

Giving a Voice to Mediterranean Women

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The Mediterranean Network of Information and Communication with a Gender Perspective, created in 2007 to give more visibility to women in the media, is the result of a long process carried out by Mediterranean women journalists. Since 1992 these women have organised meetings with the aim of breaking down the “wall of ignorance” between them and fighting against a journalism that is still sexist.

The Gender Perspective in Journalism: Media, Observatories and Universities

Since the 2nd Meeting of Mediterranean Women Journalists in Barcelona in October 2007 and other experiences (Syracuse, 1991, Barcelona, 1995), the Mediterranean Network of Information and Communication with a Gender Perspective has been networking so that the generalist, specialised and alternative media from both shores of the Mediterranean can overcome the andocentric approach in their news coverage.

Our approach to news is focused on journalism with a gender perspective, giving a voice and visibility to women, their work and their achievements and aspirations as it is the only way to develop a more democratic journalism (we women are not a sector or a group in society; we are half or the majority of society).

Women are not equally represented in the media (only 24%, as shown by the Global Media Monitoring Project [GMMP], WACC,

2010). Therefore, they must be made visible as both protagonists and sources of news, thereby recovering the professionalism of reporting, investigating and working with the greatest diversity of sources possible, to definitively create “good journalism.”

Moreover, to make them more visible in their diversity and avoid stereotypes, the use of sexist language and images is inexcusable. In this respect, great work has been carried out by the women’s image observatories (which depend on public and government institutions, universities or professional colleges and associations) in systematically denouncing sexist treatment both in advertising and news.

The recommendations for the use of a non-sexist language, as prepared by networks, journalists’ associations and professional colleges, achieving the collaboration of public administrations and government institutes, have also been of great use. These recommendations can embrace news coverage as a whole, or specific themes such as domestic violence or the treatment of migrant women, for example. Slowly,

some parts of the media are incorporating them into their style books.

Moreover, we must note the progress in the faculties of journalism and communication in the northern Mediterranean where some masters are taught and credits for training seminars and workshops presented by journalists who are experts on gender are recognised. In southern Mediterranean countries this process is still at a very early stage. However, journalists who are experts on gender believe that only with the introduction of the gender perspective in compulsory subjects on university courses can good results be achieved.

The International Institutions and News with a Gender Perspective

The international bodies have prioritised the incorporation of women as protagonists at all decision-making levels, as well as the need for them to be visible in the media.

In the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by the UN General Assembly in its resolution 34/180 (18th December 1979), it is stated that "...the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields."

The Beijing Declaration, adopted in the 16th plenary session (15th September 1995) during the Fourth World Conference on Women asks "to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and the girl child..." and in its section 7 calls to "promote a culture of peace, in particular in the media portraying women in all their creative potential rather than in stereotyped roles..."

The so-called Barcelona Process, started in 1995 in this city, resulted in the creation of the

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Barcelona Declaration, which highlights "...the importance of intercultural dialogue, and of dialogues between religions; the importance of the role the media can play in the reciprocal recognition and understanding of cultures; and the development of human resources in the cultural sphere..."

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Finally, notable among the Euro-Mediterranean Conferences is the Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference of Istanbul (14th and 15th November 2006) and its recommendations in the section "Ministerial Conclusions on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society" (later compiled in the different meetings in 2007 in Marseilles, 2009 in Morocco and in 2011 in Malta), in which the gender perspective in the media acquires a fundamental role as it calls for transmitting a positive, balanced and non-stereotyped image of girls and women in education and in the media; their access to ICTs; combating male violence with media campaigns, exchanging experiences and opinions and good practices; the participation of women in intercultural dialogue; fostering research into gender equality in the media (products and institutions) to reduce negative stereotypes, and support the media regulating bodies that control gender issues; training of male and female media professionals about the human rights of women, increase the number of professionals in the media, promote them to positions of responsibility and develop the interaction between women's organisations and NGOs with the media; fighting against the stereotyped image of women in artistic products, and encourage civil society to put



Palestinian young woman participant of the project «Our Voice: magazine des jeunes réfugiés», Hebrón (EPA / QUARTIER info).

into practice programmes that promote women's full enjoyment of all human rights, as well as gender equality.

The Mediterranean Network of Information and Communication with a Gender Perspective

Background

In Syracuse in 1992, a first meeting took place of Mediterranean women journalists, called by Italian colleagues and coordinated by Nella Condorelli.

