



ONLINE HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS: A THREAT FOR THE SPANISH DEMOCRACY

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*The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens
with the information they need to be free and self-governing*

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Abstract

Attacks and threats directed to journalists are growing in Europe, specially in countries considered safe for media professionals. Internet and social media are making journalists more accessible and, with this, easier to attack them. This occurs in countries where there is a huge polarisation in the political and social spectrums, where journalists are suffering its consequences. Within this environment, women are particularly being targeted with comments and insults that are different from the ones men usually receive –as they have gender and sexual connotations.

This study is focused in analysing the nature and the consequences of online harassment and hate speech against women journalists in Spain, through a qualitative research approach. Using a thematic qualitative text analysis, the research about the kind of comments that five media professionals (Ana Pastor, Elisa Beni, Pepa Bueno, Beatriz Talegón and Mamen Mendizábal) received on Twitter during a week, showed that the messages mentioning them fit into seven categories, with sub-categories: gender, sexual experience, physical appearance, intellectual capacity, mental stability, threats and general insults. All these categories relate to the mechanisms that, historically, have kept women in an inferior status in the society.

Through a case study of one journalist, Cristina Fallarás, we can explore the experience that someone targeted could go through. The incursion of important political figures and different public authorities can boost the level of harassment and hate that a journalist receives, which has terrible psychological effects: humiliation, rage, fear... And a deep feeling of loneliness that is enlarged with the lack of answers by the authorities –police, judiciary, or trade unions.

These feelings lead journalists to silence. And with silence, we mean self-censorship. Most of media professionals targeted with online harassment of a high number of hate speech decide not to report about a specific issue, drop their stories or change the tone of a topic they are covering. This silence affects many processes involving the production and publication of news, which has an ultimate effect on society. As many theorists stated, media play a fundamental role in the way citizens know their reality and act according to it, as well as determining their participation in the public sphere.

This research shows that, in Spain, women journalists are receiving a huge amount of hate and harassment online based on their gender. Its ultimate consequences are psychological, and it also affects their work and their participation in public debates, which at the end represents as problem for the whole Spanish society.

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1. Introduction

Attacks and intimidation against journalists are not a new phenomenon. Nevertheless, the rise of populism, the polarisation of politics and the use of the Internet has boosted hate speech against media professionals, who are the target of the anger and the disaffection of the society. The Annual Report by the partner organisations to the Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists (2020a) compiles data that show that violent attacks against journalists and other media professionals are on the rise in Europe.

The Internet –and especially social media– is becoming the scenario of this violence, which is transformed in harassment and hate. Journalists are the target of online threats of violence, harm and hate speech, with almost complete impunity (*ibid.*), often anonymously by trolls but in some cases openly by public figures, such as politicians. Within this context, women journalists are especially affected and are frequently the focus of personal or sexually explicit attacks online.

In Spain, the recent convulsive years –especially in the political space– has generated tensions that have been reflected on social media. In this polarized context, journalists have become the target of thousands of intimidating messages on Facebook, Twitter or in the comments section of websites (International Press Institute, 2019a). The impact of the hate speech received by women journalists is particularly high, and it results in form of fear, silence, and loss of confidence.

At the same time, this online harassment and hate speech endanger the free flow of information and the democratic exchange of ideas (Council of Europe, 2020a). That means, it jeopardise the work of journalists and therefore their role in any democratic society, such as Spain, by blocking the circulation of information.

This dissertation aims to address and analyse online harassment and hate speech against women journalists in Spain through three different dimensions. First, to study the characteristics of the messages received by women media professionals and how they are related to their gender. Second, to examine the processes that a journalist face once she has been the target of online harassment or hate speech, analysing especially the consequences that this phenomenon cause on her and her work. And third, to interpret and reflect upon the effect of these consequences to the journalism profession and the Spanish society.

1.1. Research question

This dissertation seeks to answer the following question:

Which are the nature and the consequences of online harassment and hate speech against Spanish women journalists?

In order to address it, I will therefore ask:

- What kind of online harassment and hate speech women journalists are facing in Spain?
- How is the individual experience while being the target of online harassment and hate speech?
- Which are its main effects for women?
- How it influences the work of journalists?
- What consequences have this influence for their participation in the public sphere?
- What consequences does it have for the Spanish society?

Once these questions are answered I will be able to analyse the implications that this online harassment and hate speech against journalists has for the women who are suffering it and to reflect upon the consequences that it might have for the society.

1.2. Objectives

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse both the nature and the consequences of online harassment and hate speech against women journalists, specifically in Spain. In order to do it, I will focus the research in three main aspects that will lead me to answer the dissertation's statement that I presented before.

First, I am interested in analysing the essence of these phenomena through examining messages received by women Spanish journalists that have been recognised as targets of online harassment or hate speech –either by themselves or publicly. Therefore, I will investigate the kind of comments mentioning them, I will analyse if there is any pattern and I will examine the role of their gender.

Second, I want to focus on the personal experience of these journalists, analysing the processes that these women experience once they are targeted with online harassment and hate speech through the voice of one of the most harassed journalist in Spain: Cristina Fallarás. And I will study the main consequences for her life and her job, and how her professional circumstances have been affected by it.

Third, this dissertation will analyse these consequences with a generic approach, one more global that seeks to understand why this is a big problem for democracies in

general and specifically for Spain. It affects fundamental rights –such as freedom of expression, freedom of information and freedom of the press–, and I want to reflect upon the consequences of the phenomena.

The main objective of the dissertation is to dig in deeper into the nature and the consequences of online harassment and hate speech against women journalists in Spain. The idea is to bring to the foreground and highlight an issue that has already been explored with quantitative methods and to investigate this phenomenon through a qualitative approach within an academic framework.

1.3. Subject relevance

During the last decade, journalists have experienced a significant increase of violence, threats, and acts of intimidation in Europe (Council of Europe, 2017), from physical attacks to harassment. The number of attacks and threats that took place online has also grown, as well as the ones targeting women journalists.

The International Federation of Journalists (2018) conducted a survey that showed that two out of three women journalists around the world have experienced online harassment at some point of their professional careers, and 38% of them said one of the main consequences was self-censorship. Therefore, online harassment against women journalists is not only affecting the women that are suffering it, but their work, their participation in the public sphere and the well-functioning of the society. This dissertation aims to dig into how this harassment is, how is it conditioning their work and its consequences for the public opinion. When a journalist is threatened, harassed, or attacked, the fundamental right to access information and to participate as active citizens in the public sphere is in danger (Council of Europe, 2017).

This research is focused on women because online harassment and threats directed at women are different from those experienced by men: “they are misogynistic” (Lees Munoz, 2016, p. 27). As AlJazeera reported, “while both men and women face harassment online, many female media professionals have to deal with the kind of hate comments men will never have to stomach, messages about their appearance, gender, and sexuality” (2018). As the attacks on women journalists are personal and intimate, the effect that this harassment has on them is also different.

I will focus the research on Spain because online harassment and hate speech against journalists is present in hostile environments (International Press Institute, 2019a), and Spain has lived in the last decade one of the most convulsive periods since the establishment of democracy in both political and social levels. A deep economic crisis,

political corruption cases and the loss of trust of the Spanish society in its institutions have led to social protests and movements that are, at the same time, polarising the feelings of the people. Within this context, journalists have been the target of the anger and the disaffection of the society. Furthermore, this phenomenon is an unexplored topic in the country, as we will see in the following section.

1.4. Literature review

Online harassment and hate speech against women journalists is an underinvestigated field from the academic point of view. Nevertheless, some organisations have conducted some research about it, presenting data and recommendations, like the Council of Europe (2017), the International Federation of Journalists (2018), the International Press Institute (2019a, 2019b), the International Women's Journalists Foundation (2018) or Reporters Without Borders (2018), among others. All their findings are used during this dissertation, as they provide context for this research.

There are a lot of studies regarding women and journalism, or the hostile environment women journalists face while they are reporting –specially from conflict zones–, as well as online harassment against women in general, without focusing in a specific group.

Related to this subject, one can find some studies focused on specialisations within newsrooms. For example, online harassment against women journalists that report about sports (Antunovic, 2019) or technology (Adams, 2018). There is also some research focused on specific minorities, for example on cyberbullying targeting women journalists of colour (Chen et al, 2019), and some projects similar to mine, but with other profession at the core, like scholars (Veletsianos et al, 2018).

As we can see, this field is relatively new when it comes to academic research. There is a study that is similar to the one I will conduct here, but focused on New Zealand (Graham, 2017), which explores the situation in the country through the voices of several women journalists that have been online harassed and analyses the messages that they have received recently on social media.

My dissertation, then, will conduct a research of a topic that has started to be studied with an academic framework recently worldwide. Up until now, there are no studies of this phenomenon in Spain with an academic perspective, although some associations have published some data and recommendations about it (International Press Institute, 2019a, 2019b) that give me some context.

1.5. Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is structured as follows: the first section provides the introductory basis for the research. This entails subparagraphs with its statement, objectives, the relevance of the subject and the literature that already exists regarding this topic.

The second section provides a description of the methods and the methodology utilised during the analysis of this dissertation. It concerns the study methodology consisting of qualitative research, thematic qualitative text analysis, case study and interviews; the sources of the data and its processing. Further, the paragraph provides a critical reflection regarding the impact of the chosen methodology and its limitations, as well as the strategy that I will use when analysing the data I collected.

The third section concerns theories and perspectives utilised and incorporated in this dissertation. These consist of theories of gender, gender-based violence and public opinion, that will help me understanding the findings from the data.

The forth section provides some context to the dissertation, including a general overview on online harassment against women journalists worldwide, the current socio-political situation in Spain, and some fundamental rights that are related to the topic of this dissertation, as they can also influence the topic of this research.

The fifth section contains the analysis, which is structured in three main parts. First, I will conduct a study about the nature of the phenomenon in Spain. Second, I will analyse it through the experience of one journalist to examine its consequences. And third, I will reflect upon the impact of these consequences for the Spanish society.

The sixth section concerns the conclusion, which will summarise the final outcomes of this dissertation, answer the research question, the main sub-questions and address further analysis possibilities.

2. Methods and methodology

This dissertation will investigate the characteristics and the effects that online harassment and hate speech has on the work of women journalists in Spain and, at the same time, it will reflect upon its repercussion to the Spanish society. In order to do it, I will base the research in a qualitative text analysis of tweets received by Spanish women journalists and a case study from an interview that will provide us with the data that will help us to understand better this phenomenon.

It is worth to mention that our first aim was to conduct more interviews in order to have a better picture of the effects of the subject of this research. Nevertheless, due to its sensitiveness and the current situation, the journalists were not available in the period of time that I have conducted this dissertation.

The following sections will present the tools that I will use throughout our study to answer the research formulation and the sub-questions presented in the first section.

2.1. Ontological and epistemological positions

Before I start with the approaches and methods used in this dissertation, it is important that I state my ontological and epistemological positions, as they are my point of departure. With this, I will determine the way in which I as researcher understand reality, and how I can know it (Punch, 2014).

In terms of my ontological position, it can be identified as constructivism, as I understand realities as subjective, created by individuals and known through socially constructed meanings (Al-Saadi, 2014). Therefore, the social phenomenon and its meanings are produced through social interaction, taking into consideration the freedom of choice of the individuals (Punch, 2014). Following this, an interpretative epistemological perspective seeks to interpret this reality, to discover the underlying meaning of events (Crotty, 1998). In this sense, “knowledge is produced by exploring and understanding the social world of the people being studied” (Al-Saadi, 2014, p. 7), and this social world is approached through the understanding of human behaviour.

Therefore, adopting a constructivist/interpretative paradigm means dedicating one’s research to interpret the reality of a social phenomenon that has been constructed by individuals or groups and their understanding of the reality. Then, this research will use qualitative methods instead of quantitative, as my main goal is to analyse online harassment and hate speech against women journalists from a human perspective.

2.2. Qualitative research

Numbers and figures are not enough to conduct a research about a social phenomenon like the subject of this dissertation. Therefore, qualitative methods are the ones I will use for this study, as I will utilise text as my empirical material. I am interested in a methodology that “starts from the notion of the social construction of realities under study, is interested in the perspectives of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study” (Flick, 2007, p. 2). In this sense, in Denzin and Lincoln’s definition,

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. (2005, p. 3)

Therefore, qualitative research is of specific relevance to research about social relations, the subject of this dissertation, “due to the fact of the pluralization of life worlds” (Flick, 2009, p. 12). That means, in a society that is constantly changing and that is becoming more and more diverse, deductive methods –testing existing theoretical models to find empirical evidence– are not enough to study certain phenomena. Therefore, the use of inductive strategies is needed: “instead of starting from theories and testing them, ‘sensitizing concepts’ are required for approaching the social contexts to be studied” (ibid.).

Consequently, the methods used during a qualitative research, and this dissertation, should be open enough to provide tools in order to understand the social relation or social processes that will be further analysed (Flick, 2007). Some of these methods are thematic qualitative text analysis, case studies or interviews, which will be further explained in the following subparagraphs.

2.3. Case study

For this dissertation, I will conduct a case study focused on one country: Spain. This will be useful for our research because it is a method that involves an in-depth and detailed observation of a subject of study and its context (Yin, 2009).

The ‘case’ in a case study might be an individual, a role, a small group, an organisation, a decision, a policy, a process and so on (Punch, 2014). At the same time, it can be

intrinsic or instrumental, depending on if the researcher pursues to gain a better understanding of a particular subject or if one wants to provide an insight into a particular issue. It can also be “collective/multiple/comparative” when the case study covers more cases (ibid., p. 121). I will focus on a single-case study of a country.

According to Yin (2009), a single-case study can be critical, extreme, or revelatory. For this dissertation, Spain represents a revelatory case study, as online harassment and hate speech against women journalists has not been researched in Spain with the academic framework that this research is presenting. The use of revelatory case studies occurs when a phenomenon “has not been studied before; when an opportunity arises to research something that has been previously inaccessible” (Blaikie, 2009, p. 190). As we have seen in previous sections, this phenomenon is starting to be researched now. The lack of available data and the fact that women began to make their cases public recently, made this topic less accessible for researchers before.

I will analyse the overall nature of online harassment and hate speech against women journalists in Spain, a country that ranked ninth in the European Institute for Gender Equality’s Gender Equality Index (2019), although it has some of the most advanced legislation in Europe. Spain is the 18th European country in the Reporters Without Borders’ World Press Freedom Index (2020), claiming that, compared to other neighbour countries, the irruption of the far-right made its supporters “stirring up hate against journalists on social media and physically harassing them on the ground”.

Within this perspective, one can not say that Spain is an extreme nor unique case. In Europe, there are countries with better and worse working environment for journalists and better and worse conditions for women. That means, I do not pretend to generalise the findings of this dissertation, because every country and region has its own special situation. Nevertheless, I pursue to analyse this topic specifically in Spain and to have a better picture of what is happening in the country in terms of the hostile environment women journalists are facing online.

The procedure that I will use for this analysis include tasks like designing a case study, collecting the study’s data, analysing the data, and presenting the results (Yin, 2009). A case study can use different methods, as its main goal is to “reconstruct and analyse a case from a sociological perspective” (Hamel et al., 1993, p.2).

In this dissertation, I will present another case study within this case, in order to dig into the reality of this phenomenon: the experience of one individual. This special characteristic will be explained further in this section (see ‘2.6. Case-in-case study’).

2.4. Thematic qualitative text analysis

In order to analyse the nature of the harassment and hate speech that Spanish women journalists are facing online, I will analyse the kind of messages they have received recently. I will conduct a thematic qualitative text analysis of Twitter publications where some journalists are mentioned during a specific period of time (see the paragraph [‘2.5. Data’](#) for further information). The purpose of this dissertation it is not to analyse the quantity of harassment or hate these journalists receive, but what characteristics they present. Therefore, conducting a thematic qualitative text analysis of these messages will help me to categorise them and to see if there is any pattern.

In this analysis, I will follow what Udo Kuckartz (2014) defined as “a multi-stage process of categorizing and coding” (p. 6), which means that I will compare constantly the data I am analysing. Following his model of process, the first step I will follow is the one where I highlight or select those tweets I consider offensive for the journalist or where I can denote an insult or a threat. In my next step, I will develop main thematic categories, where I will identify the topics and sub-topics directly using the data I gathered and using framework theories (see [‘3. Theoretical background’](#)). After that, I will start the first coding process, determining which topics are being addressed in each tweet and assigning them to the appropriate category –keeping in mind that one tweet can refer to different topics. I will then proceed to compile all the tweets that belong to the category and I will identify sub-categories inductively based on the data and the theories given, if there are any.

In order to present the results of the study, I will do a category-based analysis of the main categories of my research. In this analysis, “instead of merely presenting the frequencies with which topics and sub-topics are mentioned, the report should present content in a qualitative manner, which can also include assumptions and interpretations on the part of the research team” (ibid. p. 22).

It is important to notice that in this analysis I will only present the findings of the conducted research. Nevertheless, at the end of this dissertation there are several documents attached where I present the tools of our analysis, such as the thematic matrix ([Annex A](#)) where all the tweets are shown by the category assigned.

2.5. Data

In order to analyse the nature and the consequences of the harassment and the hate received by Spanish women journalists, I have had carry on a set of choices that led me to the sources of data that I will present in this paragraph.

First, in order to define the period of time I wanted to analyse, I decided to select the messages received during a week. I have selected a constructed week starting at the beginning of February –the time frame of this dissertation–: Monday February 3, Tuesday February 11, Wednesday February 19, Tuesday February 27, Friday March 6, Saturday March 14 and Sunday March 22. This method allows me to obtain a random sample of information, avoiding distortions of specific informative moments (Teramo, 2006), specially because our analysis is focused on journalists.

