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Representation of women as terrorists and victims of terrorism in the Spanish press. The case of *El País* newspaper

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Abstract

Introduction. This article aims to identify the interpretive frames that link women and terrorism in the Spanish newspaper *El País*. **Methods.** The body of the study derives from a search in natural language carried out within the library of *El País* newspaper. The study is based on the identification and subsequent analysis of the news stories that contained the terms *mujer** and *terroris** (“wom*” and “terroris*”). A total of 50 news items were selected and categorised according to two criteria: the interpretive frames and the features attributed to women. **Results and conclusions.** The analysis resulted in the identification of four frames: women as terrorists (the discourse of exceptionalism), women as recruiters (the discourse of expertise), women as victims (the discourse of sensationalism) and women as warriors (the discourse of bravery).

Keywords

Women and terrorism; gender representations; stereotypes; news; qualitative approach.

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1. Introduction

This article presents the results of a qualitative study inspired by two previous research works carried out by two authors of recognised prestige. The first study, *The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism*, was published in 2005 by Brigitte Nacos, a research professor from the University of Columbia. This study compares the framing patterns used in the news to represent women in politics and women terrorists. These patterns, Nacos argues, are occasionally reductionist and stereotyped, are conditioned by cultural representations of women, and are influenced by gendered frames.

The second study is *Unlikely warriors: How four U.S. news sources explained female suicide bombers*, which was published in 2008 by Barbara Friedman, from the University of North Carolina. In this study, which focuses exclusively in the case of female suicide terrorists, Friedman points out, like Nacos, that news on women terrorists are often based on preconceived and stereotypical ideas about women, war and terrorism.

Both authors aimed to explore, by means of qualitative techniques, the media representation of women who participate in terrorist acts (especially suicidal acts), mostly based on two “paradigmatic” terrorist acts perpetrated by women in 2002: Wafa Idris, the first Palestinian suicidal woman, and the cases of Chechen women terrorists, who took Moscow’s Dubrovka theatre hostage.

These two inspiring studies focused on female terrorists. In fact, the expressions and terms used by Nacos and Friedman to search for material are “female terrorist” “woman (as) terrorist” “women (as) terrorist” and “female suicide bomber”. In our case, we have tried to expand the framework of analysis and see what issues arise by linking the words “woman/women and terrorism/terrorist”. In fact, we have used in our search the expressions *mujer** (“wom*”) and *terroris**, which includes the terms terrorism and terrorist. The combination of those two terms in our search has resulted, as it will be shown later, in the identification of four news frames: women as terrorist -them most common frame-; women as recruiters; women as victims of terrorism; and women as warriors.

2. Methods

The concept of frame is widespread in the analysis of journalistic information. Basically, as Entman (1993: 52) explains, “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and to make them more salient in a communicative text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described”. The

media's framing of reality is present in all steps of the journalistic work: in the selection of subjects, sources, language and photographs (Nacos, 2005). Moreover, frames also involve isolating certain material and to focus on the object that is being represent, by emphasising some of his features and excluding or eliminating others. Frames provide a comprehensive context for the receiver, interpretive schemes of reality that, ultimately, respond to the journalist's own interpretation of reality (Álvarez-Gálvez et al., 2014).

Our study (which is qualitatively as the ones carried out by Nacos and Friedman) aims to verify, first, whether the interpretive frames of Spanish news can be equated to American news and, secondly, whether the Spanish press, represented in our case study, replicates or not the limited gender representations offered in relation to women and terrorism, taking into account the fact that the previous studies were carried out several years ago.

The body of study has resulted from a search in natural language within the library of *El País* newspaper. We have collected all those news (actually all those reports regardless of their journalistic genre) that contained the following two expressions: *mujer** (wom*) and *terroris**. The study is based on the analysis of *El País* newspaper because it is the only daily newspaper that meets the initial three limitations or requirements:

- It has to provide access to the full text of the news.
- It has to provide a search engine that indicates the degree of coincidence with the search (the coincidence degree limit was set at 65%), regardless of the publication date of the news.
- It has to provide free and full access to the newspaper archive.

