

Women's struggle for employment equality: The case of the first female communicators in Uruguayan TV

La pugna femenina por la equidad laboral. El caso de las primeras comunicadoras en la TV uruguaya

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ABSTRACT

This article is an advance of our research on women communicators from the perspective of inequalities between men and women. We intend to grasp the changes in the socio-professional life of women, taking as a study case Uruguayan television (TV). We have interviewed three generations of women communicators: the first entering TV, mature working professionals, and recent income youth.

We will follow the career path of three pioneers. The first entered TV in its beginning, in the late 50s; the second did it in the 70s, and the third in mid 80s. We have preserved the anonymity of the interviewed for greater ease in analyzing their life stories. We will depict the main obstacles and resistance that they faced, putting the focus on gender social relations.

Keywords: Gender, women communicators, television, Uruguay, employment equity.

RESUMEN

Este artículo constituye un avance de nuestra investigación sobre mujeres comunicadoras desde la perspectiva de las desigualdades entre hombres y mujeres. Pretendemos aprehender las transformaciones en la vida socioprofesional de las mujeres, tomando por caso la TV uruguaya. Hemos entrevistado a comunicadoras de tres generaciones: las primeras en ingresar a la TV, las profesionales maduras en actividad, y las jóvenes de reciente ingreso. Seguiremos el trayecto profesional de tres pioneras. La primera ingresaba a la TV en sus inicios, a fines de los años cincuenta; la segunda lo hacía en los setenta, y la tercera promediando los ochenta. Hemos preservado el anonimato de las entrevistadas para mayor soltura en el análisis de sus historias de vida. Daremos cuenta de los principales obstáculos y resistencias con que estas mujeres debieron lidiar, poniendo el foco en las relaciones sociales de género.

Palabras clave: Género, comunicadoras, televisión, Uruguay, equidad laboral.

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INTRODUCTION

From immemorial times, women have been prepared for the private and domestic sphere and men have been prepared to occupy public spaces and areas of social decision (Graña, 2006, p.11). In a few decades, the women situation in the West has changed more than in millennia; they have increasingly accessed to career fields and occupations hitherto performed exclusively by men. Social studies with a gender perspective go hand in hand with these changes, giving them feedback and providing a handle to a new feminine awareness of questioning social inequalities rooted among both genders.

This study specifically refers to the way in which women accessed to work on television. How were the first women that appeared on TV as communicators, opening gaps in an area that was closed to them? Would their journeys and their life stories help explaining their "boldness"? If they were discriminated against because they are women, if they lived in situations of sexual harassment, how did they face them? Guided by these questions, we will follow the socio-professional adventures of three pioneers on Uruguayan TV. Cristina, Ana María and Norma started their communicational work in the fifties, sixties and seventies, respectively; we will follow their stories by highlighting the gender perspective. Although the time lag between their professional paths is relatively small, it already shows a significant grading in the process of conquering recognition as professional women in a field monopolized by men since its inception.

The background review work that we will do in the next section, will allow inserting this exhibition in a broader framework of accumulation of knowledge. Also, we will specify the conceptual references that will help shaping the analytical approach. Then, we will expose the methodology used, and present the analysis of the selected interviews.

BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The distinction between sex and gender is crucial in all emerging feminist literature since the seventies of the last century. While sex is biologically determined and registered in bodies, gender encompasses the meanings which society attributes to each sex (Burin,

1998; Bonder, 1994, p. 27). We call androcentrism the vision of the world that establishes men as the center of human experience and as a universal model, and women as their subordinates in all spheres of life. This concept appeals to "aspects that are used to understand the social, economic and sexual inequality from the role occupied in the center of power" (Rovetto, 2010, p. 44). Under its shelter, critical consideration of the social place occupied by the feminine half of humanity takes a clear relational character.