Second, I had to choose the online platform where the harassment or the hate speech was taking place, and Twitter was the best option for different reasons. Not only it is one of the most used social media platforms in Spain, but it is the one where you can find more hate among its users (Pérez Colomé, 2018). Almost every journalist has a Twitter profile, as it is fundamental for their job, whereas other social media like Whatsapp, Facebook or Instagram are usually used for private purposes.

And third, the choice of the analysed journalists. There is no database with women who have suffered online harassment or have been targeted with hate speech in Spain. Therefore, I chose five women who made their case public at some point or that have been recognised as targets¹. The sample includes different profiles, with journalists working across different platforms (newspapers, online media, radio, and television), as well as different schedules (such as afternoon or evening programs, or weekend news editions). These are the journalists' profiles of my sample:

- **Ana Pastor (1977):** The woman journalist with more followers on Twitter (2M). Since 2013 she has been the anchor and the director of the weekly TV-program 'El Objetivo' and since 2017 of the weekly documentary '¿Dónde estabas entonces?', both in La Sexta. In 2018, she founded Newtral, an online media outlet specialised in fact-checking. Previously, she had collaborated with Cadena SER, RTVE and CNN en Español. She has been working as a journalist for over 20 years.
- **Elisa Beni (1965):** Writer and journalist, regular contributor at Onda Cero Radio and various television programs at Cuatro, La Sexta, Antena 3, Telecinco and Telemadrid. She also contributes to some online media (Eldiario.es, El Nacional...). She has worked at La Voz de Almería, La Razón, Época magazine, she was editor-in-chief of Diario16 and has been the director of radio stations of Cadena SER. She became the youngest newspaper director in Spain by taking over El Faro de Ceuta with 23 years old. She has been working as a journalist for almost 40 years.

¹ There are journalists that, once I contacted them, they did not recognise themselves as victim of online harassment, like Elisa Beni. Nevertheless, as we will see in the analysis, she has been the target of hate speech, receiving a high number of attacks and threats.

- **Pepa Bueno (1964):** Director and anchor of the evening radio-program Hora 25, on Cadena SER, the most listened radio-program in its time slot. She has been almost her entire professional career working in the public broadcasting service RTVE, including its morning show (2004-2009) and the news as editor (2009-2012). She started working in Cadena SER as the director and anchor of Hoy por Hoy (2012-2019), the most listened radio show in Spain. She has collaborated in Cuatro, El País or El Periódico. She has been working as a journalist for 30 years.
- **Beatriz Talegón (1983):** Opinion director in Diario16 and publishes articles for El Plural, Okdiario and Diario16. She also collaborated in several RTVE, Cuatro and La Sexta TV-programs. She participates as a guest journalist at the Catalan public broadcasting TV3. She has been politically active when defending the Catalan independence protests. She has been working as a journalist for almost 10 years.
- **Mamen Mendizábal (1976):** Since 2012, she is the director and anchor of the afternoon TV-program 'Más vale tarde', in La Sexta. Previously, she has been working in some of the most listened radio-programs in Cadena SER, as well as some TV-programs in RTVE and anchoring news shows in La Sexta. She has been the Vice President of the trade union FAPE (Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España) too. She has been working as a journalist for 20 years.

Apart from the data collected for the thematic qualitative text analysis, this dissertation will also analyse the experience of an individual. As I stated before, this is the case within a case study, focused on one journalist: Cristina Fallarás. To do it, I will use two main sources of data. The first one will be tweets received by the journalist, like in the first part of the analysis, during the same week (Monday February 3, Tuesday February 11, Wednesday February 19, Tuesday February 27, Friday March 6, Saturday March 14 and Sunday March 22). The second source of data is one-hour interview conducted to the journalist herself (see '[2.7. Interview](#)').

- **Cristina Fallarás (1968):** Journalist and writer. She started in the eighties, creating a free neighbourhood newspaper in Barcelona, the first long-term free newspaper in Spain. She was also a scriptwriter for Cadena SER. In 1998 she was hired as head of culture for El Mundo de Catalunya and later was appointed editor-in-chief of that newspaper. In 2000 she moved to Madrid to do interviews and political opinion for El Mundo. In 2002 she returned to Barcelona to do the morning show of RNE4, then in 2005 she founded the Grupo Planeta newspaper ADN. In 2008, she was fired while she was pregnant, and she started publishing some books, founding the publishing company Sigue Leyendo –which was one of the first adventures of digital books in Spain–. In 2014 she was evicted, with two children. Then, she wrote a column in El Mundo called 'My eviction is coming', being the first person with a

solid professional career to find herself in that situation and recognising it. From there, she began to collaborate on TV-programs as a political analyst (La Sexta, Cuatro, Telecinco, Antena3, Euskal Irrati Telebista, TV3, Telemadrid...). She was the director of Diario16 and worked in various online publications (LaMarea, Context, Eldiario.es, and others). Furthermore, she created the hashtag #Cuéntalo (the #MeToo for Spanish speakers), which was revolutionary: in the first days, more than three million women from 16 different countries joined the movement. She continues as a political analyst in Telecinco, Cuatro, TV3, Telemadrid and Euskal Irrati Telebista, in addition to regularly publishing a column in Público.

2.6. Case-in-case study

In order to understand better the process of harassment and hate speech against journalists in Spain I will do a case study about the experience of a woman who is considered to be one of the media professionals who is suffering it the most: Cristina Fallarás. It will help us to understand the processes that a harassed journalist experiences, from the psychological perspective to the way it affects her job. Analysing the case itself and its context will give us a broad picture of the phenomenon studied.

As I stated before, I will have a case within a case: a country (Spain) and a specific story within this country (Cristina Fallarás). This research design implies that I divide a larger phenomenon of interest into a smaller meaningful unit that will help me to analyse deeply and thoroughly the phenomenon (Mills et al., 2012).

Digging into Cristina Fallarás' case, exploring her experiences and analysing the consequences of the phenomenon I will know all possible dimensions of online harassment and hate speech against women journalists in Spain, as I will deeply study one of the toughest cases in the country. Following Robert Yin's (2009) classification of types of single-case studies, if Spain was a revelatory case study because of the unexplored characteristic of the phenomenon, our analysis about Cristina Fallarás' experience is an extreme case study. This approach is used when the purpose of the researchers is to try to highlight an unusual variation in the phenomenon, rather than trying to generalise or finding an average (Mills et al., 2010). Therefore, analysing Cristina Fallarás' case I will examine one of the worst possible case scenarios of the phenomenon in Spain, which will give us a picture of what a severe case looks like.

I will conduct this case-in-case study through two different methods: I will use a thematic text analysis of the messages the journalist receives, and I will conduct an interview to get information from a different perspective.

2.7. Interview

Qualitative interviews are one of the traditional methods to conduct a case study and it is the one I will use for this dissertation. Interviewing a woman that is experiencing online harassment is the best method to understand the reality that journalists in her situation could be facing, as it is an extreme case study. As DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) detailed, “the purpose of the qualitative research interview is to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees” (p. 314).

The interview is used to get to know the interviewee's story better. The ways on getting it are diverse depending on the research formulation, from testing hypotheses using structured formats to generating these hypotheses through the exploration of these stories and realities. This type of research “generally requires some form of qualitative interviewing which encourages the interviewee to share rich descriptions of phenomena while leaving the interpretation or analysis to the investigators” (ibid.).

Based on this, interviews can be categorised as structured, semi-structured and unstructured, depending on how open the questionnaire is (Flick, 2009). This dissertation will use the semi-structured approach to the interview, as it will be focused around “a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). This kind of interviews are the ones most used in qualitative research.

For this research one must consider different constraints. The main one is the sensitiveness of the topic, as it is connected to the most intimate essence of a person and the deepest pain suffered by the interviewee. To overcome this, before starting the questionnaire I had a short chat –off the record– with the interviewee to set an atmosphere of trust and safe space that allowed her to speak more openly. The fact that Cristina Fallarás already made her case public also helped both in the preparation of the questions and her attitude during the interview. The questionnaire was made in a form that follows what would be the development of a normal conversation, which could benefit the dialogue with the interviewee. Although the talk took place through the phone, I managed to get the interviewee speak openly for one hour.

In this sense, an individual semi-structured in-depth interview will allow me to explore deeply personal and social dimensions of the story of the interviewee. What I pursue with this dissertation is to connect an individual's experience to what other women are facing and to understand the processes the journalist is living when it comes to feelings and how it is affecting her work.

2.8. Critical reflection

While reading this dissertation, one must be aware of the potential limitations of my research. One of the main conditioning factors of this study is the sample used for the thematic qualitative text analysis. Regarding the profile of the women I am analysing, I am relying in journalists who already made their case public or someone brought their case to the foreground, which means that there is a huge number of media professionals that remain silent and that might be or not represented by the outcome of this research. At the same time, most of the journalists have worked (or are working) in media outlets that are considered to have a left-wing tendency or bias. This is, because most of the journalists who have already explained their experiences are part of this current of thought. Moreover, these journalists have a significant visibility, which means that they are more exposed to the hatred online. Plus, all of them are working on TV –or have been working on TV–, which also makes them more visible. This also means that the findings of this dissertation would be affected by this aspect.

Furthermore, I am analysing just seven specific days, which means there are a lot of messages received by the journalists on other days that are not part of this research. To categorise and compare them, I considered important to keep the same strategy.

Additionally, I chose Twitter as the platform to analyse, which means that there are other messages received by the journalists in other sites (like Facebook, Instagram or media outlets' websites) that are not being taken into account. As I stated, the level of hate in other social media channels is lower compared to Twitter, but it does not mean that it does not exist. Therefore, one can not generalise these findings on Twitter nor it is my intention. I pursue to analyse how harassment against journalists becomes a danger and its mechanisms, instead of quantifying data.

One must also be aware that the interview conducted for the case study of this dissertation was done through a phone call. On one hand, this made it easier to be able to do the interview². On the other hand, the fact of not interviewing the journalist face to face limited our interaction and the possibility to get the full feelings surrounding the conversation. As I stated before, my intention was to make more interviews to other women who have experienced the subject of our study, but I could not do them due to the current situation and the sensitiveness of the topic in question.

All these limitations imply that this research is not as thorough as it would have been with more time to develop it and with another conditions. That is why I also see an opportunity to further develop this research, making it more exhaustive.

² Due to the COVID-19 crisis, mobility restrictions in Spain were severe.

2.9. Strategy of analysis

This research focuses on both the nature of the online harassment and hate speech that women journalists are experiencing in Spain and the consequences that it might have to their work and, consequently, to any democracy. Therefore, I will use theories related to gender and gender-based violence that will provide us with a framework in order to study the main patterns I might find in the analysis and why the gender of the journalists is interrelated with the messages they might receive. I will use these theories to help me identifying categories and implications of the harassment and hate speech.

At this point, the collection of the data and its analysis through the theories take place simultaneously. It first begins with an inductive exploration and analysis of the phenomenon, studying the cases to extrapolate patterns that will lead to a wide conceptualisation of the phenomenon (Flick, 2014). Thus, through the data collected from the thematic qualitative text analysis, I will look into the relationship between concepts –or set of concepts– that will give us a better idea on how it is the nature of the phenomena that I am studying. Therefore, I will analyse our data by identifying different categories and connecting them, comparing them constantly between each other and with additional data (Urquhart, 2013).

To analyse the experience of a journalist, I will conduct an interview to Cristina Fallarás, as I stated before. I will use her own words to connect them to the theories explained in the following section and to the findings of the thematic qualitative text analysis. I will identify the main topics and statements and link them to the general conception of the phenomenon and all the notions that surround it –such as gender-based violence.

Additionally, as I am also concerned with the consequences of those affectations for the work of the journalists, I require the use of theories related to public opinion and public sphere. In this case, I will analyse the role and the influence of the media in the different stages of the creation of public opinion, as well as the processes journalists experience when they work and the consequences of a silence. I will identify common grounds between the personal experience of the journalists with the process of the production of news and the implication of altering this procedure.

3. Theoretical background

This paragraph presents theories that will be utilised in carrying out the analysis and provides a framework through which I will approach the subject of this dissertation. As formerly stated, these theories will build and provide broadening of understanding of the phenomenon that I am researching about. They present a tool for analysis to uncover the relationship between journalism, gender, and public opinion.

I will use three different perspectives to understand the phenomena of online harassment and hate speech against women journalists. First, gender theory will give me the framework to analyse the perpetuation of the inferior status of women in the society through the messages received by media professionals that I will study. Second, I will approach the mechanisms that maintains this system working from a gender-based violence perspective. And third, I will have a look at how public opinion works and the ultimate consequences when a small part of the gears is disrupted.

3.1. Gender theory

The world we are living in is profoundly structured by sex and gender -our language, relationships, social institutions... (Monro, 2005). It is essential to understand why this differentiation exists and the consequences for the society. The sex and gender dividing has a lot of implications related to identity, rights, freedoms, and more.

According to the Encyclopaedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research, "gender theory is the study of what is understood as masculine and/or feminine and/or queer behaviour in any given context, community, society, or field of study" (Jule, 2014). On the contrary, according to the pure definition, "the term sex refers to categories of the biologically observable human body, female and male or intersex, while the term gender refers to the categories of social expectations, roles, and behaviours, feminine and masculine" (ibid.).

This dualistic gender system that operates in most of our contemporary societies implies that there is a clear demarcation between what is considered masculine and what is considered feminine, and these boundaries are defined "temperamentally, physically, sexually, and behaviourally", among other factors (Schiffman et al., 2007, p. XII). At this point it is interesting to remember Simone de Beauvoir's famous quote in *The second sex*, "one is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (2011, p. 330), when she was referring to the society and culture as the ones who build "this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine" (ibid.). Nowadays,

gender diversity is challenging this binary system (Monro, 2005), as intersectionality is influencing its perception specially in Western societies.

Going back to Simone de Beauvoir, in 1949 she denounced that “not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity” (2011, p. 23). And in this archetype of women, who must be and behave in a certain way, one can see the relationship between both genders as not symmetrical. In fact, historically, “humanity [have been] male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being” (ibid., p. 26).

Therefore, women have always experienced –and are still experiencing today– a feeling of inferiority to men, and this has its roots in the relation of domination that perpetuates itself in cultures and can be perceived as acceptable and even natural (Bourdieu, 2001). This masculine domination, as Bourdieu defended, is based on the division between the active male and the passive female, which at the same time creates “the male desire as the desire for possession, eroticised domination” (2001, p. 21). This means, these gender roles are perpetuated through the diminishment of women by acknowledging them only through their connection with nature, their sexual experience, and the reduction of their role as “trophy wives” –someone who “is to be seen and not heard [...], someone who lacks agency and personal power”, above all (Alameen-Shavers, 2018, p. 648), whose intelligence is not taking into consideration when referring to her and with a limited participation in the social life.

In this dissertation I will further examine how these gender division and masculine domination that de Beauvoir and Bourdieu were referring to are interrelated with the phenomenon that I am studying. At the same time, I will analyse how these mechanisms are used in order to perpetuate this power relations and why the gender of the journalists is important when carrying out this research.

3.2. Gender-based violence

Personal and systematic violence against women is common around the world. In Western countries, many celebrities and public figures have recognised they had been assaulted, harassed, or sexually abused (Teays, 2019). This violence includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic maltreatment and it is often known as ‘gender-based’ violence because “it evolves in part from women's subordinate status in society” (Heise & Ellsberg, 1999, p. 1) that de Beauvoir was referring to.

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence labelled 'violence against women' as

"a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life [...] 'Gender-based violence against women' shall mean violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately" (Article 3, 2011)

In this sense, one can say that gender-based violence is any interpersonal, systematic, or politically violence perpetrated against people due to their gender identity or sexual orientation (Schiffmant et al, 2007). This is a consequence of the gender systems of power that I described before, where families, labour force and other organisations' structures are based on a male-dominated social framework (Bourdieu, 2001).

All these forms of violence have one thing in common: the perpetrators are usually male, acting alone or in group, "for whom violence and violation are rational solutions to perceived problems" (ibid., p. XI). The force is used to maintain the privilege of men in patriarchal structures and contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality in all spheres of the society, seeing women as secondary citizens. This has been a reality throughout the history, where "rape has been a tool of warriors for centuries and working women experienced men's coercive sexual behaviours long before the term sexual harassment was coined" (ibid., p. XI).

Although most of this violence is physical, sexual, psychological or economic, the rise of the Internet and the use of social media have established new forms of abuse, like cyberstalking, revenge porn, and online privacy violations (Teays, 2019). According to Schiffman et al (2007), there are two categories of gender-based violence that can take place online. The first one is gender harassment, which involves verbal and visual messages that insult people because of their gender, or the use other materials in order to provoke emotional harm –like posting pornographic pictures, telling chauvinistic jokes, making gender-related degrading remarks... The second category is unwanted sexual attention, which refers to behaviours that explicitly communicate sexual desires toward another individual –such as making verbal statements that explicitly or implicitly propose or insinuate sexual activities.

Online attacks and threats are therefore considered "a major obstacle to the free, legitimate, functional, and joyful use of the Net, as these acts drive away Net users as well as cause significant emotional harm and actual damage to those who remain users" (Schiffmant et al, 2007, p. 181).