With these criteria, we selected 50 news that were categorised according to two variables: their news frame and the features they attribute to women. As Tójar (2006) explains:

The qualitative analysis involves sorting and organising the available information, in addition to guiding its search, develop patterns, categories and units of analysis which will be used to reorganise the first selected units. The analysis also involves interpreting, assigning meanings, describing and understanding patterns and establishing connections between these and other categories.

3. Theoretical framework

Nacos (2005) explains that the media still use different frame patterns in the news on women and men. On many occasions, these gendered frames simplify and stereotype women and men in public life. For example, in our case, women who commit murder tend to be portrayed normally as an aberration of the real “condition” of woman (Easteal *et al.*, 2015: 31).

The objective of this work is to delimit terrorism, study the behaviour and purposes of women terrorists, and to analyse all the relations that are established between terrorism and women. The examination of the way women act within terrorist groups -as ideologists, instructors, recruiters, executors and, more frequently, victims- would de-naturalise the work we face, whose aim is to study the representation of women linked to terrorist acts in the media. However, it is necessary to describe the link between women and terrorist groups to be able to understand the complex relations

that remain between them, which are sometimes stereotypical, and yet different from those established with men.

It is convenient to start by saying that, traditionally, it was affirmed that women who militate in terrorist groups were an exceptional phenomenon (Laqueur, 2000: 13), that women were more encouraged by their spouses or relatives -especially parents and siblings- than by themselves, and that they adopted male features (Berkowitz, 2005). This seems to be confirmed by the case of revolutionary, irredentist or ethno-nationalist groups, such as ETA and IRA, as well as Western European groups during the last third of the 20th century (Vogel *et al.*, 2014: 91-114; Cunningham, 2003; Emmanuel, 2002: 15-18; Morgan, 2001: 204; Otte, 1997) and some Near East groups (Rivas, 2008). However, this reasoning has been marked by an unbalanced mixture of facts and assumptions (Bloom, 2011), and even so, some behaviours of women in terrorism have changed.

Women, still in small proportion in comparison with men, have been more involved in terrorist groups by participating directly in the attacks, and have even become suicide bombers in recent years, although moved more by manipulation than by personal convictions (Baños, 2008). Female suicide bombers give tactical advantage to the criminal group, but something similar occurs with men, who often become suicidal not out of conviction, but out of necessity or obligation (Reinares, 2004: 3-11). What seems to be, therefore, the difference? The information and propaganda dimension, which increases in the case of women for being women. Although only 15% of the women who participate in terrorist groups are willing to become suicidal, according to the few available estimations provided by reliable sources (O'Rourke, 2008).

This is a relevant issue for our study, as the motivations of female terrorists are not only what they seemed to be -basically personal motivations, like joining a terrorist group out of love, the need to avenge the death of a family member, to advocate for equality, to become subordinated to men or to recover the lost honour (Nacos, 2011; 2005: 435-451)-, but go beyond, and can include social pressure, desperation, ideological causes (Bajo, 2008) or the desire to improve their family situation - obtain financial resources with their actions, or contribute to changes in the political and social order-, although the rewards received by these acts are minor when the terrorist is a woman (Schweitzer, 2006). Radicalisation and recruitment arise from the multiple combinations of injustice, ideology and mobilisation (Pantucci, 2015: 8-15).

There are also group motivations, such as the significant fact that women raise less suspicion than men and have more ease of movement, the shortage of men in a group and the powerful effects of propaganda (Baños, 2008). The nationalist component -i.e., the ideological component with the variant of the national construction- in women from Kurdish, Chechen and Palestinian groups is a powerful factor that sometimes is added to personal issues such as the demands for equality, which is still alive.

