priority to agencies and the testimony of the invaders?

To sum up: a triple approach (gender, journalism and geography, linked to the Arab-Islamic world) with which, ultimately, we want to answer to a main question: did the women journalists of TVE offer a distinctive discourse about the invasion of Iraq?

Our methodology of analysis has been based so far on three distinct data corpus: first, the bibliographical sources; secondly, the web graphic sources, which have been particularly useful to elaborate the profile of the five women studied. Finally, and of particular importance, television news in which the five journalists selected appeared during the stage of invasion. Specifically, we examined a total of 68 pieces of information, all belonging to the news of La 1 of TVE.

The content analysis technique was the procedure chosen to extract relevant information for these 68 pieces. In each story we have paid attention to two fundamental aspects: the semantic macrostructures or topics (mostly studying the presence of women on them) and the producers of the speech (the five journalists selected, attending to their sources, issues...), in an analysis with both qualitative and quantitative elements.

With this analysis we wanted to confirm or reject our research hypothesis, that we have formulated as follows:

The journalists of TVE in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 made a coverage of the event in which they presented some of the clichés of the Western world towards the Arab world. Compared to information from their male colleagues, they specially paid attention, with hints of gender, to the situation of women in this area of the Middle East.

In the sections below we will provide the findings made over my (still emerging) research:

NEWS PRODUCED BY THE SELECTED JOURNALISTS: INTERPRETATIVE ANALYSIS

In this part of the research, I will try to answer to the to the two questions implicit in our hypothesis:

1. Are there gender elements that distinguish the speech of the women selected from the one of their male counterparts, allowing us to speak of a "gendered" information?
2. What was the image of the Arab-Islamic world that they offered to their Spanish audience?

Ángela Rodicio

Ángela Rodicio was the journalist par excellence of the Iraq's invasion. Through its 33 reports, which opened overwhelmingly all editions of the newscast, viewers were moved to the more direct vision of the conflict, the one of the city besieged, bombed and destroyed, Baghdad, also symbol of the fall of an entire regime. The common thread in all her stories is the willingness to take the pulse of the city. In fact, Baghdad takes on special prominence in this journalist, that gives the city almost anthropomorphic characters.

A curious element of the relationship of Rodicio with the environment is that even though Baghdad is a city under siege and then bombed, she tries to highlight that life continues despite of the bombs and the war. With this attention to detail and to the everyday life Rodicio gets, I think, a greater empathy between the object of the news and their receptors, fleeing from fear, terror and defeatism that is the dominant trend in the coverage of other journalists. She is probably the one who more approaches the reality of Arab-Islamic world to the Spanish viewers, and gets it precisely because she highlights not the differences, but the elements they share: the humanity that continues despite pumps.

Almudena Ariza

The chronicles sent by Almudena Ariza are thematically diverse but share, most of them, a common element: the scenery, what was called the "Northern Front", located in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The journalist made a coverage based on two sources, the Kurds on one side and western organizations working in the field and the U.S. military posted to the northern front by another. A priori this could ensure equal representation of both parts. However, in practice the reality is quite different: the statements of the Kurdish people seem to appear more like "environment element" or "note relating to the environment" than as reliable sources. By contrast, the Western sources are far less

numerous, but with much more weight and authority. The immediate consequence is that are the ones that shape the view of the conflict.

The presentation of the invasion that Almudenza Ariza offers is marked primarily by chaos and disorder after the fall of Saddam. The images of burning cars and burning of photos, the atmosphere of celebration with thousands of people in the street ... are snapshots that, from our point of view, are part of a media imagery that may not directly identify with a particular region of planet, but in any case is seen as alien to the West.

María Oña

María Oña covered a total of eight pieces during the period of the invasion. She made her work not from Iraqi territory, but from the Jordanian border, where the influx of immigrants fleeing the consequences of the clashes between the troops of Saddam Hussein and the coalition was constant.

International organizations (UN, Red Cross) and their staff are the ones who provide the information that can be considered "key" to understand the situation of refugees. By contrast, when the refugees are the interviewed, from these discussions are extracted only small fragments whose sole function seems to be to add drama and put a human touch to the pieces. However, those testimonies fail to establish as worthy of contributing to the understanding of the events.

We have thus the curious result that Oña is talking about a subject with profound humanitarian consequences in a way which virtually eliminates the human element and the perspective of the victims, to make the logistics and quantitative the core of the discourse. Therefore, we find that, surprisingly, are those affected by the situation the ones with the least voice to tell it directly, while their experience appears mediated by the Western sources that are helping them. This approach inevitable conduces to consider the affected Iraqi population in a framework of necessity and indispensable collaboration with the Western world to have a future. Such as a "protectionist" attitude reduces the agency of Iraqi population and shows it as profoundly dependent, and contributes to generate a discourse more linked with the solidarity than with the journalistic field.