3.3. Public Opinion

Public opinion is an essential element in today's interconnected society. Many authors have tried to define it throughout history, but there is still no definition accepted by all. Denis McQuail (2010) sees 'opinion' as "a statement of preference for one side of an argument or choice presented" (p. 515). Jürgen Habermas (1964) added that "the expression 'public opinion' refers to the tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally –and, in periodic elections, formally as well– practices vis-à-vis the ruling structure organized in the form of a state" (p. 49).

The innate need of individuals to understand their surroundings leads them to share those views, ideas, and opinions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), and that is what makes an opinion 'public'. In Denis McQuail's words (2010), "opinions [...] can be aggregated to form something called 'public opinion', which is usually taken to mean the predominant learning, or sum of views, of populations as a whole" (p. 515). Habermas (1991) added that we talk about 'public opinion' when we refer to the views, value judgments or personal trends of the public as a whole or of "any of its parts" (p. 142).

Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman (1988) described it as a place of debate in which relevant issues of the society are discussed and where the information citizens need in order to participate in the public life is shared. Therefore, it is important that this space is open as to participation and information flows.

It could be said that public opinion is a critical judgment on issues of general interest by many people. But for these shared opinions to exist, there must be information on the issues they are dealing with and a free space to share ideas must exist.

3.3.1. Public Sphere

The place where public opinion is generated and that must be open to all citizens is what Jürgen Habermas first called 'public sphere'. In there, "citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion –that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions– about matters of general interest" (Habermas, 1964, p. 49).

Historically, from the first modern constitutions, fundamental rights guaranteed "the society as a sphere of private autonomy and the restriction of public authority to a few functions" (ibid., p. 52). Afterwards, constitutions assured, between both spheres, the right private individuals to assemble in public body to opine about the ruling power. That space is what we call now 'public sphere', according to Habermas.

Therefore, the public sphere is the space that mediates between the state and the society, in which the citizens organise themselves and the public opinion is created. Here, the principle of public information is also generated, made public through media, and that “has made possible the democratic control of state activities” (ibid., p. 50).

3.3.2. How Public Opinion is created and the importance of the media

Walter Lippmann is one of the first great theorists about public opinion. He stressed that there are two types of realities: the one we know directly and the one we know indirectly. The first is real, because it is the person itself who experiences it; but the last one is constructed from “mental images” that are created when someone explains an event to you (2004, p. 81). Regardless of whether we consider these images to be true or not, we all act as if they were real. We must notice, then,

“the insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To that pseudo-environment his behaviour is a response. But because it is behaviour, the consequences, if they are acts, operate not in the pseudo-environment where the behaviour is stimulated, but in the real environment where action eventuates” (p. 147).

This pseudo-environment, created in our mind, is the representation of reality as we believe it is, a mix between direct and indirect experiences, what we know first-hand and what others tell us is happening. And that pseudo-reality is the only one that we perceive, so the way in which we receive the information we use to create those mental images is fundamental for the development of our future actions. Public opinion is caused precisely by those images that trigger reactions from individuals or groups of people. After all, as Lippmann stressed, our personal opinions are the reconstruction of what others have narrated and we have imagined.

The biggest influencer in the process of creating mental images is the media, as

“Universally it is admitted that the press is the chief means of contact with the unseen environment. And practically everywhere it is assumed that the press should do spontaneously for us what primitive democracy imagined each of us could do spontaneously for himself, that every day and twice a day it will present us with a true picture of all the outer world in which we are interested.” (ibid., p. 261)

These inputs have not only gone through the filter of the individual who receives them, but there has been someone before that has already selected that information, such as the gatekeeping process –in which the information is filtered for its publication– and the framing process –the perspective from which the topic is explained (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Therefore, the experience regarding that event will never be direct.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1984) defined one of the functions of the media as that of “articulation” (p. 226): they convey words and ideas that people can use to defend a point of view, so they repeat stereotypes and symbols that, if not published, they would be forgotten. The media contribute to the development of the social debate about events that have a public interest and, in turn, guide the public in their opinions.

3.3.3. Self-censorship and the spiral of silence theory

Self-censorship is a common practice among the journalists who suffer from an unwarranted interference (Council of Europe, 2017). It can be defined as the “control of what you say or do in order to avoid annoying or offending others, but without being told officially that such control is necessary” (‘Self-censorship’, n.d.). Nevertheless, the intention of this silence can also aim self-protection, as talking about a specific topic could not only harm the ones affected but could suppose a threat for the person itself.

The silence of one person can lead to the silence of more people. This is what Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann defended in her Spiral of Silence Theory, which stipulates that individuals are afraid of isolation. Her theory is based on what Alexis de Tocqueville already predicted in 1835: the general opinion exerts a great influence on each individual, “directs and oppresses it”. The opinion that has more support is perpetuated quickly “because nobody attacks it” and those who would have rejected it end up accepting it to “not engage in a dangerous and useless struggle” (1980, pp. 222-223). If the opinion of the majority is shared, a state of relative happiness is reached, but if you do not have that point of view, the best option is to remain silent, since in this way the individual continues to be tolerated by others (Noelle- Neumann, 1984). Silence, then, is synonymous with conformity.

This has serious consequences for the public opinion, as we will examine further in the dissertation (see ‘5.3. The danger of journalists’ self-censorship’ for more information). Chomsky & Herman (1988) already assured that silence weakens what Jürgen Habermas defined as ‘public sphere’, “the array of places and forums in which matters important to a democratic community are debated and information relevant to intelligent citizen participation is provided” (p. XVIII).

Therefore, silencing one’s speech or opinion as a self-protection mechanism has major consequences not just for oneself, but for the public opinion and the participation of other people in the public sphere. In the analysis of this dissertation we will also study the implications of this silence in Spain.

4. Context

In order to understand better the subject of this research, one needs to keep in mind few aspects that influence the phenomenon that I am studying in this dissertation and that will help me to comprehend the nature of my analysis. In this case, it is important to look into the overall idea of online harassment against women journalists and how it is developing around the world, the Spanish reality that could influence it and the fundamental rights that are interrelated to it.

4.1. Online harassment and hate speech against women journalists

During the last years there has been a substantial increase of violence against journalists in Europe, especially in countries considered safe for media professionals, such as France, Germany or Spain. This violence is taking different forms, “from physical attacks to intimidation and harassment, targeted surveillance and cyberbullying” (Council of Europe, 2017, p. 9). This is particularly worrying because when a journalist is the target of any kind attack or threat, the implications for the community are devastating, as we will analyse further.

If in traditional media journalists have always had to defend their work, nowadays with social media these journalists are more approachable and, in consequence, online harassment is almost a norm. Within this context, women journalists are particularly a target: in a survey conducted by the International Women’s Media Foundation (2018), nearly two-thirds of the participants said that they had experienced “acts of intimidation, threats and abuse in relation to their work” and that 25% of those threats took place online (p. 7). These attacks received by men and women have a different nature. While men journalists are more likely to be threatened with force or physical assault, women are more likely to experience sexual harassment or violence (Council of Europe, 2017).

A report published by Reporters Without Borders (2018) shows that women journalists are among the main targets of cyberbullying. When it comes to the analysis of tweets, ‘journalism’ was one of the categories where women were more insulted than men. “Slut”, “rape” and “whore” were the words more used, as well as the reception of “explicit photos, questionable jokes, misogynistic comments, the use of nicknames, and doctored photos” (p. 7). This is what Project deSHAME defined as ‘online sexual harassment’: “unwanted sexual conduct on any digital platform and it is recognised as a form of sexual violence” (2017, p. 13). It embraces behaviours that use digital content in any form (text, images, videos...) in any platform (public and private).

As stated, the International Federation of Journalists (2018) conducted survey where 66% of women journalists from all over the world recognised that they have experienced online sexual harassment. In this sense, the International Press Institute (2019b) categorised this online harassment in five different types. The first one is belittlement, which are messages that aim to discredit and underestimate the journalistic work of women just because they are women. The second one is sexist insults, comments that aim to humiliate them referring to their physical appearance instead of their work. The third one is explicit and veiled threats of sexual violence or death, which are intimidating messages that express an open desire for the death or physical violence against the journalist. The fourth one is threats and insults to family and relatives and the fifth and last one is campaigns to discredit journalists professionally, which are attacks that aim to question what the journalist has published by referring to her intellectual capacity or by alluding to her partisan interests.

At this point, I want to highlight three aspects that a wide range of studies have shown as common. First, that some women journalists recognise that one of the most difficult aspects of experiencing online sexual harassment is that the perpetrators are often unknown (International Women's Media Foundation, 2018). Second, just half of the victims report the attacks to their media management, a union or the police, which is alarming because it means that they are dealing with the situation by themselves, assuming these situations as normal (International Federation of Journalists, 2018). And third, there is a link between the subject that journalists cover and the level of hate they receive (International Press Institute, 2019a). The coverage of certain sensitive and controversial topics "carries a high possibility of harassment" (ibid., p. 6).

In this dissertation I will further discuss the nature of these attacks received by Spanish journalists and their effects to the personal and professional lives of these women through different approaches.

4.2. Spanish socio-political context

In order to understand the online harassment and hate speech against women journalists it is also important to be aware of the context of the country, as it influences the subject of our research³. Spain is a relatively new democracy, achieved when Franco died on 1975 after a long dictatorship that denied any freedoms to its citizens. During the Transition time, the legislative framework of today's Spain was born, with

³ This dissertation has been written during the expansion of the COVID-19 crisis, which means that the context reflected in this subparagraph does not include its economic, political and social consequences.

the establishment of the proclamation of the 1978 Constitution that granted fundamental rights, like freedom of expression. Its territorial organisation is decentralised, that is, autonomous communities, provinces and municipalities have their own political competences (Doe, 2020). Spain is also a multi-lingual country, where Spanish, Catalan, Basque and Galician are the languages spoken.

The 21st century has been full of ups and downs for the Spanish society. It has suffered a deep economic crisis –starting in 2008– from which it has started to recover recently, but that has had devastating consequences for the society (Cervera, 2014): an unemployment rate that reached 26% in 2012, an extremely high youth unemployment rate (30%) (Expansión, 2020) and economical cuts in its wealth-fare system –specially in healthcare and the educational systems. Furthermore, many corruption cases (Pérez Colomé & Llaneras, 2018) has prompted discontent and loss of confidence of the Spanish society in its institutions.

These economic and political turmoil boosted some of the most important social movements of the decade in Spain, from the 15M –‘indignados’– protests in 2011 (Sampedro & Lobera, 2014) to the most recent feminist demonstrations and strikes. At the same time, the Catalan independence movement has been growing since 2010 and it is currently being the cause of most of the divisions in the country.

Spain is a polarised country, with a rising anger and confrontation between right-wing and left-wing political parties, between those in favour or against the independence of Catalonia, between those who demand gender equality and the ones who deny it... And the rise of the far-right political party Vox is both the consequence and the cause of these clashes (Ull Barbat, 2020). A confronted society turns journalists into a target of attacks and threats, transforming their working conditions into a hostile environment.

4.3. Fundamental Rights

There are fundamental rights linked directly to the subject of this study. I will focus on the rights to freedom of expression, information, and press, all of them interrelated and affected by online harassment and hate speech.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on 1948, compiles some of these fundamental rights in its Article 19: “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (UN General

Assembly, 1948). At the same time, a more recent text, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012), stipulates:

- “1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.
2. The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.”

Based on the above definition, everyone has the right to communicate one's opinions and ideas and share information in whatever form. It is forbidden, then, any interference from political powers or other people in society, in form of censorship or in any shape. That means, not only citizens have the right to express their opinion freely, but they also have the right to receive information and other people's opinions.

Understanding freedom of information as an extension of freedom of expression –or speech– (Puddephatt, 2005), we must say that this last fundamental right is essential for a society to be democratic, as it enables the free exchange of ideas, opinions and information. Therefore, it allows citizens to form their own opinions on issues of public interest (Council of Europe, 2020b).

The article 20 of the Spanish Constitution (1978) recognises the protection

- “a) To freely express and disseminate thoughts, ideas and opinions by word, writing or any other means of reproduction.
- b) To the production and literary, artistic, scientific and technical creation.
- c) To academic freedom.
- d) To freely communicate or receive truthful information by any means of dissemination. The law will regulate the right to conscience clause and professional secrecy in the exercise of these freedoms” (Constitución Española, 1978)

As written in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, these freedoms imply the freedom of the press. The organisation Freedom House stated in a recent report that “a free and independent media sector that can keep the population informed and hold leaders to account is as crucial for a strong and sustainable democracy as free and fair elections” (2019). Without media freedom, then, citizens will not be able to make decisions freely, as these actions will not be informed.

One of the most famous quotes for every journalist is: “The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). Media freedom is important not just because it is a way to guarantee freedom of expression and information, but because without the information, citizens will not be completely free to decide their own actions.

5. Analysis

As formerly stated, this analysis will have three different parts. In the first one, I will study the nature of online harassment and hate speech received by women Spanish journalists, analysing tweets directed to five different women during a week. The second part of this section is dedicated to the analysis of a case study, the story of Cristina Fallarás through an analysis of the messages she receives, and her experience explained by herself. And the third and last part, it is dedicated to the consequences that this phenomenon is having for the Spanish society through an analysis based on personal experiences and existing data published in several studies.

5.1. A study of the characteristics of online harassment and hate speech against women journalists in Spain

For this dissertation, I have conducted a research about the nature of the comments women journalists are receiving in Spain on Twitter. As stated, we have analysed the tweets received by five journalists (Ana Pastor, Elisa Beni, Pepa Bueno, Beatriz Talegón and Mamen Mendizábal) during a constructed week (Monday February 3, Tuesday February 11, Wednesday February 19, Tuesday February 27, Friday March 6, Saturday March 14 and Sunday March 22) to find patterns and commonalities among them. I have carried out a thematic qualitative text analysis from these tweets, identifying different categories and sub-categories according to the patterns I had found. All the tweets and their categories are available in [Annex A](#).

I have classified the insults and threats in seven main categories: attacks based directly on their gender, their sexual experience, their physical appearance, their intellectual capacity, their mental stability, threats, and general insults.

Gender

The first category of attacks received by the Spanish journalists is related to their gender, with two sub-categories: motherhood and marriage, both historical symbols of the devaluation of women relative to men (Ortner, 1972). The first sub-category relates to the experience of motherhood and pregnancy through attacks to the journalists with messages like “she doesn’t want to become pregnant or there is no one who dares to impregnate her”, or “are you going to breastfeed your children?”. In this sense, gender theorists argue that women's physiological and biological characteristics have

historically limited their social situation (Ortner, 1972) and that changing this traditional role could be seen as a threat for some men (Bourdieu, 2001). That is, since women are linked to the idea of 'nature' and men to the concept of 'culture', "it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if woman is a part of nature, then culture would find it 'natural' to subordinate, not to say oppress, her" (Ortner, 1972, p. 12). It is worth to mention too that there are messages that referred to menstruation as an aspect that influences a woman's behaviour.

The second sub-category, the one related to the marriage, was especially present in the messages received by Ana Pastor, as her husband is also TV anchor in the same TV channel. In some of these tweets one can read "anchored by the wife of [...]", "ask your husband", or "ask Ana Pastor if it [a comment of her husband] disgusts her", among others. This is related to the concept Simone de Beauvoir developed in *The second sex* (2011) 'the other', where she explains that the subordinate role of women is always defined by men and, specifically, by a woman's male partner –the husband.

Sexual experience

The second main category I have identified is one with attacks related to the sexual experience of the journalists. Within this category, the most common messages are connected to a Spanish concept of doing a 'blowjob' when one is not critical enough with the government. Thus, we find comments like "wipe the corner of your lips, we can see [Pedro] Sánchez's cum", "blowjobs at ease", "a system's sucker" or "worn knee pads", among others. In this study I also found some direct mentions to sexual behaviours, with tweets including "damn bitch", "frigid" or "it turns you on". There were few mentions to the relationship between the journalists and their husbands, specially directed to Ana Pastor –for example, "she is not getting what she needs" –, as well as messages with the journalist as an object of sexual desire.

These examples can be clearly identified as sexual objectification, an approach that defends that women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use. In this sense, sexual objectification "occurs when a woman's body or body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical" (Szymanski et al., 2011, p. 8). In the tweets we have analysed, the journalists' work is reduced to and judge according to the perpetrators' idea of the sexual life of these women, instead of the value of their profession. Some of the effects of the sexual objectification are related to depression, harmful effects in the women's job and eating disorders (Weiss, 2017), among others.

Physical appearance

In the third category I have identified I have spotted different sub-categories according to the different aspects that could be considered while referring to the physical appearance of someone: the attractiveness, the weight, the age and others. Within the first one, the attractiveness, I found comments calling the women “ugly”, specially comparing them to other public figures or celebrities. There are also a lot of messages related to their weight, calling them “fat” directly or indirectly through other comments –for instance when Mamen Mendizábal tweeted a picture of chocolates and she received messages saying “you already had enough” or “the big thing must be your panties now”. The third sub-category is related to their age, comments that have been only directed to the journalists that are more than 50 (Pepa Bueno and Elisa Beni), arguing that their age is affecting the way they work –like “she is senile” or “you are too old to say this nonsense”. The rest of the messages refer to specific aspects of their physical appearance –such as the way the talk– or in general, with tweets qualifying them as “disgusting” or asking them if “at some point in your life were you a man?”.