An important fact in suicide terrorism is that one way to persuade some women to get involved is physical and psychological abuse, and even rape. Women are seduced -to engage in sexual acts- so that their honour vanishes, and the respect from their rigorist society and family is lost; they are emotionally weakened and are induced to take their own lives and, sometimes, they are raped to facilitate the process (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2002; Rivas, 2008). Suicide allows women to recover the lost honour and give tactical advantage to the terrorist group, nourishes

effective and dispensable warriors at a very low cost, increases the propaganda effect and the possibility of new recruitments (Rivas, 2013; Rao and Weerasinghe, 2011; Rain, 2009; Toros, 2009), either in Palestine, Syria and Iraq, or in the Africa subjected to Boko Haram (Adegbulu, 2013: 260-273) or Al-Shabab (Rodríguez, 2013: 1-9). Moreover, the education level of female suicide terrorists is low because most of them only have basic education -and perhaps this facilitates the previously described process- although they usually have better education than the men in the same organisation. Even so, in the case of Chechen and Palestinian groups, the education level of women suicide terrorist is higher than their male counterparts, since a third of these women have university studies (Miller, 2007) and, as it occurs with men, psychological disorders do not abound among women (Schweitzer, 2006: 18) because there is no common psychological profile for the terrorist regardless of gender (De la Corte, 2006: 190-200).

In addition, as their male counterparts, female suicide terrorists are young, around 20 years of age, and do not tend to be particularly devout to religion. The skilful manipulation by extremists and the traumatic events that contribute to the incorporation of women to a terrorist group are more important than faith.

The case of the Daesh is interesting because it gives clues about this process and also rises questions. 13.7% of the total number of combatants who moved to Iraq and Syria were women (García-Calvo, 2015: 1). And, according to the Western media, the Daesh, despite its extreme severity, encouraged women to join the group to find love (Bonet, 2014) and overcame gender clichés as it matched the number of men and women in combat (Muñoz and Pagola, 2015). However, we cannot affirm this is entirely true (García-Calvo, 2015: 1). This story is rather due to the effective recruitment campaign developed to make people move to the territory occupied by the Daesh, because in the Caliphate that the Daesh wants to build women have a particular function (Fresneda, 2015), as it is clearly outlined in the manifesto that explains what is the role of women for the Jihad. The Al-Khansaa brigade, an all-women police unit, published in 2005 the text *Women of the Islamic State* (in its English translation), which talks about the sedentary role of women in the Jihad. The Jihad promises at least four things those who join it: emancipation, liberation, participation and devotion. Women can take the reins of their own life when joining the Daesh, just like men can; the injustices that women suffer in the West will end in that moment; they will make the Caliphate grow and flourish by making, raising and educating the new generations of warriors; and will have a devoted Islamic existence (Rafiq and Malik, 2015: 13). Uncertainty becomes certainty, as stated in the diary of a Western woman who travelled to Syria to contribute to the construction of the Caliphate, in which the journey frees the soul of the muhājira and the previous mess is given direction and sense, according to Daesh (Sham, 2015).

Hoyle, Bradford and Frenett (2015) insisted that women who adhered to the Daesh supported violence in the same way as their male counterparts. The tendency does not seem to have changed. Some women terrorist support the systematic rape of young Yazidis and Christian women, covered by the publication in December 2014 of the document titled *Questions and answers about the holding of prisoners and slaves*. Those women were surprised that some males refused to commit those acts, as if these acts were vile (Umm Sumayyah, 2015: 45) or illegitimate.

In fact, the previous studies suggest that, currently, female terrorists, in their role of collaborators or main participants, are not an exceptional phenomenon -although their scale is still smaller than that

of men-; that most of them do not adhere to a cause or a group to follow their parents, siblings or spouses; that they have increased their direct participation terrorist attacks; that they take part in suicide attacks moved by personal and group motivations, including ideological motivations; that sometimes they are induced to suicide with pressure and abuse, which is used by terrorist organisations on women, and men, who are unwilling to take their own lives; and that these women agree to carry out these tasks and tend to accept the new path and new role in the construction of the new order, whether as wife, mother or potential warrior (Pastor, 2015); but that in the case of the Daesh, which tries to recruit women to the Caliphate that it aims to build, women are offered an important role, away from the frontline, although with some exceptions. The effectiveness and cruelty of women as terrorist are similar to those of men.

Despite this evidence about the various causes and forms of participation of women in terrorist groups, the media discourse tends to present, as Eastal *et al.* (2015) explained, female characters as emotionally unstable, evil manipulators, victims of gender violence, sexual deviant or bad mothers and wives.