Three years later, parallel to the European Conference of 1995 and the creation of the

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the conference "Women Journalists, the Mediterranean and the Future", organised by the Association of Women Journalists of Catalonia (ADPC in Catalan) and the European Network of Women Journalists, took place in Barcelona. Led by Montserrat Minobis and Alicia Oliver, it brought together participants from Albania, Algeria, Bosnia, Egypt, Spain, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Morocco, Turkey and Tunisia. In its conclusions we stated: "...to promote paths of change and collaboration among women journalists of all countries on the shores of the Mediterranean, the first thing we must do is to break down the wall of ignorance: exchange information, know who we are, what the situ-

ation in each country is, what unites us and what separates us.” And to set out on this path of mutual understanding we drafted a list of proposals that ranged from training to asking for space in the media.

It should be noted that in 1995 some Mediterranean women journalists who participated in the conference had difficult and complicated access to ICTs in many countries. This was the main reason that most proposals were not put into practice and these networks would not be consolidated until 12 years later in the next meeting, also held in Barcelona.

Creating the Mediterranean Network of Information and Communication with a Gender Perspective using ICTs

In Barcelona, and parallel to the Istanbul Euro-Mediterranean Conference in 2006, we women journalists with a gender perspective organised a new meeting of Mediterranean journalists, recovering the spirit of the 1995 conference, this time inviting male colleagues and adding the learning shared with the networks of women journalists from Latin America who we met during the 1st Meeting of the International Network of Women Journalists with a Gender Perspective (RIPVG), held in November 2005 in Morelia (Michoacán, Mexico), coordinated by the Mexican Network and led by the journalists Lucia Lagunes, Sara Lovera and Erika Cervantes.

We already had the fundamental instrument that allowed us — this time successfully — to consolidate a network of networks of women journalists from the Mediterranean, the habitual use of the ICTs with access to Internet, a mailing list of the Network and the ability to prepare digital information products. Moreover, through the RIPVG, we already had some consolidated news agencies in Central America, the Caribbean and Latin America such as CIMAC and SEMLAC, as well as others just underway and periodical newsletters

in Argentina, Guatemala, Uruguay, and so on, which also produced important programmes on public radio and television. At the same time in diverse southern European countries we consolidated our networks, published blogs and planned news agencies and newsletters with a gender perspective (Women in the City in Italy, AMECO in Spain, and La Independent in Catalonia).

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In 2007, with institutional support (Barcelona City Council and the Catalan government), the College of Journalists, the Barcelona International Press Centre and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), we held in Barcelona the 2nd Conference of Women Journalists and Communicators of the Mediterranean under the slogan “Let’s communicate with a different perspective: a bridge for peace and human rights”. This meeting was organised by the Network in Catalonia and coordinated by Montserrat Minobis, Tona Gusi and Lina Barber with the support of the Italian colleague Nella Condorelli.

In its Barcelona Declaration, the 2nd Conference announced the creation of a Mediterranean network of networks, which was called the Mediterranean Network of Information and Communication with a Gender Perspective. Formed by journalists from Palestine, Israel, Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Italy, France, Tunisia, Morocco, Catalonia and Spain, it made a commitment to the broadcast of news that is often unmentioned and silenced in the traditional media and to fight to strengthen real dialogue in favour of peace and women’s rights.

The Mediterranean Network (network of networks, groups and journalists, and communicators individually) became a member of RIPVG and a month later would hold its 2nd International Meeting, this time on the other side of the Atlantic, in Oviedo (Asturias, Spain) in 2007, organised by the journalist Iolina Cueli (from the Network in Asturias).

Gender and News Coverage of the Countries in Conflict. The Prohibited Issues

In September 2008, with the support of the Mediterranean Network of Information and Communication with a Gender Perspective of Catalonia and the support of the IEMed, a meeting was also held in Barcelona with journalists from countries in conflict in the Mediterranean to prepare an Agenda and Recommendations on gender and news coverage in the countries in conflict. During the previous months, there was intensive work via Internet with journalists from Palestine, Jordan and Syria and women NGO media journalists and heads of press in Catalonia. One of the most important achievements was the preparation of the newsletter *“Women, Journalists and Conflict in the Mediterranean”* to explore with a gender perspective the situation of women in countries in conflict in the Mediterranean. It is worth noting the contributions of the Palestinian Khawther Salam, the Syrian-Jordanian Haifa Haidar and the journalist M.G. who worked as a journalist in Syria.

The Agenda noted two objectives: the promotion of the Family Codes and the different types of violence against women (both domestic and violence inflicted on war, economic and social conflicts, etc.). It also specified a list of prohibited issues such as sexual abuse within the family and at work; honour killings; female genital mutilation; gender sexual issues;

violence by men within the family; marriage and divorce issues; trials in Islamic courts that are not adjourned so as not to allow time for women's defence; violation of women's rights; and any criticism of governments or of presidents or monarchs, their families and state of health (for example, in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia ...).