The sexual objectification of women brought up before is tightly connected with the feminine beauty ideal that prevails in Western societies. Physical and biological differences between men and women have shaped the images of the ideal male and female, but the women’s ability to reproduce has transformed the way they are perceived (Thesander, 1997). This is why the female body has always been regarded as ‘nature’ and, “therefore, associated with insecurity and mysticism” (ibid., p. 7), an object of social control, whereas the male body was associated with “substance and spirit –culture and order– and as an instrument of control” (ibid.). As de Beauvoir (2011) pointed out, femininity does not depend on biology, but it is a product of culture, which means that one must fit in social demands that are “discriminatory and restrictive” that help “to cast women in the role of aesthetic objects” (Thesander, 1997, p. 8). In our current times, a slim, beautiful, young body is “an object of admiration” (ibid., p. 32), an ideal that dominates in the media, the culture, and the society.

Intellectual capacity

The fourth category identified in this research is related to the intellectual capacity of the journalists, and it is one of the most common topics found in the analysis. Here, there are two sub-categories, one that refers to the insults to the intelligence of the women and the other one concerned with the tone of the messages. In the first one, one can find a wide range of tweets calling the journalists “ignorant”, “dumb”, “irrational”, “mentally retarded” and some of them even invite them to watch ‘Sesame

Street', among many other comments. One can also notice a huge number of messages that were written in a special tone, which I decided to label them to a second sub-category related to paternal tone. That is, tweets referring to the women as "stupid", but in a way that highlights a status of inferiority and the need to teach the journalists how to do their jobs, like "they didn't teach you as a little girl that you have to let others talk" or "I wanted to advise you to speak more quietly". One of the ways in doing so is in calling them by their name through a diminutive, and the most common ones were directed to Ana Pastor, calling her "Anita". Other qualifications include "dear", "pretty", and more, a way of perpetrating this feeling of inferiority.

The denigration of women also includes making them feel stupid, incompetent, or unworthy, as well as speak to them in a dismissive tone of voice (Liegghio & Caragata, 2016). The tone of voice used in the tweets we have analysed is a symbol of the idea that women need protection and someone who takes care of them, as they are seen as the weak, second-class gender, which at the same time makes men superior, the protector (Thesander, 1997). When a woman is seen as a simple "dumb girl", she is being treated as "if her thoughts or contributions are unlikely to be of value and are unworthy of consideration" (Bartow, 2005, p. 221).

Mental stability

The fifth category I have identified is one that compiles tweets attacking the mental stability of the journalists. For this, I have divided the comments in three different sub-categories: mental stability itself, emotional reactions, and addiction problems.

The first one represents an overview of adjectives that describe the journalists through different mental situations. Therefore, one can find words like "crazy", "mindless", "insane", "mentally ill", "bipolar" or encouraging them to go to the psychiatrist. Portraying a woman as 'crazy' is not new: it is used with the intention of perpetuating their inferiority, depicting them as 'emotional' –instead of the representation of the 'logical' men–, minimizing their feelings as a way of controlling them (O'Malley, 2014).

This idea is connected to the second sub-category, which relates to the idea of women being emotional. The tweets qualify them as "hysterical", "scene-maker" and allude to the combativeness of the journalists while doing their job. In fact, the 'syndrome of hysteria' had been always connected to women, as it was thought it emerged from physical conditions –uterus and ovaries– and in the twentieth century it was an attribute used to define women that participated in feminist movements (Little, 2015). They are characterised as attention-seeking, manipulative, seductive, immature, self-centred, and dependent on others, an idea that remains today as we have seen with the tweets.

The third sub-category is related to addictions. Nevertheless, all the comments are linked to alcoholism and were directed to just one of the journalists, Elisa Beni. Some of them, for example, made a reference to a slogan created by the Spanish government to promote a law to protect women from rape 'Sola y borracha, quiero llegar a casa' ('Alone and drunk, I want to get home'), arguing that women must be able to get home safely and freely. Depicting women as 'drunks' is also a way of diminishing them, pushing them away from the way a woman should behave (de Beauvoir, 2011). The portrayal of women drinkers in the media does not help to overcome this idea: it links women's binge drinking to impacts on physical appearance and public behaviours, presenting them as haggard, vulnerable, physically incapacitated and socially transgressive –something that we don't find in men (Patterson et al, 2016).

Threats

I have identified tweets that can be labelled as threats, specifically death threats. Nevertheless, there were only two comments about it. The first one, directed to Elisa Beni, saying "be careful red [republican], that you already know what happened to your people", referring to the outcome of the Spanish Civil War, where the republican side was annihilated. The second threat, that was directed to Mamen Mendizábal, is a GIF showing a TV anchor being shot by a gun. Compared to the number of tweets these women have received, these threats are a small proportion of them, but they still exist, and I considered them important enough to create a category about it.

General insults

In the last category I have compiled general insults that might not fit in the other categories or that are more general to men and women journalists. I have divided these comments in two sub-categories: insults and disparagements. The first one, insults, collects different kind of attacks with comments that include words like "Nazi journalist", "daughter of a bitch", "vulture" or referring to their job as "disgusting", among many other. The second sub-category compiles disparagements to the journalists, tweets less aggressive but that still attack media professionals for the fact of doing their job, like "journalism at the service of lies", "envious" and much more.

All in all, we have seen that the most common tweets received by women journalists in Spain fit into the categories that historically have diminished their figure. The 'ugly, stupid, crazy bitch' is a concept used to discriminate women that do not fit into the

feminine ideal. As I have found during the analysis, these words refer to the second-class, inferior place women have in the society, and they are sent with the intention of perpetrating the limited role of women in their social lives. The masculine domination that Pierre Bourdieu (2001) wrote about operates within this framework: the power structures of the society, the ones created by the dominant (men), are applied by the dominated (women) as well, as they appear as natural. Therefore, apart from the evident violence or hate intrinsic in the tweets that we have analysed, there is a 'symbolic violence' that goes beyond, which is one instituted "through the adherence that the dominated cannot fail to grant to the dominant –and therefore to the domination– when, to shape her thought of him, and herself, or, rather, her thought of her relation with him" (p. 35). This can lead to a kind of "systematic self-depreciation, even self-denigration" (ibid.). I will analyse these consequences through the experience of one journalist in the following sub-paragraph.

5.2. Case study: the experience of Cristina Fallarás

In the previous section I have analysed the nature of the online harassment and hate speech against some Spanish women journalists during a specific period of time. I have seen the kind of messages they receive in their day-to-day life and I have categorised them to understand why they are gender-based and how they constitute a form of discrimination. Within this framework, I will conduct a case study about the experience of Cristina Fallarás, a journalist who has recognised herself as victim of online harassment and has made her case public. Through her testimony, I will examine the social processes that interact within this phenomenon (Mills et al., 2010) in order to understand better why it constitutes a serious problem.

In this part of the analysis I will focus on two different perspectives of the phenomenon. The first one is its nature, in which I will study the kind of harassment that Fallarás has received, who were the perpetrators of those attacks, how did she reported the cases and I will conduct a study of the most recent harassment and hate speech that she has received, applying the outcome of the thematic qualitative text analysis to the specific case of Fallarás, using the same categories and the same sampling days. In the second part I will focus on the consequences that she has experienced and is still experiencing, both from the psychological point of view and the effects it had in her work and the way she participates in the public sphere. For this analysis I will use selected quotes from the interview included in Annex B.

Cristina Fallaràs, who is recognised as one of the most harassed journalist in Spain, is currently⁴ working as a political analyst in important TV channels, like Telecinco, Cuatro, TV3, Telemadrid or Euskal Irrati Telebista. She also writes articles in the online newspaper Público and collaborates in other written media covering social issues, specially about feminism, social classes, poverty, economic cuts... Before, she also denounced publicly the inexistent trials for Franco's crimes. This is important, because according to a research by the International Press Institute (2019b), the topic that a journalist is covering is related to the amount of hate and harassment that receives. In the case of Fallaràs, we will see further in this analysis that it is indeed connected.

"We, the journalists, always receive opinions against us, and some of them are violent", said Cristina Fallaràs, "I could think they were isolated attacks, but not harassment... Not until it was brutal", she added. In her case, the harassment started online by "usual haters", but afterwards some political parties and politicians (like VOX⁵ or Albert Rivera⁶, the former President of Ciudadanos) started attacking her and some media outlets (like Periodista Digital⁷) began to publish statements insulting her. "Everything put me in the centre of the hate because I was defending both feminist and anti-Franco positions", she said.

The first time Cristina Fallaràs felt that she received more hate on social media than what she considered usual before was in Catalonia, in 2013. At that time, the idea of the independence of the region started to become stronger, and Fallaràs defended the right of self-determination but, at the same time, she was very critical against the Catalan government. "From that moment, people started insulting me, screaming at me on the streets...", she stated. Furthermore, Antonio Baños (the former leader of CUP, an anarchist political party in favour of the Catalan independence) published a letter attacking her⁸ that was shared by other important and influential Catalan politicians, like Ernest Maragall or Agustí Colomines⁹, who also tweeted that she was in psychiatric treatment –this post is now deleted.

⁴ When I say 'currently', I mean before the COVID-19 crisis, as this thesis is being written during the strict phase of the confinement in Spain

⁵ https://www.elplural.com/fuera-de-foco/cristina-fallaras-asustada-por-los-violentos-de-vox_225349102

⁶ https://twitter.com/Albert_Rivera/status/1059729535741104128

⁷ <https://www.periodistadigital.com/periodismo/20190822/tuit-zafia-cristina-fallaras-fomenta-odio-hombre-mujer-noticia-689404052949/>

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/somcatalans/posts/10202426951811610/>

⁹ <https://twitter.com/agusticolomines/status/431524747101212674>

After she moved to Madrid, she experienced the worst harassment she ever received, in 2017, right after she denounced on TV that she had received a picture of a grave and a monument in honour of the republicans, and a message from the far-right saying “there is room for more here”. At that moment, one of the main unions of the national police (Sindicato Unificado de Policías) started a campaign against her¹⁰, accusing her of collaborating with ETA (the terrorist group from the Basque Country). In this sense, she felt that the situation “was very, very serious, because then haters and aggressors felt legitimised to attack me, because the ones who were supposed to defend me were the ones attacking me”. From that moment, “a path of constant threats was opened”, and she said publicly that

“they knew that they were pointing me out with lies and that it would have serious consequences. Indeed, the next day I received the first death threat and two days later, my children. I spent almost a year receiving death threats almost daily, apart of course from other insults and threats”.

Fallarás argued that it was at that moment when she really felt harassed: “It was truly clear. When I noticed that they were pointing at me, I knew what was about to come”. She said, “I knew that what was about to come would be a brutal harassment. I saw it coming, rather than realizing when I received it”.

She started being the target of hate and harassment on one hand by the far-right linked to that police union because of her anti-Franco position, and on the other hand by “chauvinists” because of her feminist defence. She specially noticed this second side when she created the hashtag #Cuéntalo (the #MeToo for Spanish speakers), “which went directly against them and became a huge change in all the attacks I received”. First, death threats and then some assaults on the street: shoving, spitting, hitting... “And that was multiplied after the first big demonstration of March 8 [2018] and the sentence of La Manada [a trial against the perpetrators of a rape that received a lot of media attention]. I became their toy, a character to hit. And from there, it hasn’t stop”.

During all this time, and specially from the moment the police union tweeted about her, Cristina Fallarás has received every kind of message one could imagine. In fact, some of the death threats she received aimed her children,

“They (9 and 15) received pictures of dismembered women, images of women with guns in their vaginas, or with bottles in their vaginas... It was terrifying, it was brutal. And then they were made public naming my children and listing their ages. There was not a single day that I did not receive threats. ‘We are going to kill you’, ‘we know where you live’, ‘we have seen you on the street’, ‘we know where you shop’...”.

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/LaFallaras/status/904713343583363074>

As many studies pointed out, women receive more death threats than men, and one of the most common cases is when someone stalks them by repeatedly insulting and harassing them and these women are rejecting the harasser or acting with indifference (Morewitz, 2008). The consequences of those threats could be devastating for the women, as “they live in suspense” and “those fears and anxieties are so intense and pervasive that the victims often are practically paralysed by them” (ibid., p. 36-37).

Fallarás stated she has denounced her case to the police and to unions specialised in media freedom, but it did not have any effect. “I am alone, it’s not a feeling”, she said, “I can share words with you, but I can not share how I tremble. Harassment has deep connections with who you are, and that loneliness is impossible to explain”, she added.

This deep feeling of loneliness is what she is experiencing now, but there have been other stages before with different emotions interacting. She believed, “at the beginning I felt humiliation, then rage and the third step was fear. And fear led to silence”.

Fallarás felt humiliated when people with authority exposed her as “mentally ill, because it legitimised all the attacks that I received”. In this sense, one can say humiliation is another mechanism to perpetrate the power relations between both gender, as “humiliating behaviours and conditions deny this capacity to become otherwise specifically by treating humans as nonhuman –as not worthy of freedom– while seeing them as subhuman” (Taylor, 2018). Therefore, “being humiliated is the experience of being treated and seen in these ways” (ibid.). Fallarás also stated that this feeling was particularly strong in Catalonia, “where some part of the population I had relation with, supported that idea”.

Then, when she received the death threats, she felt rage, because it was affecting her son and her daughter. Feeling angry after suffering a strong harassment or abuse is natural in those women who believe that they do not deserve that situation, that what they are experiencing is fundamentally unfair and that there is no rational justification for what is happening to them (Mental Help, 2020). At the same time, an excess of anger can lead to fear, as Fallarás felt –and still feels– it after the event with the police union, when the harassment was stronger. She said, “one on hand I fear from men looking like conservatives and on the other hand, the police itself”. This is how harassment also works as a form of coercive control, with perpetrator employing different tactics and behaviours that, together with the social context and expectations, undermines the response of the woman and makes it easier for them to continue the harassment (Pain, 2012). It is the threat of everyday harassment what produces that fear and, at the same time, what lead to the silence that she mentioned.

Cristina Fallarás explained she believes that receives a thousand tweets insulting her and that most of them are linked to three axes: 'crazy', 'bitch' and 'drunk'. In order to better analyse the kind of messages that she receives, I have read every tweet that mentioned her during the same week that I used for the thematic qualitative text analysis of the first part of the section (Monday February 3, Tuesday February 11, Wednesday February 19, Tuesday February 27, Friday March 6, Saturday March 14 and Sunday March 22) and I have counted them according to the categories defined in the previous analysis (you can see the full figures in [Annex C](#)).

During a week, I have found an average of more than 800 tweets that one can consider attacks or insults mentioning Cristina Fallarás. The most common comments that she received fit into the sub-category related to addictions (19,3%), with messages saying that she is a "drunk" or videos and GIFs about it. The second sub-category with more tweets is the one referred to her mental stability (14,4%), calling her "crazy", "get some treatment" or "you need to see a doctor", among others. The third sub-category with more comments is insults related to her intelligence (12,9%), calling her "dumb", "stupid", "abducted" or "retarded", as examples. Other common tweets refer to the sub-category insults (10,7%), attractiveness (10,4%) and sexual experience (9,7%).

The fact that the most common categories are related to her mental stability is connected to the kind of insults Cristina Fallarás has received from political groups. This is important, because the rise populism "is further contributing to the normalisation of anti-gender policies as well as anti-feminist and misogynistic language in public and political life" (Barker & Jurasz, 2020), which damages the right to participate and engage on public debates. At the same time, "the common existence and acceptance of such language in politics and public life legitimises the existence of misogyny, everyday violence against women" (ibid.), which is what Fallarás has denounced.

It is also interesting to relate the topic of a tweet made by Fallarás with the kind of replies she receives, as I found it intricately linked. For example, on Wednesday February 19 she mentioned a debate about the minimum wage and most of the comments she received were talking about her intellectual capacity (25%). Or on Friday March 6 she tweeted about prostitution and the messages mentioning her were mainly referring to her mental stability (37%) and her sexual experience (13%). This is worth highlighting, as it is directly affecting her work as a journalist. "If they call you 'crazy', you stop writing about madness. If they call you 'drunk', you stop writing about alcohol. If they call you 'aggressive', you stop writing about violence", she pointed out.

Cristina Fallarás acknowledged that self-censorship is still her reality and the main outcome of the harassment related to her work. "You think that there are a lot of things

to report about, why should I cover a specific issue that will bring to the foreground all those things again? You stop writing about it”, she admitted.

She recognised a process of two different forms of self-censorship: overexposure and silence. At the beginning, Fallarás’ instinctive reaction was to exacerbate it, covering topics that she was being criticised for doing it,

“and suddenly there is a surge against that. They begin to build an image of yourself and your past that are false, but which is so insistent that there are sectors of the population that believe that it is real. And against that you can no longer fight. There is no solution”.

Then, she felt reminding silent about specific issues was the only thing she could do to decrease the amount of hate she receives. She still does it, “every day”. “I have assumed how they control what I write and what I can not write”, she felt.

This silence has negative effects for the journalist, especially because “self-censorship may cause personal distress as the person may be aware that the withheld information is relevant for the well-being of the society, or that norms of free flow of information are violated” (Bar-Tal, 2014, p. 56). Journalists upholding information can also feel guilt and shame for not publishing a specific information or not reporting about a topic.

In this sense, Cristina Fallarás unquestioned that the online harassment and hate that she still receives is conditioning her job, the way she relates with other people—a fundamental aspect in journalism—, her life and her children’s life,

“forever, because the digital fingerprint is indelible: when my grandchildren would search for their grandmother’s name, they will find bestialities. Harassment modifies my existence on Earth. There was very few information about myself before, but now it is huge, there are millions of facts about me and 99% are false. My profile, the one that will remain, the memory of myself, my portrait, my identity will be conditioned by what people is saying about me online. And I can’t change that anymore”.