Even in the case of the women suicide bombers, the stereotyped discourses fall within the definition of women based on their attire, physical appearance and family relationships. Thus, Eastal (2015: 37) describes the case of Palestinian Wafa Idris -the first suicide bomber. A good part of the news from the media made reference to the brown and curly hair that fell on her shoulders, her brown reddish hair, her pale complexion, her sleeves dresses and makeup.

4. Results. News frames of women and terrorism

Four interpretive frames resulted from the analysis of the news that contained the expressions *wom** and *terroris**. The asterisk indicates that the search may include any term whose root is “wom” (woman and women, for example) and “terroris” (terrorism and terrorist).

In addition to the most obvious and numerous frame used in news on women who commit terrorist attacks, we detected other three frames: women who are victims of terrorism in different degrees; the movements for the rights of women and girls; and the frame concerning women terrorist recruiters.

One of the first conclusions is that opposing the analysis of Nacos (2005), who detected 6 frames that referred exclusively to the attributes that define women who commit terrorist attacks, our analysis is enriched, as mentioned, with the identification of three interpretive frames.

4.1. Women as terrorists: the discourse of exceptionalism

The first and the most important interpretive frame is that of women as terrorist subjects. Women who commit violent acts in general and terrorist acts in particular are perceived, as Nacos points out, as “intrusive” in the world of extreme violence that has been historically considered as inherently male. It is assumed that approximately 15% of the suicide attacks are perpetrated by women (Schewitzer, Bajo, 2009) and that women comprise between 20% and 30% of the terrorist groups. However, we should be cautious with these estimations since they are difficult to verify.

News on women who commit attacks highlight over and over again how “strange” and “unusual” it is for a woman to exercise violence. As different authors explain (Berrington and Honkatukia, 2002; Nacos, 2005; Berkowitz, 2005; Friedman, 2008; Brown, 2011; Easteal, 2015), violent women are seen as exceptional, but also as unnatural -“it is not in their nature”, “they behave like men”- and doubly deviant:

“When we cannot understand women in roles that cultural norms and prejudices perceive as inherently male (i.e., women as political leaders, women as violent political actors), there is a tendency to resort to stereotypical explanations (i.e., her good looks opened doors; her family affected her path; she is tough like a man, not a real woman).” (Nacos, 2005: 437).

The analysed news items extracted from *El País* tend to provide background information that tends to refer to the first female terrorists who appeared in the media. On the one hand, one of the effects of offering these references is positive: it shows readers a historical context. On the other hand, they provide a permanent feeling that women are eternal “pioneers” in the spaces that they are not supposed to participate.

The phenomenon of the black widows, female suicide bombers, goes far beyond the borders of the Caucasus. Women have participated in attacks in clashes with political, ethnic or religious claims. A Lebanese woman, Khyadali Sana Mehadali, was the eldest daughter of a saga that today stretches across Sri Lanka, Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. (*El País*, 30/03/2010).

In 2002, Wafa Idris, an aid worker who had been disowned by her husband for being infertile, became the Palestinian suicide bomber. She killed one person and left 100 injured after detonating a 22-pound bomb, in an attack claimed by the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. (*El País*, 30/03/2010).

With regards to the news discourse of the exceptionalism of the attacks carried out by women, Juana Gallego (2008: 13) has already warned, when referring to those women who assumed certain type of public role or had won a sports title:

Yes, it is understandable that initially, we highlighted the exceptionalism of women doing something for the first time, but saying “she is the first at something” is a that cliché that currently suggests that this is always beginning, that there is no history, that there is an absence of advance or progress. There will always be a woman who will become the first at something.

It is true that in the discourses under analysis the role of women is tragic (they are terrorists), but we are not talking about the unquestionably reprehensible violent acts, but about the news treatment and its symbolic content, the asymmetric treatment with respect to males, who rarely appear as pioneers or intruders when they occupy the public scene.

In addition, these *gendered frames* tend to highlight -also in an asymmetrical way, since the same does not occur in the case of men- the physical aspect and clothing of women as well as their family

relationships. Also, women are usually assigned attributes that increase the effect of the violence they exercise, as if it did not correspond to their “nature” (Berrington, E., & Honkatukia, P., 2002; Barnett, 2005; Berkowitz, 2005; Nacos, 2005).