Letizia Ortiz

Letizia Ortiz's coverage of the invasion is peculiar, since she began working on it as co-anchor with Alfredo Urdaci, director of TVE news, in the second edition of the newscast, and then moved to the ground in the final dates of the invasion.

As in several of the reporters analyzed, Iraqi sources and Western armed forces have different functions when they give their testimony. The first ones provide the element of immediacy, drama and relationship of the journalist with the suffering

environment that surrounds her. The latter offer the technical note and explain the work of Spanish cooperation in this area of Iraq. Spanish armed forces and local population are moving in parallel ways that never meet, causing that the viewer can not but appreciate the differences that exist between them and wonder with who he/she identifies more.

Letizia Ortiz is, of the five journalists selected, the one that has a more direct relation with the Iraqi population. As an extreme example of vulnerability, women and children are the protagonists of her stories. She is undoubtedly the one of the five journalists selected that more uses her gender to get in touch with the women of Um Qasr. She comes into their homes or talks to them in the markets and obtains, in that way, angles that a man could not have got, getting an unusual coverage of the events.

The tone of Letizia's speech is eminently humanizing and dramatic, with the objective, I believe, of getting the viewer's empathy. Surely these statements will result in immediate tears and compassion for the victims, but do not provide explanatory material to help understand the reasons for their situation.

In the case of this journalist, the fact that that her coverage is so different to the one of the other women studied arises a fundamental question: is this her daily style and speech or the special attention to women and children and the humanistic discourse are related with her future role as part of the Spanish royal family? The combination of professional successful woman and care about the most vulnerable groups of the society certainly matches up with the desirable image of a sweet and capable queen for the future of the country.

Raquel González

Raquel González only carried out during the reporting period three stories, all of them some weeks after the start of the invasion (9, 11 and 15 April).

Her coverage followed the footsteps of Spanish aid in Um Qasr. The main protagonists were the Spanish soldiers, rather than the affected population. As consequence, the experience is filtered by these soldiers, and the only aspects of Iraqi life to be found are thus directly related to the work of Spain in Um Qasr. It is impossible to find in all Raquel Gonzalez's discourse any reference to the fact that Spain was one of the countries that supported the invasion of Iraq that has caused all the humanitarian problems the army has now to respond to. The critical-interpretative element is totally absent in all three pieces of the journalist.

On the other hand, the fact that all elements of the surrounding reality are presented through the prism of the military itself and the lack of details of everyday life or testimonies from those who have been affected by conflict, together with the highly technical tone of the speech, increases the distance of the public over the Iraqi reality presented on the news.

**CONCLUSION:
A "GENDERED" AND STEREOTYPED COVERAGE
OF THE ARAB-ISLAMIC WORLD?**

Rather than being a conclusion strict sense, since, as mentioned at the beginning, I am still at an early stage of my research, this section seeks to reflect on the questions raised in the hypothesis:

1. Are there gender elements that distinguish the speech of the five women selected from the one of their male counterparts, allowing us to speak of a "gendered" information?

2. What was the image of the Arab-Islamic world that these five journalists offered to their Spanish audience?

A "gendered" information?

Consider that women journalists cover the information differently than they do their male counterparts can be understood from a perspective both negative and positive: the negative one would be an affront to their professionalism, as journalism made by women would mean a kind of production that traditionally has been regarded as 'feminine' and with lower value (gossips, humanistic issues...). The second conception on a special journalism done by women, by contrast, understands that the "gendered" journalism involves a number of different characteristics to those of men but not necessarily negative. On the contrary, these distinctions may become to provide a new and original approaching to the objects of study. From this second perspective, a more human coverage of histories, the increased attention given to the women themselves or the ability to make contact with them in societies with a marked separation of the sexes (as in great part of the world Muslim) would be very positive aspects of the existence of a journalism that we can qualify of "gendered."

In my case, I have considered for my study the "positive" conception of "gendered" journalism, from the conviction that women, being equally valid as men to exercise their professional duties, perform them with a number of distinctive characteristics that allow us to speak of a distinct speech. I will focus on a basic element to see if there is such a distinct speech: the attention and coverage that the five journalists selected made over the other women with whom they come into contact during the invasion of Iraq. Do the five women analyzed take advantage of their gender to enter female spaces to which men have no access? Do they give priority to women into their journalistic pieces? Are they particularly interested in issues in which women are involved? Do they use their work as journalists to give voice to a collective frequently silenced into its own societies?

The global response to these questions in the case of the five periods studied is NO. Except in the case of Letizia Ortiz, where exists a clear orientation towards the field of women and children, in the other four journalists, women are not a priority subject of the news. The consequence is that little is known about a collective that is also largely invisible within Iraqi society. The lack of knowledge of Arabic (only Ángela Rodicio speaks this language) becomes an obstacle when the journalists are related in a direct way on the ground with women.