Harassment has caused the silence of Cristina Fallarás, both while she is doing her job and when she participates in the public sphere. “I can not look at my Twitter timeline, but I can not leave it because is my main source of income”, she realised, “I do not use them that much today because there is a huge number of insults... I can not look at my social media profiles”. Nevertheless, she recognised that she has it assumed: “I am not free”. She said, “I can not walk alone on the street at night. But it does not come from scratch, it has been built digitally, through the authorities that have insulted me and that have made hundreds, or thousands of people join the harassment”, as well as “the media that created false statements about me”.

In this part of the analysis we have been able to know first-hand the testimony of a journalist that has been –and still is being– harassed online and the target of hundreds of hate attacks and threats. With this, we have understood the correlation between the nature of the harassment that she receives and the consequences that it has to her work and life. We have seen how her reactions and psychological process are connected to the kind of attacks that she receives and, at the same time, how her natural responses have led her to silence, both lowering her participation in the public sphere and not covering specific topics as a journalist.

5.3. The danger of journalists' self-censorship

Many studies and reports show, as I have found in this analysis, that the main consequences for women journalists that experience online sexual harassment are psychological –anxiety, fear or stress– (International Federation of Journalists, 2018), but a lot of them also recognise that “the use of harassment online is sometimes effective in silencing them and their colleagues” (International Women’s Media Foundation, 2018, p. 15). Cristina Fallarás’ experience is not the only one: it is relevant to highlight the huge number of women media professionals (38%) that admitted self-censorship (International Federation of Journalists, 2018). In fact, “31% of journalists tone down their coverage of certain stories after being harassed, 15% drop the story, 23% don’t cover certain stories” (Reporters Without Borders, 2018, p.11). These figures prove that self-censorship is real and that it is a mechanism of self-protection against harassment and hate. Nevertheless, the fact that the ones suffering it are journalists has a lot of implications for the public sphere, as I will further analyse.

One can say that “censorship and self-censorship are parts of the same vicious circle. Censorship produces self-censorship and self-censorship means that there is an outer pressure for censorship” (Çipuri, 2015, p. 75). In censorship, the limits of what one can and can not write are drawn by outside powers (governments, companies, editors, etc.), whereas in the self-censoring process journalists are the ones censoring themselves, hiding some facts that they think would be dangerous to publish. In this sense, Daniel Bar-Tal (2017) defined self-censorship as “the act of intentionally and voluntarily withholding information from others in the absence of formal obstacles”, and it constitutes “one of the sociopsychological mechanisms that often obstructs a well-functioning democratic society” (p. 41). That is, because “it limits free access to information, obstructs freedom of expression, and harms free flow of information” (ibid.). This free flow of information is closely related to some fundamental rights I stated before in this dissertation, specially freedom of expression.

According to Bar-Tal, there are five motives that might lead journalists to adopt self-censorship: “motivation to protect the ingroup, personal motivation to avoid external negative sanctions and gain positive rewards, motivation to protect self-image, motivation to protect a belief, and motivation to protect a third party” (p. 46). Here, one can see that fear is a key self-defence act that constitutes one of the main reasons for self-censorship (Çipuri, 2015), the feeling that Cristina Fallarás felt right before she silenced herself, as she explained in the interview.

Self-censorship is “when journalism and media are driven not by editorial concerns, but by fear” (White, 2014). Political, economic, cultural, and social pressures –and even life-threatening actions– force journalists to self-censor (Yesil et al., 2014), whether from the state, the owner, the advertiser, or the audience. At the end, “when fear of retaliation stalks the newsroom there can be no press freedom” (White, 2014).

Then, self-censorship is a practice that affects journalists every day around the world who are afraid of the consequences of speaking about certain topics (Çipuri, 2015). In fact, Fallarás recognised that she dropped out a reportage the same day of the interview because it was related to drug addiction and she was afraid of receiving more messages accusing her of consuming drugs (see [Annex B](#)).

According to Walter Lippmann (2004), and as I stated in previous sections, the information citizens have about their surroundings is gathered through to different ways: the events that we experience ourselves and the ones that are explained to us, and in this second case media plays a fundamental role. Self-censorship can influence some selection processes that journalists carry out while working and, at the end, effects what information that the society receives and how.

If much of what we know about the world is given by the media, it means that not everything depends exclusively on the individuals receiving the information, as the understanding of the same subject depends on the sender of the message and the audience that is receiving it (McQuail, 2010). Subjectivity of the media, therefore, plays a prominent role, as the newspapers, as they finally arrive to the readers, are the result of a series of decisions regarding what should be printed, what order they should follow, how much space the news should occupy and what aspects should be emphasized in each case (Lippmann, 2004).

At this point, I want to highlight two concepts related to this discussion: gatekeeping and framing. ‘Gatekeeping’ is the process in which the information is filtered for its publication, that is, the decision of which news are going to be published and which are not (Serban, 2015). This refers to what Cristina Fallarás explained in the interview about the silence as a consequence of the online harassment. Furthermore, the report

from Reporters Without Borders (2018) showed that 15% of the journalists that recognised that were or are victims of online harassment dropped the story they were working on and 23% do not cover certain topics.

The process called 'framing' consists on the frame or the perspective from which the topic is explained (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The news goes through many people with subjective views on the news, starting with reporters, editor-in-chiefs, and news editors, who will judge the same fact in different ways (Serban, 2015). Going back to the Reporters Without Borders' report (2018), 31% of women journalists tone down their coverage of certain stories after being harassed. This means that self-censorship can affect not only the stories that journalists cover, but also the tone and the perspective from which they write about a specific topic. Self-censorship affects fundamental processes, both gatekeeping and framing, of the work of journalists.

From the moment the events occur until they reach the citizen, the news is subject to constant decisions that affect how individuals will perceive that reality. What media professionals or media outlets decide to publish or not, or the way the topic is approached, will determine the way citizens perceive their reality. Then, that self-censorship prevents free access to information, freedom of expression, and the flow of information, as it blocks it. As Bar-Tal (2014) pointed out,

"it leads to ignorance of the public on issues that may have importance for the society and later leads to impaired decisions because of the missing information. It impoverishes public debate. It harms transparency and critical views, and it blocks changes as well as reinforcing reproduction of particular dogmas, norms, and practices because of withheld information that could change them. It may also lead to moral deterioration because it prevents information about societal misdeeds". (p. 56-57)

As I have analysed, through media we not only know what is happening around us, but we also realise what other people think about a specific topic. In Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence Theory (1984), the media is essential: the fear of isolation makes people to check constantly what opinions and behaviours are approved or disapproved and what opinions and forms of behaviour are gaining or losing strength.

When people feel a minority, they become silent, because of fear of isolation; one does not want to lose its reputation or does not want to suffer and sees public space as a threat. This causes that the minority appears to be even weaker and prompts it to eventually disappear. Therefore, if the media does not represent an idea, it seems that it is weak, so it will end up disappearing, because it will no longer have the support of individuals who fear isolation. At the same time, if one fears from critiques when expressing one's opinion, it will remind silent and that opinion will be lost.

According to the Spiral of Silence Theory, then, online harassment prevents journalists to inform and citizens to be informed and, at the same time, it affects the right of the journalists to participate in the public sphere sharing their opinions, and it also prevents other citizens to express their own views because of the same fear that is silencing media professionals. This means that the silence is double: from the journalists and from the citizens.

The functioning of a democratic society relies on that the choices made by its citizens in elections and other contexts are thus reasoned and rational (Chambers & Costain, 2001). Therefore, the role of journalism is fundamental: journalists provide the information on which citizens will be able to choose what candidate or party they want as a ruler or, at the end, in what kind of society they want to live (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2008). The importance of journalism relies in this idea, that the more information citizens have, the freer they are (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001).

There is another crucial function of journalism in democratic societies: its watchdog role. This is what Edmund Burke called the Fourth Estate, the “critical scrutiny over the powerful, be they in government, business or other influential spheres of society” (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2008, p. 239). On behalf of the citizens, journalists monitor the exercise of the main powers of a state in order to prevent abuses.

In order to have a well-functioning democratic society, with a free critical and political climate, it is essential to have an unrestricted access to information, which also helps to develop of “open-minded, well-informed, knowledgeable, and critically oriented group members who know how to search for, process, use, and express information” (Bar-Tal, 2014, p. 25). If the free participation of citizens in the public sphere and free access to information are elemental for any democratic society, the self-censorship of women journalists who have been targeted with online harassment or hate speech is an important limitation to well-functioning of the Spanish society.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the nature and the consequences of online harassment and hate speech against Spanish women journalists through both, an analysis about the kind of messages a selected number of media professionals received recently and the personal experience of one of the journalists that has suffered the most.

Spanish women journalists are facing a kind of online attacks that are based on their gender. As we have seen, the messages they received were related not just to their gender, but also their sexual experience, their physical appearance, their intellectual capacity, and their mental stability, apart from general insults and threats.

Through the lens of gender theory and a gender-based violence approach, one can conclude that these comments are diminishing these women just for the fact of being women and they are perpetuating the inferior status of women in the society. This is achieved by applying the mechanisms that have always been used, like scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir or Pierre Bourdieu analysed: women are defined by men, “not in herself, but in relation to himself” (de Beauvoir, 2011, p. 26). Therefore, women are deeply linked to their biological role –giving birth– and this has limited them to engage in social life. Women, then, have been reduced to mere sexual objects, emotional, irrational, unreasonable, someone who “is to be seen and not heard” (Alameen-Shavers, 2018, p. 648). This idea of women is the one that we have seen in this first part of the analysis, where the gender power relations are preserved.

Looking into the personal experience of Cristina Fallarás we have seen that, in Spain, these attacks could be massive in extreme cases like hers, and that the fact that she receives a huge amount of hate messages and is suffering a brutal harassment is because public figures and authorities attacked her too, which somehow legitimised the other tweets and physical assaults that she received. As I have analysed, the topics that a journalist reports about and the amount of hate she receives are fully connected, and Fallarás writes and talks about anti-Franco policies, feminism, and social justice, some of the topics that are polarising the Spanish society the most.

Humiliation, rage, anxiety, fear... Silence. The effects of this online harassment and hate speech for women journalists are mainly psychological, as Fallarás' case and data from specialised organisations showed. There is a deep feeling of loneliness, shame, anger and panic that has changed their lives forever, especially in extreme cases like Fallarás' one. This fear leads the journalists to the main consequence directly impacting their work: silence. Or, in other words, self-censorship.

Self-censorship of journalists violates two fundamental rights that, at the end, have terrible consequences for media freedom: freedom of expression and freedom of information. Most of the journalists who are the target of online harassment and hate speech, like Cristina Fallarás, use their social media with less frequency and participate less in public debates, which makes them less visible in the public sphere. As we have seen in the analysis, the fact that women silence themselves affects the participation of every citizen in public opinion. For example, through the Spiral of Silence Theory, Noelle-Neumann (1984) explained that if an opinion is not widely represented it will prompt the silence of that minority because of their fear of isolation.

The fact that the ones silenced are journalists also has implications regarding the freedom of the citizens. As the quote at the opening of this dissertation states, “the primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001). This means that, if at any stage of the process of the reporting a journalist is dropping a story or is changing its tone, there is valuable information that might not reach the citizens who will be less free to decide who they want as a governor or who they want to be.

This is particularly worrying in a democratic country like Spain, which is living one of the most convulsive times since the end of Franco dictatorship. Political disputes, huge number of corruption cases, regional movements claiming for independence, high unemployment, and elevated poverty rates... The Spanish society is absolutely polarised, and the journalists are the easy target for this disaffection. Nevertheless, in these times, journalism is more needed than ever.

From this point, there is plenty of room for more research related to this topic. One could do a more complete study of the messages received by more women media professionals, or including other platforms, or expanding the period of time analysed. One could also conduct more interviews to explore more personal experiences or focus the research in other countries to get a better picture of the phenomenon.

All in all, we have seen that the harassment and hate speech that Spanish women journalists receive online is based on their gender, implying the perpetuation of the gender roles, the power relations, and the diminishing of women. It creates a feeling of loneliness, humiliation and fear on the women suffering it that leads to silence. This is transformed into self-censorship when it comes to their work, a phenomenon that affects their right to express their opinion freely and their right to inform the society. At the end, it results into the lack of opinions and information that endanger any democratic society in the world, including Spain.

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Annexes

Annex A

Table of tweets received by Spanish journalists during a week, by categories.

CATEGORY: GENDER			
Sub-category: Motherhood			
Ana Pastor	Wednesday - February 19	!¿En serio?! Vaya telita de dictadura, manda huevos, que gentuza. Cuando a @_anapastor_ le viene la regla ,hace limpieza de twitter...	https://twitter.com/moisctc/status/1230237258210586629
	Friday – March 6	Anita, tú le vas a dar de mamar a tus churumbeles? No? Que cojones te importa lo que hagan las demás mujeres. Tú serás como la @elisabeni que no quiere que la dejen preñá	https://twitter.com/Quetedenx/status/1236007520499572736
Elisa Beni	Wednesday - February 19	La @elisabeni no quiere quedarse preñá o no hay nadie que se atreva a dejarla preñá? Hay que tener cojones para aguantar a esa cotorra todo el puto día bla bla bla.	https://twitter.com/Quetedenx/status/1230207885352849409
	Friday – March 6	Anita, tú le vas a dar de mamar a tus churumbeles? No? Que cojones te importa lo que hagan las demás mujeres. Tú serás como la @elisabeni que no quiere que la dejen preñá	https://twitter.com/Quetedenx/status/1236007520499572736
Sub-category: Marriage			
Ana Pastor	Monday - February 3	De vergüenza ajena. Lo de tu marido diciendo que echenique no aplaude al mierdas del rey. Como sois tan miserables una persona que carece de movilidad. Y no rectifique que asco, más periodismo de vergüenza ajena. Hacéroslo mirar un poco anda	https://twitter.com/nataliafernan1/status/1224444466771025921
	Monday - February 3	@_anapastor_ Más Periodismo y infamias de tu marido sois escoria.	https://twitter.com/Ak4lan/status/1224437150428491776
	Monday - February 3	A ver si @_anapastor_ le da ascazo, ella que es tan sentida... “Yo espero q Ferreras, el marido de @_anapastor_ mañana mismo se disculpe x lo de Echenique.	https://twitter.com/alejandrosdios/status/1224404873099251712
	Tuesday - February 11	@_anapastor_ tergiversando sobre el 11M. Qué vergüenza. Pregunta a tu marido, que también sabe mucho de eso. Asco.	https://twitter.com/c_acha/status/1227353029101473796
	Tuesday - February 11	Que asco dais. Hasta en esto lleváis años llevando la sardina a vuestra ascua. Quieres memoria? Pregunta a tu marido por las noticias falsas. Pero que asco dais, joder.	https://twitter.com/iosmafer66/status/1227352827871342597
	Tuesday - February 11	Hombre... Presentado por la mujer del de los terroristas con los calzoncillos al revés.... Ferreras... Dais asco...	https://twitter.com/Gamusinoss/status/1227323733498617859

CATEGORY: SEXUAL EXPERIENCE			
Ana Pastor	Friday – March 6	Tu Ferradas tb eres feminista. Se te nota la ostia, o feminista o no se moja y al sofá, porque si dice no, toca solitario y si la rechazas tocan cuernos. Pero somos heteropatriarcados. Jiji jiji	https://twitter.com/Rojaygualdacero/status/1236050169860427778
	Friday – March 6	Cambiarle el nombre al programa “mamadas a gusto está mejor”	https://twitter.com/Carthago3000/status/1236004937936629761
	Saturday - March 14	Rodilleras desgastadas	https://twitter.com/SeriousBiggg/status/1238950207678799873
	Sunday - March 22	Tiene energías porque el Ferreras no le da lo suyo, la tiene a dos velas, y es que tanto comer culo podemita cansa y no le deja fuerzas 🤔🤔	https://twitter.com/Drako35002796/status/1241857728357773319
Elisa Beni	Monday - February 3	A la frigida de @elisabeni hasta un niño no manipulado por el Estado o cualquiera le da un zasca porque tiene las mismas neuronas que @LaFallaras, O.	https://twitter.com/J_Torquemada_4/status/1224244210620125189
	Sunday - March 22	Vete al cuerno tú y deja a la gente que mostremos nuestra disconformidad con lo que consideremos injusto, como lo hacíais vosotros con Rajoy (con razón). Y límpiase la comisura de los labios, que se te ve la LÉf4 de Sánchez.	https://twitter.com/Eloyfighter/status/1241859983576313863
Pepa Bueno	Sunday - March 22	Otra mamadora del sistema. 🙌	https://twitter.com/ce_joselu/status/1241661016993411072
Beatriz Talegón	Sunday - March 22	Maldita zorra, con perdón hacia ese bello animal	https://twitter.com/AntonioOlsenero/status/1241841372027588608
Mamen Mendizábal	Tuesday - February 11	Mamen tranqui para ti todo lo que huele a derecha te escita eres una cumunista🙌	https://twitter.com/Jorge50962975/status/1227277284945596417
	Thursday - February 27	@mmendizabal1 Bueno, bueno, , Mamen te vi en el programa de Pablo la otra noche, y tu sabes lo que hacen los niños pequeños cuando llenan el babero de babas? pues así estaba yo viéndote, que no tendrás mermelada pero tienes unos ojos, una mirada y un yo qué sé que me vuelve loco	https://twitter.com/carlosjpe6/status/1233093250937950208