Fauzía Allal Mohamed is a smiling and very vivacious 19-year-old from Melilla. This summer her photograph, with a black hijab and eyes framed with kohl, was circulated around the world in the form of a police file. Hours earlier, she had been arrested, along with an underage girl from Ceuta, accused of being a jihadi on her way to the holy war. (*El País*, 27/10/2014).

The tendency to explain the family relationships of women, regardless of their relevance, is also majority:

The so-called black widows are relatives of Chechen men who belonged to guerrillas and died in combat or in terrorist attacks. About twenty of these women allegedly participated in the taking of Moscow’s Dubrovka theatre, carrying explosives attached to their bodies. This was the first time that the Russians heard about female suicide bombers. (*El País*, 10/07/2003).

Samira Yerou, accused of being affiliated to a terrorist organisation, was sent to prison yesterday. Judge Andreu justified the measure by saying that there was a “high risk” the jihadist mother could try to escape. Small Mohamed is in the custody of his father. (*El País*, 10/03/2015).

The presence of women in the cells dismantled in Spain is “a very recent phenomenon, but in ascending progression”, according to a police report. Before 2008, there was only one case of converted women who left the country, like the Spanish Helena Moreno, married to Mustafá Setmarián, who resides in Qatar, and Raquel Burgos García Hanane, widow of Amer Azizi, who supposedly lives in Afghanistan with an Al Qaeda leader. Or the converted Andalusian Tomasa Pérez, 38 years old, whose husband is in prison in Morocco, and in 2014 travelled with four children to Syria, where the two oldest are warriors. (*El País*, 16/07/2015)

The Minister seemed to point directly to Samantha Lewthwaite, the so-called “White Widow”, when clarifying that the woman she was referring to “has done this many times before”. Lewthwaite has been wanted and captured for a long time by Kenyan authorities, who accuse her of participating in at least one attack in Mombasa, the touristic capital of the country. (*El País*, 24/09/2013).

4.2. Women as recruiters: the discourse of expertise

A specific case of women terrorist is women recruiting other women (sometimes also other men) to form part of different terrorist groups. Bajo (2008: 14) explains that in the case of extremist Islamic groups, women tend to be responsible «of multiple activities to support the community, ranging from recruiting other women for the cause, to facilitating operations and managing the financial resources,

as well as the most traditional activities like supporting their husbands in the fight and educating their children».

The media highlight the figure of the West woman who acts as recruiter or operates in the West (and also tends to do so over and over again as something new, even when it is not):

Residing in Philadelphia but with strong ties to South Texas, this 46-year-old small woman has been charged with using the Internet for the purpose of recruiting Jihad warriors and help terrorists overseas to plan a murder -the prosecution document does not specify whether such murder was committed or not but no murder charges have been made against LaRose-. (*El País*, 10/03/2010).

The recruitment of male and female supporters for terrorist groups of all kinds has a very different casuistry. In the case of women, it is one of the many roles they can perform (Bajo, 2008), although in the narratives of the media female recruiters respond to one, although not unique, existing profile: the woman who recruits other women through social networks:

Those who recruit women, however, are not men but a handful of young women, all of them Western women from different countries, women who perfectly know the Muslim female psychology because they shared it. Their role is to entice their contemporaries and convince them to leave the Western culture and consumerism and to embark on a patriotic adventure next to a warrior, or rather, a hero. (*El País*, 04/05/2015).

Those arrested in Spain were a man and four women (one of them underage). The arrests were made in Barcelona, Ceuta and Melilla. The latter was mainly devoted to attracting female jihadis to the Islamic State, having managed to recruit 12 women so far through social networks and private Whatsapp groups. (*El País*, 07/03/2015).

Social networks are a vehicle to promote meetings and channel radicalisation. But certain context is necessary to exist for young people to use a computer and view radical and even jihadist pages, according to sources from security bodies. “It is usually a person from that environment who tells them: get in that chat or that forum. They go deliberately for it. In the case of women, 90% are face to face meetings in homes”, they explain. (*El País*, 27/10/2014).