The five journalists selected (with the exception already noted of Letizia Ortiz) not only have a coverage, from our point of view, not gendered, but we also have direct evidence that some of them reject that journalism is qualified by the gender of the practitioner: "Journalism is a matter of attitude, not of gender", as Almudena Ariza summed up².

Professional and personal difficulties aside, the analysis of the pieces on the invasion of Iraq leads us to conclude that the five women selected do not have a different and "gendered" style in relation to their male counterparts. The differences are determined by the style of each of the journalists, not by their sex. The presence of a gender perspective in the sense in which we think about it, such as special attention to women as objects of study, does not exist. Consequently, and paradoxically, what it was not intended to be a gendered discourse it becomes gendered, a male-gendered discourse: men seem to be the only actors and victims of the invasion. Women, despite being the story told by women, are once again overshadowed and continue to suffer at the media the discrimination they also experience in their daily lives.

A stereotyped image of the Arab-Islamic world?

Media coverage of Arab-Islamic world has been marked, especially since the events of 11-S, by a series of negative notes repeated ad nauseam: violent and chaotic nature of their societies, continuous and threatening presence of the religion, concept of the "Islamic threat" ... The chronicles analyzed do not repeat such stereotypes: they do not draw a picture of this region marked by an intrinsic violence or by an obsessive presence of religion, nor at any time arises that this world can be a threat to the West.

However, primarily as a result of treatment offered to the sources (preeminence given to Western ones), the final result of the media coverage is a picture of the Iraqi society as an anonymous mass. The little individual attention paid to Iraqi sources, combined with a coverage particularly incisive over the more dramatic elements of the conflict, has consequences on the vision offered about the Arab-Islamic world: it is outside the familiar world WE inhabit and this situation diminishes the empathy between the receiver and the object of the pieces, in this case, the Iraqi society.

² Almudena Ariza: "El periodismo es una cuestión de actitud no de género" « EldiapasonBlog. Extracted 16/06/2010, 2010, from <http://eldiapason.wordpress.com/2009/09/22/almudena-ariza-â€œel-periodismo-es-una-cuestion-de-actitud-no-de-generoâ€•/>

Another aspect that increases the gap and makes difficult the viewer comes to understand what happens in Iraq is the lack of interpretive elements in the vast majority of the articles analyzed. Just Ángela Rodicio, probably because she has a continuous trajectory in the Arab world, provides a picture of the daily life in Iraq with analytical elements. The rest of the reporters analyzed present a large volume of information that, however, does not guarantee clarity³. What is transmitted is not a picture of the invasion of Iraq, but decontextualized fragments that have no capacity to make understand the receiver what is actually happening, a “chaos narrative”, in Michael Ignatieff’s vocabulary⁴.

NGOs and Western sources are the essential providers of information. They are also sources with a previously articulated discourse, understandable not only by the own journalists, but also by the Spanish audience. A discourse that easily fits within the media imagery on the non-Western world that the Western has cultivated: a country without hope, marked by injuries, looting, chaos...

The result: an Arab-Islamic world view that, rather than full of clichés, could be described as shallow and incapable of generating an approximation between the Spanish audience and the reality presented. In the end, the consequence is that this reality appears as something alien to the public, a Spanish audience that is never questioned about its responsibility (even though its government has directly supported the invasion of Iraq).

The analysis so far forces us to rethink the entire contents of the hypothesis to advance a new reformulation, that will be checked in later stages of the research work. A first reprocessing could leave my hypothesis as follows:

The women journalists of TVE in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 made a coverage of this event in which they offered an image of the Arab world as foreign to the Spanish viewer. This coverage does not satisfy any characteristic features that allow us to talk about a “gendered” journalism.

³ *La guerra mejor contada de la historia* · ELPAÍS.com. Extracted 16/06/2010, 2010, from http://www.elpais.com/articulo/reportajes/guerra/mejor/contada/historia/elpepucul/20030406elpdmgrep_1/Tes

⁴ *Women war correspondents: Does gender make a difference on the front line?* Authored by Buonanno, Milly. Extracted 30/06/2010, from http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/9/5/7/8/pages295786/p295786-1.php

My research, however, is constantly subject to reformulation, especially in a moment in which the Arab-Islamic world is immersed in a profound process of change. Far from the "immutable" character that, according to many Western media, it was supposed to have, as a world marked by religious and secular inherent violence, the events in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt have showed that the Arab-Islamic world is a scenery open to change and reinterpretation. The recent uprisings in these countries also contradict far extended clichés. One of them, the passivity of its women. Nobody who has seen the protests in Tahrir Square, in Cairo, will since now repeat that they are a part of society just waiting for the men to act. And this change of perception, inevitably, will have also to change the coverage carried out by the women journalists about them.