CATEGORY: PHYSICAL APPEARANCE			
Sub-category: Attractiveness			
Elisa Beni	Wednesday - February 19	Pues lo mismo es más fea la Beni que el Ferreras.	https://twitter.com/Quetedenx/status/1230206730325327874
Mamen Mendizábal	Tuesday - February 11	Calla Mamen por favor que me pongo de mala leche ehhe. Dejen a las personas vivirr y morirr como les dé la gana, parecen los vigilantes de la playa pero en feossss	https://twitter.com/carlosipe6/status/1227308766405808128
Sub-category: Weight			
Elisa Beni	Tuesday - February 11	@elisabeni Ala gorda, comete otro donut! Que asco!!	https://twitter.com/ElCordo94766306/status/1227342178713767941
Mamen Mendizábal	Thursday - February 27	No te hace falta, que ya vas sobradita de todo.	https://twitter.com/Kucio_Basile/status/1233095300878872576
	Sunday - March 22	Lo grande, deben de ser tus tangas ahora. Has dejado de fumar, de hacer deporte, y enno que mas tw has esforzado es en borrar tweets en tu sillón. Quieres una tableta de chocolata?	https://twitter.com/Yuli61979641/status/1241846176628047876
Sub-category: Age			
Elisa Beni	Tuesday - February 11	@elisabeni es una "señora" de la tercera edad y está senil, es la única explicación posible.	https://twitter.com/Unha127/status/1227237658902106112
	Wednesday - February 19	@elisabeni así que investigar el "Delcygate" es enfangar?? Su nivel de bajeza moral raya lo nauseabundo. Se la ve el plumero rojo a kilómetros, deje de defender lo indefendible y no haga el ridículo, que ya es mayor para decir estas tonterías.	https://twitter.com/EdSouldark/status/1230204298082082817
Pepa Bueno	Wednesday - February 19	Hacía tiempo que no sabía nada de la @PepaBueno esta. Esta mujer no ha dicho en su vida una frase sensata. Va a empezar ahora a su edad? que es mas o menos la mía por cierto.	https://twitter.com/jlmartin62/status/1230198731141787648
Sub-category: Others			
Elisa Beni	Monday - February 3	Elisa en algún momento de tu vida fuiste varón?	https://twitter.com/Franoaks222/status/1224446410461831169
	Monday - February 3	Esta tipa es una peliculera da asco verle.	https://twitter.com/Antonio09250050/status/1224397703305711616
Pepa Bueno	Tuesday - February 11	Los editoriales de mierda de la presentadora que se ahoga cuando habla...y que pregunta con esa tono de cantinela tan ridículo	https://twitter.com/Instinctmatter/status/1227338278946377728

CATEGORY: INTELLECTUAL CAPACITY			
Sub-category: Insults to their intelligence			
Ana Pastor	Wednesday - February 19	Cuando la termines le dices a tu jefe te la explique.	https://twitter.com/fram2106/status/1230225629158748161
	Friday – March 6	Madre mía que nivel de retraso mental.	https://twitter.com/ayosm/status/1236044836819611648
	Friday – March 6	@_anapastor_ aprende! Ridícula	https://twitter.com/hotpedrito1/status/1235985535765798915
	Sunday - March 22	El Gobierno de España debió suspenderlo todo retrasada mental,dilo,que es muy fácil.Eres patética y una vendida	https://twitter.com/Dei_1983/status/1241854275308969984
Elisa Beni	Monday - February 3	Es posible que los chinos sepan algo, TU ni puta idea	https://twitter.com/CarbajoPino/status/1224436578006663169
	Monday - February 3	sí claro, como las leyes emanan directamente del pueblo... No será que la que está liada es usted? Los poderes emanan del estado y la soberanía nacional del pueblo. Venga profesora, vaya a estudiar un poco por favor. Liados los jueces XD	https://twitter.com/Justaceo1/status/1224347273557172224
	Monday - February 3	A la frígida de @elisabeni hasta un niño no manipulado por el Estado o cualquiera le da un zasca tiene las mismas neuronas que @LaFallaras, 0.	https://twitter.com/J_Torquemada_4/status/1224244210620125189
	Tuesday - February 11	Si tú no sabes francés, seguro que lo traduciste el texto con Google translate y ya sabemos que Google es otro propagandista de izquierda que solo ve el piojo en pelo ajeno	https://twitter.com/duskmon86/status/1227344930030395396
	Wednesday - February 19	La Beni , la experta en cualquier tema que se invente la sexta.	https://twitter.com/Quetedenx/status/1230209443012530176
	Friday - March 6	Pero tú desde cuando eres racional Elisa? Si opinas de todo sin tener ni puta idea.	https://twitter.com/jcp19911/status/1235909419965308928
Pepa Bueno	Wednesday - February 19	Hacia tiempo que no sabía nada de la @PepaBueno esta. Esta mujer no ha dicho en su vida una frase sensata. Va a empezar ahora a su edad? que es mas o menos la mía por cierto.	https://twitter.com/jlmartin62/status/1230198731141787648
Beatriz Talegón	Monday - February 3	A una ignorante, no merece la pena pena contestarla, solo enviarla de vuelta a la escuela para que conozca la historia de Escocia y la historia de Cataluña. Y llamándote ignorante te estoy haciendo un piropo, porque si te concedo el conocimiento de ello, cambiaría por miserable.	https://twitter.com/LxviJuan/status/1224462619731427328
	Monday - February 3	Tienes que buscar la diferencia entre LEGAL e ILEGAL Inténtalo con un vídeo de Barrio Sésamo, a ver si así lo captas!	https://twitter.com/parmamol/status/1224438628060807168

Beatriz Talegón	Tuesday - February 11	A esa le entra por un oído y le sale por el otro. Es una abducida.	https://twitter.com/JoseF38155544/status/1227351556464533504
	Wednesday - February 19	Porque Piero @piernodoyuna15 tiene mucha más cabeza que ella y eso Bea no lo soporta	https://twitter.com/Laartillera1/status/1230261331317710850
	Thursday - February 27	Eres tan poca cosa q mi vale la pena insultarte.	https://twitter.com/anitaboada/status/1233148621438189568
Mamen Mendizábal	Monday - February 3	@mmendizabal1 JAJAJJAAAJJAJAJAJAJJA tarde de MIEDO, BORREGA?? entre rel Coronavirus y esto, si no os a dado algo a ti y a tu jefe el miserable Tonton Ferreras va a ser raro, un ESPECIAL podiais hacer, INUTILES INCOMPETENTES!!	https://twitter.com/quiqueregi/status/1224400039705030658
	Tuesday - February 11	Eres muy cortita!!!	https://twitter.com/cosmonauta18/status/1227318090712649728
	Tuesday - February 11	@mmendizabal1 dando una lección de catetismo comparando la Alemania Nazi con El Franquismo.	https://twitter.com/derechasiempre8/status/1227269770304573441
	Tuesday - February 11	@mmendizabal1 no tiene la menor idea de lo que dice el código penal alemán sobre el nazismo. Es una absoluta y total ignorante.	https://twitter.com/ChenierPoeta/status/1227269565417062400
	Thursday - February 27	@mmendizabal1 diciendo bobadas en la sexta. Como si fuese Nobel de economía. Que atrevida es la ignorancia.	https://twitter.com/RivasNueva/status/1233100982436929536
	Sunday - March 22	Estoy de acuerdo , noque a a tu presidente @sanchezcastejon , por higiene mental , paleta !	https://twitter.com/Mrdoblezzeta/status/1241850096733560842
Sub-category: Paternal tone			
Ana Pastor	Monday - February 3	Te va que ni para el pelo, bonita.	https://twitter.com/elotrogazon/status/1224335970423705600
	Tuesday - February 11	Ferreras estaba trabajando activamente para la @PSOE y a... anita @_anapastor_ urdía...	https://twitter.com/Pfernandezbaca/status/1227338399889154051
	Tuesday - February 11	Vais tarde querida.	https://twitter.com/seimatterhorn/status/1227329477329506305
	Tuesday - February 11	No llegó a los 70 y estoy cansado, pero cansado de la poliqueteria no hay una pastilla para esto? Anita como diría Correa...	https://twitter.com/RaulMolinaTech/status/1227328785172848642
	Friday - March 6	Hola Anita? Que tal la gestión de esta crisis? NI UNA SOLA CRITICA AL GOBIERNO Y VAMOS CAMINO DE ITALIA!! VAIS A HACER PERIODISMO O NO SE DICE NADA? Dais verdadera vergüenza	https://twitter.com/SingleOneTweet/status/1236045232510251009

Ana Pastor	Friday – March 6	Anita, deja de hacer el ridículo anda. Es una gripe sin vacuna y ya está. Estáis haciendo que la gente entre en pánico al no dejar de hablar del tema. Luego te llamas periodista de verdad pero eres parte de la telebasura de este país.	https://twitter.com/tripy71/status/1236017958872285184
	Friday – March 6	Anita, tú le vas a dar de mamar a tus churumbeles? No? Que cojones te importa lo que hagan las demás mujeres. Tú serás como la @elisabeni que no quiere que la dejen preñá	https://twitter.com/Quetedenx/status/1236007520499572736
	Sunday - March 22	Anita ¿Pedro te ha escrito este argumento tan malo? Tú alentaste una manifestación, tú eres tb culpable	https://twitter.com/JuanalLaLoca/status/1241861952072269824
Elisa Beni	Monday - February 3	¿No te das demasiada importancia, querida?	https://twitter.com/miguelgalvarez/status/1224088975473856513
	Wednesday - February 19	@elisabeni no te enseñaron de pequeña que hay que dejar hablar a los demás? O sólo te enseñaron a interrumpir y gritar? A falta de argumentos, pues gritar. @Juandecolmenero demostrando una educación que otras no tienen.	https://twitter.com/josancv/status/1230203899610615808
	Friday – March 6	Estás apañada para dar lecciones de nada, bonita	https://twitter.com/Jot4j0/status/1235702090833555457
Beatriz Talegón	Monday - February 3	Se llama respeto, entiendo que no te suene, es evidente, respeto a las instituciones y si prefieres respeto al jefe del Estado que te paga . Cuando seas mayor igual lo entiendes.	https://twitter.com/pacoigles/status/1224462536763940870
Mamen Mendizábal	Monday - February 3	@mmendizabal1 Hola quería aconsejarte que hablaras un poco más bajo y tranquilo. Transmites muchos nervios. Gracias	https://twitter.com/aliosegarr/status/1224377896250363906

CATEGORY: MENTAL STABILITY			
Sub-category: Mental Stability			
Ana Pastor	Friday – March 6	La Pastora, si tiene algo bueno, es que no engaña a nadie. Igual de rojiloca que su marido el gorila rojo @_anapastor_	https://twitter.com/rm89cf/status/1236035048798932998
	Saturday - March 14	Son unas enfermas	https://twitter.com/escipion_r/status/1238942434706567169
Elisa Beni	Monday - February 3	Pero ¿Quien en su sano juicio quiere seguir a Elisa Beni?	https://twitter.com/Justo26953392/status/1224090330590597124
	Tuesday - February 11	Deberías ir a un psiquiatra hasta que dejes de ver patriarcados inexistentes en todo.	https://twitter.com/Pedro56631790/status/1226994781571682304
	Friday – March 6	Y si llevamos a un psiquiatra de verdad y le hacemos un estudio psicológico de verdad a este par de bru jas? biba el feminismo	https://twitter.com/MaryTothecoast/status/1236020105684926466

Elisa Beni	Sunday - March 22	Ni falta que hace. Como tú estás como un cencerro, ya escuchas la cacerolada en tu cabeza.	https://twitter.com/JuanCar71412102/status/1241849014686973956
Mamen Mendizábal	Friday – March 6	Descerebrada será Vd, sectaria Sra @mmendizabal1, no @CayetanaAT. Vd. q dolosamente dedica a diario su programa a generar ODIO a la DERECHA	https://twitter.com/epesimo/status/1236013655361282049
	Sunday - March 22	Creo que se te ha caído esto, puedes ir a un hospital que te van a dejar entrar si lo enseñas en la puerta	https://twitter.com/Capitan65045987/status/1241708274724098048
	Sunday - March 22	¡¡ A ver si se aclara, la bipolaridad es una enfermedad !!.	https://twitter.com/_PedroRquez_/status/1241453146196639745
Sub-category: Emotional reaction			
Ana Pastor	Monday - February 3	Vamos que vas a ir a machacarlo	https://twitter.com/amartos80/status/1224340263319035911
Elisa Beni	Thursday - February 27	La montapollos achantada	https://twitter.com/JoseLuisGarcaC5/status/1233117772999282689
	Thursday - February 27	@elisabeni aupa !!! Donde estará la monta pollos????	https://twitter.com/KizkiKiz/status/1233094896153743361
	Saturday - March 14	Tú, solamente sabes gritar....histérica!!!	https://twitter.com/CarlosSomebody/status/1238945579922870273
	Sunday - March 22	@elisabeni a llorar en bajito....que es la hora de la cena.....pastillita y a dormir!!!	https://twitter.com/SenenGiron/status/1241816780072464389
Sub-category: Addiction problems			
Elisa Beni	Tuesday - February 11	Estaría borracha como de costumbre. @elisabeni	https://twitter.com/JuanIгнаMedina/status/1227319953822539777
	Thursday - February 27	Tus gin tonic son los q hay q derogar	https://twitter.com/CatalanChiflado/status/1233150057072988160
	Friday – March 6	Elisa es de las que van #Solayborrracha por la vida.	https://twitter.com/JuanIгнаMedina/status/1235694439420616706
	Saturday - March 14	Tu sigue atascándote de alcohol y pastillas, seguro q cuando despiertes ya somos una República	https://twitter.com/carlospilleto/status/1238955506363817984
	Saturday - March 14	Ya has vuelto a llegar a casa sola y borracha Elisa?? Menuda te espera, aguantarte a ti misma 15 días	https://twitter.com/david7marzo/status/1238943336603488259
	Saturday - March 14	Y yo que te hacía de copas por Benidorm....	https://twitter.com/Cristia40182854/status/1238911480378122242

CATEGORY: THREATS			
Elisa Beni	Monday - February 3	Tened cuidao rojos q ya sabéis lo q os pasó 😊😊👉	https://twitter.com/alentexo/status/1224104969583894528
Mamen Mendizábal	Sunday - March 22	GIF	https://twitter.com/Gr6Alberto/status/1241782013599846413

CATEGORY: GENERAL			
Sub-category: Insults			
Ana Pastor	Monday - February 3	@_anapastor_ Más Periodismo y infamias de tu marido sois escoria.	https://twitter.com/Ak4lan/status/1224437150428491776
	Monday - February 3	Pensamiento único, periodismo Nazi.	https://twitter.com/rafaelborox/status/1224402296403939333
	Monday - February 3	Con todo el respeto; menudo tongo de periodismo de mierda asusta-viejas Ana.	https://twitter.com/rritarded/status/1224398418984022018
	Tuesday - February 11	Que asco dais. Hasta en esto lleváis años llevando la sardina a vuestra ascu. Quieres memoria? Pregunta a tu marido por las noticias falsas. Pero que asco dais, joder.	https://twitter.com/josmafer66/status/1227352827871342597
	Tuesday - February 11	Buitre	https://twitter.com/Ruberdmin/status/1227336026340941824
	Tuesday - February 11	Hombre... Presentado por la mujer del de los terroristas con los calzoncillos al revés.... Ferreras... O como subvertir el Estado de Derecho mintiendo y arengando el asalto a las sedes del Pp. Dais asco...	https://twitter.com/Gamusinoss/status/1227323733498617859
	Tuesday - February 11	Hoy en Donde te la cascabas entonces.... apología del terrorismo del PP que fue el que puso las bombas u decapito a los supervivientes. Mejor veo otra cosa y no la pastoreando mintiendo con si puto programa de mierda	https://twitter.com/jcamporedondo/status/1227250513189560328
	Thursday - February 27	Mucho madre mia,pero tu fijación de Hiena con los podemitas no cesa.!!Anda ya rica.¡¡	https://twitter.com/granotadecor/status/1233066032052482049
	Sunday - March 22	Menuda la arpía esta y su marido, de cada dos cosas que dicen tres están manipuladas, que television tan sucia a manos del gobierno...todos palmeros	https://twitter.com/gatoloko81/status/1241855870427975689
Elisa Beni	Tuesday - February 11	Estos son los que @elisabeni protege diciendo que como eso en su país lo hacen como costumbre no se les puede condenar aquí, ya que no saben que está mal. Hay que ser hija de PUTA tan solo para pensarlo, ya no digo decirlo	https://twitter.com/Cobosjc/status/1227237239572201472