The stories of female recruiters and, in general, women terrorist or victims of terrorism, are plagued with literature that begins with the assignment of a name that aims to provide an air of mysticism to the story (“black widow”, “tigress”, “white widow”, etc.):

Unless they realise it, the seduction of these Islamic Cinderellas, imprisoned by their Western stepmother, paradoxically occurs through manipulation with the classical tools of European fables. The career woman, who rubs shoulders with men on the boards of directors of large companies, is a disgusting image, as disgusting as the idea of ending up as a spinster. That is clearly sensed in the messages that Loubna sends from Al Raqa. And indoctrination works. In Ceuta, with a population of 85,000 inhabitants, 15

families have denounced the disappearance of teenagers, a very high percentage. (*El País*, 04/05/2015).

This alleged female recruiter fell in love at age 16 with a Moroccan man she married a few years later and it was him who convinced her to convert. She lived for a year in Mauritania. Then she became radicalised through Islamic forums on the Internet. Judge Santiago Pedraz explained in the order of imprisonment of Celestín that she, in addition to disseminating jihadist content on Facebook, is an “active recruiter”. After doing networking on Facebook to catch future “female candidates”, she led the most prone to WhatsApp and Telegram forums to make preparatory personal contact to travel to Syria and Iraq. Pedraz point out that she had intended to go to any of those countries. (*El País*, 16/07/2015)

4.3. Women as victims: the sensationalist discourse

Women are not only protagonists of terrorism as activists, they are also victims. Violence against women is exercised by different actors and in different ways, and it does not only include the harms produced for the actions of terrorist groups, but also the suffering caused by the so-called “honour codes” existing in different parts of the world.

One of the most repeated themes in the analysed news is the kidnappings in Nigeria at the hands of the Boko Haram terrorist group. This group uses kidnapping for two purposes: on the one hand, to finance its terrorist activities and, on the other hand, to establish the Sharia law by spreading of terror among civilians. Women and girls are the main victims of this bloody campaign. In April 2014, this group kidnapped more than 200 girls from a school. Once again, news about these events, when referring to women, often used a condescending and poetic style, with a sensationalist perspective at times:

Two hundred girls were abducted months ago in Nigeria. Nobody know anything about them. There is only one image, a single image, of them dressed in ash colour, the tone of their situation, from their burned villages, from the horror that persists... (*El País*, 26/01/2015).

And what a simple conclusion for your people, for those who have lost everything: pretending to be educated women led them, one by one, to be abducted yesterday, disappeared today (that “do not exist while existing” so well known by the family of the missing girls). Probably already raped and sold, by this point, far beyond the borders with Cameroon, Niger and Chad. (*El País*, 26/01/2015).

Randa was kidnapped in her village, South of Mount Sinjar, along with her parents, siblings and other relatives. Her father was killed with other males of the family. Her pregnant mother gave birth in captivity and continues hold prisoner along with several dozens of women and children. She was sold or given to a man twice her age, but she managed to escape and now wonders if she will ever see them again. (*El País*, 23/12/2014).

You. Your name is Rose Daniel, you are 17 years old. And you return shortly after being abducted before the eyes of your people, in that group picture which is now famous worldwide. You come back transformed into a grey mass of oppression. Your mother, your father, your brother, your neighbour look for your face among the other girls. You are found. And they barely recognise you. (*El País*, 26/01/2015).

Villaplana (2009: 474) explains that in the discourse of the media the stereotype of the victim is overrepresented, and that women tend to be more personified and often suffer from a more sensationalist coverage: «the narration -in the press, radio, advertising and television- becomes ostentatious, almost obscene, when it promotes a hypertrophy of listening and seeing».

Without ceasing to denounce the abuses to which women are subjected, this author proposes to highlight the fighting and survival capacity of the women who are victims of violence.

4.4. Women as warriors: the discourse of bravery

Opposing the discourse of victimisation, the news of *El País* newspaper also offer an interpretive frame of great interest: the discourse of the fighting and courageous women who face the harsh reality of terrorism and their environments.