Over the last century, in the Western world, and certainly in Uruguay, a set of important advances eroded the foundations of androcentrism. The average number of children decreased, the use of modern contraceptives became widespread, and –along with it– women increased their level of formal education and their incorporation into labor, political and cultural areas historically occupied by men. These changes have expanded the autonomy of women, who increased their bargaining power over men. Thus, inequalities attributable to gender have been significantly reduced, and women have greater awareness of the discrimination that they are subjected to in social coexistence. It is worthwhile to stress that discrimination have declined, but are far from disappearing. Women are still responsible for the chore of the home and the care of the persons at home, non remunerated activities that are also not socially valued (Batthyány et al., 2014); also, they continue suffering from brutal, physical, psychological and symbolic male violence (Graña, 2014).

The so-called second feminist wave¹, which involved in the seventies women from the old Europe and the United States, gave a strong boost to media studies with gender perspectives. At the end of that decade, sociologist Gaye Tuchman patented the term "symbolic annihilation" to encompass the communicational practices that under represent women and contribute to create an effect of invisibility of them in mass media (Tuchman, Kaplan & Bennet, 1978). Since then, studies that account for the presence of women in the news, either as protagonists, as qualified informants or as communicators, primarily using quantitative research techniques have proliferated in the Western world (Burch, 2000; Alfaro, 1997).

The 1990s marked a significant turning point in terms of visibility of gender inequalities in the field of non sexist public policies driven by organized women.

At the IV World Conference on Women which was held in 1995 in Beijing, the governments there represented pledged to promote a series of goals of equality and development for all the women of the world (De los Ríos & Martínez, 1997). The Conference covered various fields in which it was considered necessary to advance in the rights of women, including an increase in their participation and access to the media (United Nations, 1995).

In the studies conducted at the beginning of this century, there has been an approach which calls for the genuine universality of the principles of equality, inclusion, diversity and participation, understood as basic human rights. It has been pointed out that the universality of these rights is called into question while the differences between men and women are not contemplated. Even when the gender perspective is incorporated, the imperative of ensuring the rights specifically involving women, and which are still pending in our human-centric societies emerges forcefully: to be treated with respect and dignity, to have equal opportunities of work and income than men, to enjoy a life free of violence and a fulfilling and healthy sexual and reproductive life; to access to education, to culture, to politics, to all decision levels. The stereotypical images of women in the media, along with their low participation in them, remain today as powerful obstacles to a true universality of all these rights. Therefore, the guarantee of equality for women in access to communication is a condition sine qua non of the respect for the human rights listed above (Montiel, 2009). Also, the democratizing promise of a free and equal access to cyberspace proved fallacious: far from diminishing, levels of violence and discrimination against women—particularly pornography and prostitution—have multiplied in the Internet and in the new technologies of information and communication (Güereca Torres, 2012; Castaño, 2005).

Scientific research provides evidence of the reproduction of sexist stereotypes on TV, which show women in traditional roles of mothers, wives and housewives, fragile and vulnerable, mere objects of desire for men. The claims of transformation of their faces and bodies to look in line with prevailing patterns of beauty are denounced as instruments of gender-based violence contributing to perpetuate inequality (Ramírez Salgado, 2012). These sexist stereotypes that denigrate them contribute to “naturalize” certain feminine aes-

thetic cannons made with the male gaze. Women are required to work in television not only with professionalism, but also with a good physical appearance, requirement much less present in the selection of men. Professional women realize the difficulties to reconcile family responsibilities with work, in a work context that demands high availability. To this must be added the sexual harassment and androcentric prejudices present in many of the hierarchical responsible of media (Bach, Altés, Gallego, Plujà & Puig, 2000; Aldana et al., 2000; Secanella & Fagoaga, 1984).

On the one hand, there is an increasing emergence of women in newsrooms of books and magazines, in the newspapers, in the presentation of newscasts, in the development of electronic journals. The number of professional women journalists has been constantly growing. On the other hand, their presence is not reflected in decision-making positions, where in most countries women continue to be underrepresented (Burch, 2000). In the words of a Spanish researcher, the incorporation of women to journalism has been “slow but overwhelming”: the marked trend towards the feminization of professional schools is combined with a more parsimonious access to directive positions, this last being much more flagrant in the written press (Ufarte Ruiz, 2007). This increased presence of women in the media has not influenced significantly in the selection and prioritization of information, which is still favoring the men as protagonists and receivers of the news (Lovera, 2007).