Elisa Beni	Wednesday - February 19	Un horror de tipa!! 😬	https://twitter.com/malubamen/status/1230212117413924870
	Wednesday - February 19	que señora mas apestosa	https://twitter.com/MARLUZ52/status/1230203851355172865
Pepa Bueno	Monday - February 3	¿Es @PepaBueno la tipa más sectaria de España?	https://twitter.com/alfalfaVive/status/1224455996736622600
	Sunday - March 22	Hijos de puta lameculos no decís nada de las cacerolas de la población, estamos hasta los cojones de los Iglesias y compañía	https://twitter.com/Miguelo692/status/1241690921227505664
Beatriz Talegón	Wednesday - February 19	Otra fachilla moderna. Salís hasta de debajo de las piedras, tú.	https://twitter.com/Darvint413/status/1230265747282198536
	Saturday - March 14	Joder eres el coronavirus del tuitter prima	https://twitter.com/alfonramirez/status/1238954229961838592
Mamen Mendizábal	Saturday - March 14	Has mentido con lo del gel casero para las manos, estás desinformando a la gente, haztelo mirar, que ya das un poquito de asco, lo mismo con las mascarillas, eres un estómago agradecido más.	https://twitter.com/Jose46808670/status/1238669477916573696
Sub-category: Disparagement			
Ana Pastor	Friday - March 6	Creo que ganábamos más si en vez de lavarse las manos @_anapastor_ se lavase la boca de vez en cuando...	https://twitter.com/PinHighBalls/status/1236056483714002945
	Sunday - March 22	Culpable rata	https://twitter.com/PYmepa/status/1241853696201445378
Elisa Beni	Monday - February 3	La intervención de @elisabeni resultó esencial para anestesiarse a los pasajeros durante las tres horas de aproximación a Barajas. Los pilotos sostienen que "fue ponerla por megafonía y caer todos catatónicos".	https://twitter.com/Darwinvolucion/status/1224429894635003906
	Saturday - March 14	Bienpagá. Callese que ya estamos hasta los eggs de voceros. Encierrese y que no la veamos en 20 reencarnaciones.	https://twitter.com/VivoraRoja/status/1238896834111778817
Beatriz Talegón	Monday - February 3	Bea ,tu solo vives del monotema: independentismo? Tienes algún idea aparte más para mejorar la vida de las personas? Seguiras aburriendo al personal con una idea razista , aldeana y medieval del siglo XIX,en pleno año 2020? Aportaras algo más valioso a la sociedad?	https://twitter.com/miguelcarmonaes/status/1224459958437150720
	Monday - February 3	Bea, la difamadora sentenciada, nos dice 24/7, 365 días, todo el rato todo el tiempo lo que se debería hacer o no hacer.. en serio, esta chica no tiene amigos o familia que le digan cuatro verdades a la cara?	https://twitter.com/Cagayan1582/status/1224447240187437056

Beatriz Talegón	Wednesday - February 19	Pier es un crack y Beatriz la emperatriz una perdiz tan grande como mi lombriz	https://twitter.com/mediterraneo732/status/1230262157142581249
	Friday – March 6	Envidiosa	https://twitter.com/robertorodrigoj/status/1236041879059402754
Mamen Mendizábal	Friday – March 6	Jajaja, no se puede ser más cursi.	https://twitter.com/juanbolyai/status/1235964675080273923
	Saturday - March 14	@mmendizabal1 la bienpagá al servicio de la mentira y la indecencia...sigue ladrando	https://twitter.com/hulkelincreible/status/1238818949267181569

Annex B

Interview to Cristina Fallarás (Spanish)

Cuéntame un poco sobre tu trayectoria como periodista (dónde has trabajado y qué tipo de temas has tratado)

En el 1986 me fui a estudiar periodismo a Barcelona, pero dos años después lo dejé porque no aprendíamos francamente nada. A finales de los ochenta me uní a un grupo de personas para crear un periódico gratuito del barrio barcelonés Nou Barris, que fue el primer periódico gratuito de España de larga duración. De ahí pasé a ser guionista de la Cadena Ser y a escribir artículos para El Mundo. En 1998 me contrataron como jefa de cultura de El Mundo de Catalunya y después fui jefa de redacción de esa publicación. En el 2000 volví a Madrid para hacer entrevista y opinión política para El Mundo. En 2002 me volví a Barcelona para hacer los programas de la mañana de Radio Nacional 4 (RNE4), de ahí pasé a fundar en 2005 el diario ADN, del Grupo Planeta. En 2008 me despidieron embarazada de ocho meses, publiqué algunas obras, fundé la editorial Sigue Leyendo (que fue una de las primeras aventuras de publicación digital que hubo en España). En 2014 me desahuciaron, me quedé en la calle con mis dos hijos y durante esos años fui haciendo algunas colaboraciones en programas de televisión, sobre todo de 8tv. Yo, en El Mundo, hice una columna que se llamaba “Llega mi desahucio”, y aquello fue muy sonado porque era la primera persona con una trayectoria como la mía que era desahuciada. A partir de ahí empecé mis colaboraciones en televisiones: Más vale tarde, La Sexta Noche, Las Mañanas de Cuatro, y en otros programas de Cuatro, Telecinco, Antena3, Euskal Irrati Telebista, TV3, Telemadrid... Como analista política. Fui directora de Diario16, trabajé en LaMarea, Contexto, Eldiario.es, y otros... Además, saqué el hashtag #Cuéntalo, que fue revolucionario porque en los primeros días se unieron tres millones de mujeres de 16 países diferentes, que es como el #MeToo en español.

¿Dónde estás trabajando actualmente?

Sigo como analista política en Telecinco, Cuatro, TV3, Telemadrid y Euskal Irrati Telebista. Además, publico una columna en Público.

¿Qué tipo de temas cubres?

Así como en la televisión me ocupo más de asuntos políticos, en los medios escritos me dedico más a temas de corte social, sobre todo enfocados a los sectores más desfavorecidos de la población y a las injusticias: hablo sobre todo de feminismo, de clase social, de pobreza, de recortes económicos... Y me he dedicado mucho a la memoria histórica y a la denuncia de los no-juicios de los crímenes franquistas.

¿Qué consideras acoso? ¿O qué es para ti el acoso?

El acoso significa cualquier tipo de amenaza o agresión, tanto verbal como física, por un hecho concreto, o por una opinión concreta. Es decir, es un gesto agresivo contra una persona por razón de ideología, de aspecto, de sexualidad, de profesión, etc.

¿Qué tipo de amenazas o ataques recibiste o estás recibiendo?

Bueno, de echo está cuantificado. Antes de la cuarentena por el Coronavirus estaba recibiendo sobre un millar de insultos o amenazas al día. Mil al día. Pero también en la calle... El acoso empezó en

las redes por parte de los odiadores habituales, después intervinieron por un lado algunas formaciones políticas (como Albert Rivera, que tuvo la indecencia de ponerme en el ojo del huracán con un vídeo, por supuesto Vox e incluso el PSOE, con el alcalde de Valladolid que me insultó públicamente por un ejercicio de mi profesión) y después varios medios de comunicación, si es que se les puede llamar así, iniciaron una campaña contra mí (de hecho, hay uno que se llama Periodista Digital que llegó a publicar una noticia diaria sobre mí falsa). Todo eso hizo que me pusieran en el centro del odio por razones de feminismo y por razones antifrancistas. Y luego el principal sindicato de la Policía Nacional empezó también su campaña contra mí, y eso fue muy grave, muy grave. Porque el hecho de que la Policía haga una campaña contra ti falsa hace que los odiadores y los agresores se sientan legitimados, porque si la Policía que es quien que tiene que defender es quien te ataca... Ese sindicato hizo una serie de tuits en los que decían que yo había participado en los asesinatos de ETA... Y nada más lejos de la realidad, por supuesto, yo además tuve algunos problemas de amenazas terroristas, pero a ellos les dio igual. Y a partir de ahí, toda la extrema derecha más cavernícola se puso contra mí. Entonces, empezaron a acosarme por un lado la extrema derecha vinculada a la Policía (que es muy dura en este país) por razones de pensamiento y de posición antifrancista, y por otro lado toda la caverna machista por mi defensa del feminismo y, sobre todo, cuando empecé lo del #Cuéntalo, que convirtió en algo que les señalaba directamente, y aquello supuso un cambio brutal en todas las agresiones que recibí. Primero llegaron las amenazas de muerte y después algunas agresiones en la calle: algún empujón, escupitajos, golpes...

¿Qué tipo de mensajes son?

Todos los que te puedas imaginar. Tú figúrate, si recibes mil al día... Las amenazas de muerte van, desde “te vamos a reventar” a amenazas de muerte a mis hijos. Fíjate, mi hija tenía 9 años y mi hijo 15 cuando les llegaron imágenes de mujeres descuartizadas, imágenes de mujeres con pistolas metidas en la vagina, imágenes de mujeres con botellas metidas en la vagina... Fue algo aterrador, fue bestial. Me llegaban a mí y le llegaban a mi hijo mayor. Y luego se hicieron públicas nombrando a mis hijos y enumerando sus edades. No había día que no recibiera amenazas. “Te vamos a matar”, “sabemos dónde vives”, “te hemos visto por la calle”, “sabemos dónde compras”... Y eso se unía a que de repente en la calle pasaba una señora y me daba un empujón llamándome “roja de mierda”, o unos tipos se ponían detrás de mí a seguirme diciéndome “te vamos a violar, cerda, te vamos a violar”, o a veces me escupen cuando paso... No sé. Hay incluso restaurantes en los que no me dejan entrar. ¡Y todo eso sin haber hecho nada más que opinar! Y tampoco a lo bestia... Quiero decir, que no he mentido, solo he denunciado el franquismo, he denunciado la extrema derecha, he denunciado el machismo. Y punto. Nada más. Yo ahora mismo escribo en Twitter “buenos días” y tengo en seguida cien respuestas diciéndome que ya estoy ciega, que doy los buenos días porque ya me he tomado la primera ginebra, bla bla bla, “zorra de mierda”, “te gusta dar los buenos días porque te gusta Stalin”, “a cuántos has asesinado hoy”. Es inmediato. Es brutal. Y en realidad me da miedo porque ahora hay montajes y de vez en cuando leo “porno Cristina Fallarás”. No busco más, pero sí sé cómo se están modificando, sobre todo en Estados Unidos, las imágenes de mujeres y en las redes de porno empieza a aparecer mi nombre.

¿Cuándo empezaste a sufrirlo?

La primera vez que lo recibí fue en Catalunya, antes de venirme a Madrid. Cuando empezó la idea del proceso de independencia yo defendía la idea de que, si un pueblo quería independizarse, pues

oye mira, que lo decida la población. Defendí el derecho de la autodeterminación. Pero en el momento en el que pactaron con Convergència, yo dije que me daba vergüenza, porque si pretendían montar una sociedad nueva con los mismos que había destrozado la sociedad existente y que además eran de derecha nacionalista, me parecía la máxima idiotez y lo critiqué muy duramente. A partir de ahí, en Catalunya empezaron a insultarme, me hicieron alguna pintada delante de casa, me gritaban cuando iba con mis hijos por la calle... Además, en 2013, el político Antonio Baños escribió una carta contra mí en la que decía tonterías sobre mí, pero otros políticos como Ernest Maragall o Agustí Colomines se hicieron eco de la carta y la difundieron. Y me insultaron. Agustí Colomines hizo público un tuit en el que decía que yo tenía un problema mental y que yo me estaba tratando psiquiátricamente, todo mentira, claro. Y se creó la idea de que yo estaba loca. Los tres ejes siempre han sido “loca, puta y borracha”, siempre se repiten los mismos patrones.

Entre eso, que me estaba quedando sin trabajo en Barcelona y que iba a las televisiones de Madrid, nos vinimos a vivir aquí. Y en Madrid empezaron las agresiones más duras con el Sindicato Unificado de Policías. Alguno me insultaba, pero tampoco existía el odio que hay ahora en las redes. Pero cuando el Sindicato Unificado de Policías dijo que yo era amiga de los etarras, ahí se abrió una vía de amenazas constantes, de hecho, yo lo digo públicamente, sabían que me estaban señalando con mentiras y que eso tendría estas consecuencias. Efectivamente, al día siguiente yo recibía la primera amenaza de muerte y a los dos días, mis hijos. Fue casi un año recibiendo amenazas de muerte prácticamente a diario, entre medio por supuesto de otros insultos y amenazas. Y eso se multiplicó a lo bestia a partir del primer ocho de marzo y la sentencia de La Manada, que estuvieron muy cerca, y cuando salió #Cuéntalo. Y ahí empecé a salir en los medios digitales que inventaban noticias sobre mí. Me convirtieron en un personaje al que darle fuerte. Y a partir de ahí, no hay parado.

Al principio, ¿sabías lo que estaba pasando? ¿Eras consciente de que eras víctima de acoso?

No. No, no... Los periodistas siempre recibimos opiniones en contra, y algunas de ellas son violentas. Yo en aquel entonces podía pensar que eran agresiones aisladas, pero no acoso. Empieza a ser acoso cuando, en Las Mañanas de Cuatro, enseñó una foto de una fosa y un monumento en honor a los republicanos, y un mensaje de la extrema derecha diciendo “aquí cabéis más”. Yo lo denuncié en televisión y allí fue cuando entró el Sindicato Unificado de Policías y cuando entró a saco la extrema derecha contra mí. En este caso lo tuve muy claro. Cuando advertí que me estaban señalando, supe lo que iba a venir. Y supe que lo que me iba a venir sería un acoso brutal. Vi llegar el acoso, más que darme cuenta en el momento de recibirlo. Sí que es verdad que cuando pasó lo de Agustí Coromines fue la primera vez que yo sentí una humillación brutal.

¿Hablaste sobre eso con alguien cercano a ti?

Hasta que no fue tan brutal, no.

¿Qué tipo de efectos psicológicos experimentaste al principio? ¿Sentiste ansiedad? ¿Miedo?

Sobre todo, rabia. Rabia porque afectaba a mis hijos. Y mucha humillación. Mucha humillación en el momento que te he comentado de Catalunya, porque vi una parte de la población con la que yo trataba daba crédito a eso y que empezaban a prescindir de mí pues por ejemplo una biblioteca municipal donde yo daba clases de literatura, o un foro de lectura... Y era la humillación de verte expuesta como enferma mental por gente con responsabilidades políticas que merecen crédito. Pasó lo mismo cuando lo hizo la policía, o cuando lo hizo Albert Rivera, o cuando lo hizo Óscar Puente:

de repente, dan alas a gente que dice “bueno, si la autoridad dice esto, esto tiene que ser verdad”. Después de lo que pasó con la Policía empecé a sentir miedo, por un lado a los hombres con pinta de conservadores y por otro a la misma Policía. Tengo un miedo cerval a la Policía, a mí las fuerzas del orden público me aterran. Tanto es así que a mí me aplicaron la Ley Mordaza y cuando se me acercó un policía me dijo “Cristina”, y dije “bueno, ¿usted sabe que me llamo Cristina?”.

¿Cómo te ibas sintiendo a medida que evolucionaban los hechos? ¿Cómo fue ese proceso?

Yo creo que al principio sentí humillación, luego rabia y el tercer paso fue el miedo. Y el miedo llevó al silencio.

¿Te sentiste sola?

Estoy sola. No es un sentimiento. Yo luego puedo compartirlo, pero desde luego es muy difícil. Yo te puedo transmitir palabras, pero no te puedo transmitir hasta qué punto tiemblo. Es tan subjetivo y tiene unas conexiones tan brutales con quién eres, con la infancia, etc. que esa soledad es muy difícil de compartir. Y estás sola. No le puedes decir a nadie cómo te sientes cuando todo el tiempo, cada minuto, te están insultando. Cada minuto, cada minuto.

¿Crees que has dejado de informar sobre un tema debido al acoso?

Evidentemente. Si a ti te llaman “loca” cada día, dejas de escribir sobre la locura, porque sabes lo que se te viene encima. Si a ti te llaman “borracha” cada día, dejas de escribir sobre el alcohol. Si a ti te llaman “violenta”, dejas de escribir sobre la violencia... Y el mecanismo es: “bueno, hay tantos temas para qué voy a hablar de esto si va a volver a salir toda esa basura”. Dejas de escribir sobre eso. Fíjate, hace poco, ya en el confinamiento pensé en el asunto de los drogodependientes en las cárceles (al no haber visitas, no entra droga y eso supone un problema para los toxicómanos, algo que está reconocido como enfermedad), y cuando empecé a pensar en cómo escribir el artículo pensé: “Ay no, Cristina, no lo escribas tú porque vas a volver a encender una llama que se estaba apagando que es la de ‘eres una puta yonqui’”. Eso es una autocensura brutal.

O sea, que te sigue sucediendo ahora.

Sí, sí, sí. Por supuesto. Cada día. Y lo tengo muy asumido. Tengo muy asumido cómo controlan lo que yo escribo y qué no puedo escribir. Pero te diré más, hay un ejercicio brutal contra la libertad de las mujeres para celebrar, para salir de fiesta, para beber... Basta con que una mujer relativamente conocida diga “nos fuimos a tomar un vino” para que todas las redes la llamen “la borracha”. De manera que todas las mujeres hemos ido dejando de poner cómo nos divertimos. Es que al final, nos estamos aplicando una autocensura como género, como mujeres, todas. Me parece mucho más fuerte esto, que las agresiones que yo recibo a diario.

¿Esa autocensura ha ido cambiando en el tiempo? ¿O ha sido siempre igual?

Ha cambiado, claro. Creo que primero viene el silencio en el que tú te concentras para comprender lo que está pasando. Ese silencio lleva a una tristeza tremenda donde permaneces en silencio, ‘¿qué hago?’, ‘¿cómo reacciono ante esto?’ Mi primera reacción, que no es la de todas, fue exacerbarlo: ¿no quieres que hable de esto? Pues ahora solo hablo de esto. Multiplicado. Y, de repente, hay una oleada contra eso. Empiezan a construir una imagen de ti misma y de tu pasado que son falsos, pero que es tanta la insistencia que hay sectores de la población que creen que es real. Y contra eso ya no se puede luchar. Yo no puedo rebatir a los que mienten sobre mí. Ya no hay solución. Y

dices bueno, hay gente que lleva una existencia paralela, pero eso es imposible. Y además no puedo dejar esos lugares en los que me insultan porque son mi fuente de ingresos.

Al principio, ¿eras consciente de esa autocensura?

Sí, sí. Bueno, al principio era otra forma de censura: la sobrexposición.

¿Esta autocensura crees que llegará a desaparecer?

Creo que si soy muy rica prescindiré del mundo digital. Escribo novelas para tratar de ganar dinero y desaparecer. Y que eso permanezca allí, que siga su curso, pero no tener por qué enterarme. A ellos les molesta que yo aparezca: si no aparezco en dos semanas, preguntan el por qué. Yo soy su juguete, es como quien va a cazar ciervos y no hay ciervos. No es que deseen mi desaparición.