Thus, some of the news with this frame speak of the rights of women and girls, their opposition to child marriage and child labour, their fight for education and their rejection of the codes of honour.

Afghan women occupied for a few hours the headquarters of Loya Jirga, the traditional grand assembly. A thousand women have come to listen to Habiba Sarabi, one of the three candidates to the Vice Presidency in Saturday elections (she is the only woman with possibilities to advance to the second round). “Men and women are equal and we should work to make it effective”, says the popular former governor of Bamiyan province in a rally that would have upset the Taliban. (*El País*, 02/04/2014).

“There has been progress, but we expected more,” summarises Nilab, who studies Geography and Social Sciences. He points out that, despite progress in legislation, “women are still deprived of their rights because of traditions”. (*El País*, 02/04/2014).

However, what matters the most in the long term is that girls themselves are demanding that their rights are taken seriously. There were mobilisations of girls in Bangladesh, where the movement to establish child marriage-free zones is growing; in India, where the Global March Against Child Labour began; and in Africa, where children protection clubs are being created in almost all countries. (*El País*, 25/07/2014).

Last month, on African Children’s day, thousands of young people marched on the streets of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and took control of 20 African and Asian parliaments to demand universal education for girls. (*El País*, 08/08/2014).

The growing wave of teen fury towards child marriage and child labour has yet to wake up in Twitter and Facebook, just like the child marriage-free zone of Bangladesh in the region of Nilphamari, and the child empowerment groups in the districts of Dompu and Grobogan in Indonesia. (*El País*, 08/08/2014).

Along these positive narratives, others highlight the actions of women in conflict zones, women who risk their lives and fight for a better life.

Meanwhile, Attiya's mother just wants to see her daughter walk again. Her willingness, just as Malala's, is the greatest triumph over the retrograde people who deny education to half of all children. (*El País*, 16/12/2013).

She was an extremely brave woman, according to all the Indian media. "She taught how a Bengali woman can face the coercion of the Taliban", said Ujjwal Chatterjee, director of the movie based on her life. He also wrote other books, such as *The atrocities of the Taliban inside and outside Afghanistan*, *Mullah Omar, Taliban, and I*, *No word is a lie...* (*El País*, 10/09/2013).

5. Conclusions

The work presented here aims to follow in the footsteps of other studies carried out in the United States about the representations of female terrorists. In our case, we have expanded the analysis to other interpretive frames, based on the observation of a paradigmatic case: *El País* newspaper.

The main conclusions of our study are the following:

1. One of the most important studies on the representation of women terrorists, the one by Brigitte Nacos (2005), identified six *gendered frames*, that is, six explanatory frames with certain gender bias on this reality. The sample of news analysed in this work, belonging to *El País* newspaper, use at least three of those six frames: the *frame* of the physical appearance, the *frame* of family relations, and the *frame* that represents women "as violent as" men. The sample of news did not contain, for example, the justifications given by the media analysed by Nacos on why women joined the front line of terrorism, which in some cases was identified as an advance in terms of gender equality.
2. The women terrorists and the female recruiters of activists who appear in the analysed news stories are represented as "pioneers" or "trespassers", since the news highlight the "novelty of their actions" or argue that women occupy a place that does not correspond to their "nature". This is what we have called "the discourse of exceptionalism", which also appears in other informative contexts (politics or sports, for example) and could also be termed the context of the "eternal exceptionalism".
3. The stories about terrorism and women, either as active or passive subjects, -i.e. as terrorists or victims of violence- there is an abuse of the almost mystical, literary style that can be condescending and sensationalist. That style is evident in the names used to refer to terrorists ("Tigress", "black widow", etc.), but also in the narration of the violent acts and the consequences for the victims.

4. In contrast to the aforementioned condescending style, the analysis detected a frame that presents the stories positively, by highlighting the dramatic situation of women and girls who are actually victims of violence (for example, the violence exercised by certain radical Islamist groups in zones of conflict in the planet) and the women who rebel against violence, who lead movements for equality and the end of the codes of honour, as well as women who empower themselves to demand education for girls, the end of child marriage or child labour.

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