Other Meetings and Activities of the Mediterranean Network of Information and Communication with a Gender Perspective

The Mediterranean Network in Catalonia and Spain is integrated into the Anna Lindh Foundation and supports and promotes artistic projects such as the photographic installations “Vicinities”, the monitoring of the literary contest for youths in Europe and the Mediterranean “A Sea of Words” or the exhibition: “13.25. First there was the word” by the photographer and communicator Daniel Lagarto Fernández, who through photographs of Palestinian and Israeli women shows in words and images these women's pain and desire for a future of peace and justice. The exhibition insists on UN *Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security*: “Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.”

In the 3rd Meeting of Women Journalists and Communicators of the Mediterranean under the slogan “Together we will create a new culture of communication and exchange” held in Marrakech in October 2008, organised by women journalists from Morocco, led by Saida Boudaglia, and with the support of the Enna-

khil Association, directed by Zakia Mrini, the blog *Mediamediterranies* of the Mediterranean Network of Information and Communication with a Gender Perspective was created. This meeting had a marked Moroccan emphasis and set out the conditions for the creation of a Network of Women Journalists in Morocco. Various proposals were aimed at the treatment of migrants from the South to the North of the Mediterranean in the media.

In November 2009 in Bogotá, Colombia, the 3rd International Meeting of RIPVG was held, organised by the Colombian Network and coordinated by Fabiola Calvo, where the role of communication in the conflict and in relation to human rights occupied an important place. Women journalists from the Mediterranean Network of Information and Communication with a Gender Perspective also contributed with presentations.

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In March 2011, at the height of the Arab uprisings, another meeting was held in Rome with lower participation by other Mediterranean countries and focused on freedom of expression.

In Fez, Morocco, in November 2011 the 4th Meeting of the RIPVG was held, organised by the Network of Women Journalists of Morocco with the support of the universities of Fez and Rabat where the news priorities concerning women migrants and the women leaders that emerged after the Arab revolutions were added to the proposals.

Proposals and Recommendations

The distinct meetings draft, revalidate or expand previous proposals and recommendations,

so below is a summary of them from 1995 to 2011, organised in 5 sections coinciding with those of the 2nd Meeting of Women Journalists and Communicators of the Mediterranean.

How to Combat and Change the Routines of Producing News that Strengthens and Reproduces Stereotypes of Women's Rights

Achieving space in the media to introduce the issues that deal with women and those generated by them; preparation of lists of experts; positive discrimination in the profession and promotion; preparation of codes of professional ethics, style books and observatories to assess sexist and fundamentalist contents that attack women's rights; encourage studies/diagnosis; offer training workshops and seminars; incorporation of the gender perspective into all the regulated education processes from compulsory teaching to university; promote a virtual space around issues of civil rights, labour and good government practices with gender perspectives.

How to Enhance Professional Networking

Create networks of journalists; Creation of a website and a list of addresses (completed); preparation of an Internet search engine of women journalists and communicators in the Mediterranean with each one's speciality (pending); access and fostering access of women to ICTs; shared publishing projects; stimulating citizen journalism; encouraging interviews with women experts from the south; and carry out monitoring and promotion of women who participate in politics or in the public administration and defend women's interests.

Invigoration of Network Campaigns

Sharing multidisciplinary information of general interest from each of the countries that make up the Network; conducting campaigns aimed at interdisciplinary communication teams.

Making Pacifist Movements in Defence of Human Rights and Women's Rights Visible

Promotion of campaigns against the reproduction of stereotypes on both shores of the Mediterranean; make groups of women visible in the media, organised by human rights and social rights; report on stories about the lives of women affected by the conflicts, the displaced, refugees, peace activists, personal testimonies, and so on; recover historical memory of women in each country, approaching issues such as reparation for damages, difficulties of returning; promote the 25th November as the day against gender violence in the countries of the Mediterranean region; help women journalists and communicators with the publication of reports on prohibited issues and promote manifestos and support for people at risk; summarise the current legislation on women's rights in different countries, showing the contradictions with their respective constitutions; the countries where this issue was already being worked on were: Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine; promote mutual understanding through cultural associations, foundations and other international organisations; improve the news coverage of women migrants in southern Mediterranean countries, Maghreb women who have migrated towards the southern European countries; disseminate information about residents in Italy, Spain, France, and so on; and establish links with emigrated women; creation of a European Award for the media outlet or journalist that has published the best article or report on the situation of women in the Mediterranean.

Shared Use of Resources and Strategies to Give Immediate Responses of the Network to the Abuses of and Attacks on Freedom of the Press and Freedom of Expression

Monitoring of cases and publication of news alerts; on the Network website and in the

newsletter; preparation of barometer according to cases and countries; publication of statements.