¿Participas en debates públicos? ¿Alguna vez dejaste de utilizar las redes sociales?

Yo ya no he vuelto a mirar mi timeline de Twitter. Yo tengo una gran presencia en Twitter porque yo cuando tuve que recuperar el trabajo lo hice a base de usar mis redes sociales, las usé para convertirme en una voz y volver al trabajo. Ahora me es imposible mirarlas, hay tal cantidad de insultos... Y me dicen "bloquea" y no; yo no puedo bloquear, porque tendría que leer miles de insultos y amenazas. Pero vamos, lo tengo todo asumido, son años. Yo no soy libre. Yo no voy andando sola por la calle de noche, un día me siguieron tres hombres, vestidos con traje y evidentemente ebrios, que me decían "si fueras más joven te violaríamos, pero como eres vieja te vamos a matar". Pero claro, eso no viene de cero, eso se ha construido en lo digital. Y en medios de comunicación que hacen eso, y medios de comunicación que se encargan de no denunciar que hacen eso.

¿A qué te refieres cuando dices "lo tengo asumido"?

Es un desastre horroroso. Quiere decir que condiciona mi vida, condiciona mi trabajo, condiciona mi relación con los demás y condiciona la vida de mis hijos. Y la de mi familia. Para siempre. No ahora, para siempre. Para siempre. Porque la huella digital es imborrable. Cuando mis hijos busquen el nombre de su madre encontrarán basura, bazofia, bestialidades. Cuando mis nietos busquen el nombre de su abuela encontrarán bestialidades. El acoso modifica mi existencia en esta tierra. La información sobre una misma antes era muy poca, pero ahora la información sobre mí es ingente. Hay millones de datos sobre mí y el 99% son falsos. Mi perfil, el que permanecerá, la memoria de mí misma, mi retrato, mi identidad estará penetrada por eso. Y eso ya no lo puedo cambiar.

¿Cuándo lo notificaste a las autoridades (si alguna vez lo hiciste)?

Yo ya dejé de apelar a la FAPE. De vez en cuando apelo a la PDLI pero mi problema no es solo de libertad de expresión, es de acoso. Denuncié a la Policía y en un juzgado las amenazas de muerte y las amenazas a mis hijos. No sirvió de nada, no pasa nada. Luego ya no he recurrido a nadie, porque no tiene sentido.

¿Qué consecuencias crees que tiene esto para la democracia española?

La consecuencia es que hay una falta de libertad de expresión brutal y una modificación del papel de la mujer en la sociedad a través del acoso constante en las redes sociales. Por un lado, hay una merma en la libertad de expresión, y por otro lado un retrato y una modificación del papel de la mujer en la sociedad y de sus derechos. Esta huella permanecerá en la historia. No solo me ocurre a mí, nos pasa a muchas. Y si todas modificamos nuestro comportamiento, ese queda como icónico y es

el que permanece. La libertad de expresión no es solo la libertad de expresión en si misma, pero hay un problema mayor y es que modifica el desarrollo de una sociedad. Las niñas que se fijan en nosotras ven que yo por ser como soy recibo un castigo y claro, nadie quiere recibir un castigo.

Interview to Cristina Fallarás (English)

¿Could you tell me a little more about your background in journalism (where have you worked and what kind of topics did you cover)?

In 1986 I went to study journalism in Barcelona, but two years later I left because we didn't learn anything. In the late eighties I joined a group of people to create a free newspaper in the Barcelona's neighbourhood Nou Barris, which was the first long-term free newspaper in Spain. From there I became a screenwriter for Cadena SER and I wrote articles for El Mundo. In 1998 I was hired as head of culture for El Mundo de Catalunya and later I was editor-in-chief of that publication. In 2000 I returned to Madrid to do interviews and political opinion for El Mundo. In 2002 I returned to Barcelona to do the morning show of Radio Nacional 4 (RNE4), from there I founded the Grupo Planeta's newspaper ADN in 2005. In 2008 I was fired when I was eight months pregnant, I published some books, I founded the publishing site Sigue Leyendo (which was one of the first adventure of digital publishing in Spain). In 2014 I was evicted, and I wrote a column in El Mundo called "My eviction arrives", and that was very popular because I was the first person with a career like mine who was evicted. From there I began my collaborations on television: Más Vale Tarde, La Sexta Noche, Las Mañanas de Cuatro, and in other TV-programs in Cuatro, Telecinco, Antena3, Euskal Irrati Telebista, TV3, Telemadrid... I was the director of Diario16, I worked in LaMarea, in Contexto, Eldiario.es, and others... In addition, I created the hashtag #Cuéntalo, the Spanish #MeToo, which was revolutionary because in the first days three million women joined from 16 different countries.

Where are you currently working?

I am still a political analyst at Telecinco, Cuatro, TV3, Telemadrid and Euskal Irrati Telebista. In addition, I publish a weekly column in Público.

What kind of topics do you cover?

On television I deal more with political issues. In the written media I cover more social issues, especially focused on the most disadvantaged sectors of the population and injustices: about feminism, social classes, poverty, economic cuts... And I have spoken and written a lot about historical memory and the non-trials of Franco's crimes.

What do you consider harassment? Or what is harassment for you?

Harassment means any type of threat or aggression, both verbal and physical, because of a fact, or because of a specific opinion. In other words, it is an aggressive gesture against a person due to her ideology, appearance, sexuality, profession, etc.

What kind of threats or attacks are you receiving?

Well, it is quantified. Before the Coronavirus' quarantine, I was receiving over a thousand insults or threats a day. A thousand a day. But also, on the street... The harassment began on social media by usual haters, then some political parties intervened (such as Albert Rivera, who had the indecency

to put me on the spot with a video; of course Vox and even PSOE, with the mayor of Valladolid) and then several media, if you can call them that, started a campaign against me (in fact, Periodista Digital got to publish a fake news about me daily). All this put me at the centre of hatred because I defend feminism and anti-Franco policies. And then the main Police Union also started its campaign against me, and that was profoundly serious. Because the fact that the Police makes a false campaign against you makes the haters and the aggressors feel legitimized, because if the Police is the one who is supposed to defend you and, instead, is the one who attacks you... That union made a series of tweets in which they said that I was a collaborator of the ETA and that I had participated in their murders... And that was false, of course, I even had some problems with terrorist threats, but they did not care. And from there, the entire most cave-dwelling far right turned against me. Then, on the one hand, I was harassed by the far-right linked to the Police (which is very harsh in this country) for my anti-Franco position, and on the other hand the entire macho cavern for my defence of feminism. When I started the #Cuéntalo movement, which turned into something that accused them directly, there was a brutal change in all the attacks I received. First came the death threats and then some assaults on the street: shoving, spitting, hitting...

What kind of messages are they?

All you can imagine. If you receive a thousand a day... Death threats range from “we are going to destroy you” to death threats to my children. My daughter was 9 and my son was 15 when they got images of dismembered women, images of women with guns in their vaginas, images of women with bottles in their vaginas... It was terrifying, it was beastly. They reached me and they reached my oldest son. And then they were made public by naming my children and listing their ages. There were no days that I did not receive death threats. “We are going to kill you”, “we know where you live”, “we have seen you on the street”, “we know where you shop”... And a lady passed by on the street and pushed me calling me “red shit”, or some guys stood behind me to follow me saying “we are going to rape you, bitch, we are going to rape you”, or sometimes they spit on me when I pass... I don't know. There are even restaurants that won't let me in. And I haven't done anything else than expressing my opinion! I mean, I have not lied, I have only denounced Francoism, I have denounced the far-right, I have denounced the macho culture. Period. Nothing else. Right now, if I write on Twitter “good morning” I will have a hundred responses right away saying that I'm already drunk, that I say good morning because I've already taken the first gin and tonic, blah blah blah, “fucking bitch”, “you like to wish good morning because you like Stalin”, “how many have you killed today”. It is immediate. It is brutal. And I'm really scared because now there are montages and I occasionally read “Cristina Fallarás porn”. I don't look at it, but I do know how images of women are being manipulated, especially in the United States, and my name is starting to appear on porn networks.

When did you started suffering it?

The first time I received it was in Catalonia, before coming to Madrid. When the idea of the independence movement began, I defended the idea that if people wanted to become independent, well, let them decide it. I defended the right of self-determination. But at the time when they agreed with Convergència, I said that I was ashamed, because if they try to set up a new society with the same ones that had destroyed the existing one and right-wing nationalists, it seemed stupid to me and I criticized it very harshly. From there, in Catalonia they began to insult me, they painted on my house, they yelled at me when I was walking with my children on the street... Also, in 2013, the

politician Antonio Baños wrote a letter against me in which he spoke nonsense about me, but other politicians like Ernest Maragall or Agustí Colomines echoed the letter and spread it. And they insulted me. Agustí Colomines published a tweet in which he said that I had a mental problem and that I was treating myself psychiatrically, all lies. And the idea that I was crazy was created. The three axes have always been “crazy, bitch and drunk”, the same patterns are always repeated.

Between this, the fact that I was running out of work in Barcelona and that I was going to the Madrid television stations, we came to live here. And in Madrid the harshest attacks began with the Unified Police Union. Some insulted me, but the hatred that exists now in the networks did not exist back then. But when the Unified Police Union said that I was a friend of ETA (09/04/2017), there was opened a path of constant threats, in fact as a result of that I said it publicly, they knew that they were pointing me out with lies and that this would have these consequences. Indeed, the next day I received the first death threat and two days later, my children. I spent almost a year receiving death threats almost daily, in between, of course, of other insults and threats. And that was multiplied from the first March 8 and the sentence of La Manada, which were very close and when #Cuéntalo came out. And there I began to appear in the digital media that made up news about me. They made me a character to hit hard. And from there, it has not stop.

At the beginning, did you know what was happening? Were you aware that you were a target of harassment?

No. No, no... Journalists always receive opinions against us, and some of them are violent. At that time I could think that they were isolated assaults, but not harassment. It began to be harassment when in Las Mañanas de Cuatro I showed a picture of a grave and a monument in honour of the republicans, and a message from the far-right saying "there is room for more here". I denounced it on television and that was when the Unified Police Union tweeted and when the far-right started going against me. In this case it was very clear. When I noticed that they were pointing at me, I knew what was about to come. And I knew that what was about to come would be a brutal harassment. I saw the bullying coming, rather than realizing it when I received it. It is true that when Agustí Colomines insulted me, it was the first time that I felt a brutal humiliation.

Did you talked about it with some close to you?

Not until it was brutal.

What kind of psychological effects did you experienced at the beginning? Anxiety? Fear?

Above all, rage. Rage because it affected my children. And a lot of humiliation. Humiliation specially at the time that happened what I have told you about Catalonia, because I saw a part of the population with whom I dealt that gave credit to that believed it. And it was the humiliation of being exposed as mentally ill by people with political responsibilities who deserve credit. The same thing happened when the Police did it, or when Albert Rivera did it, or when Óscar Puente did it: suddenly, people can say “well, if the authority says this, this has to be true”. After what happened with the Police I began to feel fear, on the one hand to the men who looked like conservatives and on the other hand to the Police itself. I am terrified by the forces of public order. So much so that the Gag Law was applied to me and when a police officer approached me and said “Cristina”, and I said “well, do you know my name is Cristina?”.

What did you feel once the events were evolving? How was this process?

I think that at first I felt humiliation, then anger and the third step was fear. And fear led to silence.

Did you feel alone?

I'm alone. It is not a feeling. Harassment is harassment as long as you are alone. I can share it later, but of course it is very difficult. I can transmit words to you, but I cannot transmit to you how I shake. It is so subjective and it has such brutal connections with who you are, with childhood, etc. That loneliness is very difficult to share. And you are alone. You can't tell anyone how you feel when all the time, every minute, they are insulting you. Every minute, every minute.

Do you think you stop writing about a topic because of this harassment?

Obviously. If you are called "crazy" every day, you stop writing about madness. If they call you "drunk" every day, you stop writing about alcohol. If they call you "violent", you stop writing about violence... And at the end you think, the mechanism is: "well, there are so many topics to talk about, why would I talk about this if it is going to come back again all that garbage to me". You know? You stop writing about it. Look, recently, in the confinement I thought about the issue of drug addicts in prisons (there are no visits, there is no drug and that is a problem for drug addicts, which is recognized as a disease), and when I started to think about how to write the article I thought: "Oh no, Cristina, don't write it, don't write it because you're going to relight a flame that was going out, which is 'you're a junkie bitch'". That is brutal self-censorship.

So, it is still happening.

Yes, yes, yes. Of course. Every day. And I have it very assumed. I have very assumed how they control what I write and what I cannot write. But I will tell you more, there is a brutal exercise against women's freedom to celebrate, to party, to drink... If a relatively well-known woman says "we went to have a wine", all social media will call her "drunk". So all women have stopped sharing how we have fun. At the end, we are applying a self-censorship as a gender, as women, all. This seems much stronger to me than the attacks I receive on a daily basis.

Did this self-censorship change throughout all the process? Or has always been the same?

It has changed, of course. I think that first comes the silence in which you try to understand what is happening. That silence leads to tremendous sadness where you remain silent, 'What do I do?', 'How do I react to this?' My first reaction, which is not everyone's, was to exacerbate it: don't you want me to talk about this? Well now I'm just talking about this. Multiplied. And suddenly there is a surge against that. They begin to build an image of yourself and your past that are false, but which is so insistent that there are sectors of the population that believe that it is real. And against that you can no longer fight. I cannot refute those who lie about me. There is no longer a solution. And you say well, there are people who have a parallel existence, but that is impossible. And I also can't leave those places where they insult me because they are my source of income.

Were you aware of that self-censorship at the beginning?

Yes, yes. Well, at the beginning it was another kind of self-censorship: overexposure.

Do you think this self-censorship will disappear at some point?

I think if I am very rich I will never look again in the internet. I write novels to try to make money and disappear. And it would remain there, continue its course, but not having to find it out. It bothers them that I show up: if I don't show up in two weeks, they ask why. I am his toy, is like someone who goes hunting deer and there are no deer.

Do you participate in public debates? Did you stop checking your social media accounts?

I can not look at my Twitter timeline any more. I have a huge presence on Twitter because when I had to get my work back I did it by using my social media, I used them to become a voice and go back to work. Now it is impossible for me to look at them, there are so many insults... And they say "block" and no; I cannot block, because I would have to read thousands of insults and threats. But come on, I have everything assumed, it's years. I am not free. I'm not walking alone on the street at night... One day three men followed me (dressed in suits and obviously drunk) who told me "if you were younger we would rape you, but since you are old we are going to kill you". But of course, that does not come from scratch, that has been built digitally. And in the media that does it (and the media that are in charge of not reporting that they do that).

What do you mean by "I have it assumed"?

It is a horrible disaster. It means that it conditions my life, it conditions my work, it conditions my relationship with others and it conditions the lives of my children. And of my family. Forever. Not now, forever. Forever. Because the digital fingerprint is indelible. When my children look for their mother's name they will find garbage, slop, bestialities. When my grandchildren search for their grandmother's name they will find bestialities. Harassment modifies my existence on Earth. The information about yourself before was very little, but now the information about me is huge. There are millions of data about me and 99% are false. My profile, the one that will remain, the memory of myself, my portrait, my identity will be penetrated by that. And I can't change that any more.

When did you notify it to the authorities (if you ever did it)?

I have already stopped appealing to FAPE. Occasionally I appeal to the PDLI but my problem is not just freedom of expression, it is harassment. I reported the death threats and the threats to my children to the Police and in court. It was useless, nothing happens. Then I have not appealed to anyone else, because it does not make sense.

What consequences do you think it has for the Spanish democracy?

The main consequence is that there is a brutal lack of freedom of expression and a change in the role of women in society through constant harassment on social media. On the one hand, there is a decrease in freedom of expression, and on the other hand, a portrait and a modification of the role of women in society and their rights. This trace will remain in history. It doesn't just happen to me, it happens to many. And if we all modify our behaviour, that remains as iconic and is the one that remains. Freedom of expression is not only freedom of expression in itself, but there is a bigger problem and that is that it modifies the development of a society. The girls who look at us, they see that I am receiving a punishment for being the way I am, and of course, nobody wants to receive a punishment.

Annex C

Table of tweets received by Cristina Fallarás during a week, by sub-categories.

Category	Sub-category	03/02	11/02	19/02	27/02	06/03	14/03	22/03	TOTAL	%
Gender	Motherhood	8	8	5	3	0	2	0	26	0,5
	Marriage	2	0	2	3	0	1	3	11	0,2
Sexual experience	Sexual experience	90	54	62	88	114	79	77	564	9,7
Physical appearance	Attractiveness	103	78	61	62	102	103	93	602	10,4
	Weight	54	3	3	1	0	0	12	73	1,3
	Age	58	14	6	15	17	5	34	149	2,6
Intellectual capacity	Insults to their intelligence	76	78	125	126	109	107	126	747	12,9
	Paternal tone	52	54	53	78	74	39	41	391	6,7
Mental stability	Mental stability	96	110	79	96	158	113	182	834	14,4
	Emotional reactions	110	18	15	13	3	7	19	185	3,2
	Addiction problems	96	166	175	156	165	127	234	1119	19,3
Threats	Threats	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	4	0,07
General	Insults	74	94	90	96	75	84	106	619	10,7
	Disparagement	54	76	60	72	68	65	82	477	8,1
TOTAL		874	753	736	810	885	732	1011	5801	100