Giving a Voice to Women Journalists and Communicators in the Countries of the Arab Revolutions

Youths and women have certainly been the protagonists of the Arab springs and this is what we have reported from our own news agencies in northern Mediterranean countries: AMECO in Madrid, La Independent in Catalonia or from the newsletter of Pikara magazine in the Basque Country and Women in the City (via the website of Articolo 21) in Italy. But also from Feministikt Perspektivt in Sweden and from the agencies in Latin America. Journalists or communicators and other women protagonists have also expressed their views in their blogs and social networks, in Facebook and twitter. Thus their opinions have been reproduced through the networks of journalists and happily also, at least in part, by the traditional media.

Since February 2011 we have published, among others, the opinions and reflections of women journalists from Morocco: *Jihad Fatchati*, a young journalism student in Rabat and activist of the 20F movement; *Leila Chafai*, from the Maghreb press agency Maghreb Arab Press; Zineb El Razhoui, freelance French-Moroccan journalist; and *Saida Boudaglia*, journalist and professor at the University of Rabat.

From Egypt we have heard: Randa Achwani, journalist on the seminar "el-Ahram Hebdo"; Sihem Bensedrine, writer and journalist; Nawal El Saadawi, writer, journalist and teacher; Amal Rasis, filmmaker; Sholeh Irani, journalist; Leil-Zahra Mortada, communicator; Sanaa Seif (17), student and activist in the Tahrir Square protest camps, works for an independent newspaper she created with a group of youths; Mona Hussein (50), mother of an arrested son and now an activist; Hanan

Sadek, author of a documentary about mother and daughter; and Sahar Talaat, journalist and university professor.

And the Tunisian voices of: Sihem Bensedrine, journalist; Rym Ayadi, young researcher from the Centre for European Policy Studies; *Lina Ben Mhenni*, Tunisian blogger, and worker for Radio Kalima; Naila Jrad, journalist; *Zeyneb Farhat*, director of El Teatro, journalist and theatre organiser; *Selma Baccar*, filmmaker and candidate; *Maya Jribi*, Secretary General of the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP), who headed the Ben Arous governorate list in the Tunisian capital; *Najed Zammouri*, PDP candidate; *Khadija ben Hassine*, Modernist Democratic Pole candidate for the governorate of Manouba; *Souad Abdelrahim*, from Ennahda; and Mouna Abid, university professor.

From Algeria we have the opinions of Wasyla Tamzali and Hamama (Association of Algerian Women). From Syria, that of the professor of Communication at Carlos III University, *Leila Nachawati Rego*. And from Libya we have published the opinions of *Shawg Najem*, anaesthetist at the Central Hospital in Bengasi (Libya).

And, finally, voices of women in the Yemen revolution such as: *Tuakul Karman*, journalist and blogger; *Arwa en Iabari*, designer of niqabs and traditional dresses; and *Kabir al Mahaqri*, mother.

All these women and many others encourage the work of the women journalists and communicators from both shores of the Mediterranean who firmly believe in mutual understanding and the need to incorporate the gender perspective into the media.

This is what the Tunisian Sihem Bensedrine, interviewed by Teresa Carreras (La Independent) said at the start of the revolutions: "If you want to be independent, you must be clandestine. Therefore, I congratulate La Independent, a news agency with a gender perspective, for its project of giving a voice to equality and to the problems that we men and women are suf-

fering today in Tunisia." Or *Sholeh Irani*, from Egypt, interviewed by Feministikt Perspektiv about Mubarak: "He deliberately spoke with the language of the patriarch. And he lost. No one understood him. With his words and his authoritarian gestures Mubarak caused more repudiation." Or Rym Ayadi, a young Tunisian researcher from the Centre for European Policy Studies, interviewed by Elena Ledda: "Although women had a very active role in the Tunisian revolution they are not present in the new government [...] clearly this is not only a Tunisian problem but I think that Tunisia, given its relative formal equality between men and women can be the country that drives a real gender equality throughout the region. The associations of women and civil society have a very important role but there is still a long way to go."

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And this month of December, thanks to some meetings of reflection called by the IEMed and the International Catalan Institute for Peace (ICIP), shortly before writing this article we published words full of doubt about current politics, about whether freedom and women's rights will be respected. They are the words of Mouna Abid (University of Carthage, Tunis); of the Egyptian journalist and university professor, Sahar Talaat; and of the professor from the University of Granada Ewa Strzelecka on the role of women in the Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, respectively.

These are words that urge a more decisive practice of journalism with a gender perspective.