In Uruguay, research on communication from a gender perspective is still in early stages. The feminist organization *Cotidiano Mujer* has launched an “Observatory of the Media” (1999), which records and analyzes the space occupied by women in the media. A research of María Goñi (2005) examines the quality of women's participation in the Uruguayan TV, as it is perceived by the women communicator respondents. Male hierarchical structures persist, as well as sexist criteria of selection of women that “decorate” with a feminine touch programs conducted by men journalists. In spite of the foregoing, the growing number of women communicators gives them greater public visibility and thus contributes to the progressive retreat of traditional resistances.

In this context happen the paths of professional women that entered the Uruguayan TV between the 1950s and 1980s, focus of this article. Through their

life experiences we see persistence in the stratification of gender in the audiovisual media, as well as observable changes in the studied period.

METHODOLOGY

The ultimate purpose of the general investigation framing this work, then, is to trace an evolutionary historical picture of the lights and shadows observable in the progressive feminization of the professional staffs of broadcast TV. With only analytical purposes, we have established three generations of communicators: the first entering the Uruguayan TV in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the mature professionals who currently have a consolidated professional trajectory, and young women who recently entered an audiovisual media. In this research advances, we will deal with some of the pioneers: a communicator of the early years of the Uruguayan TV, and two mature professionals who entered the media in the 1970s and early 1980s, respectively.

We are determined to apprehend the way in which women communicators have lived their professional paths, facing the specificities and obstacles attributable to gender inequalities and historical male hegemony. The qualitative methodological perspective is which best lends itself to give an account of the way in which the actors themselves perceive—and help building—their everyday life contexts. All qualitative research can be defined as an exploration of intersubjective worlds of life (Beltrán, 1986). Qualitative techniques in general, and the interview in particular, seek to *interpret* what is said and why it is said; they seek to understand both what was said and what was omitted, scouring between lines in search of meanings in the perception of the world of the speaker, not always present in its conscience (Graña, 2010). In the words of a renowned researcher, “the use of the interview presupposes that the thematic object of research, whatever it is, will be analyzed through the experience that a certain number of individuals have from it...” (Blanchet, 1989, p. 92).

We used the semi-structured interview technique. Interviews—eighteen in total—average one hour in length each, and were made between 2010 and 2014. We sought to enlighten the ways in which these women won a place on broadcast television, considering in each case the meaning connections between these ways and their socio-historical and family contexts. The selection of

communicators who were interviewed was made in “snowball”: starting with the women of greater public visibility in each of three generations, these suggested us names of other colleagues. As it has been said, we will deal here only with three pioneers of notorious visibility on the small screen.

THREE PIONEERS OF TELEVISION

CRISTINA: FIRST FEMALE FACE IN THE URUGUAYAN TV

The forties witnessed the boom of radio plays and phone audiences; the radio, undisputed star of mass media, reached the zenith of its popularity. By then, the male hegemony was absolute and undisputed. Uruguayan women had just acquired their citizenship cards with the right to vote in 1938. This conquest was a giant step towards formal gender equality; however, women were still considered a mere appendix to the man: he was the helmsman of the State, the owner of reason and of the world of ideas, leading religious institutions, politics, the market, all professional areas (Graña, 2006).

At the end of that decade, a radio station had a contest for aspiring women presenters; it should be a new voice, without previous experience in radio broadcasting. What for any young man of seventeen years at the time amounted to be an enormous boldness, for Cristina represented a challenge that she took without hesitation. Her mother immediately consented, and they agreed to hide the situation from the father during the time of competition. Cristina—and many of her contemporaries—felt that women could and should transcend the doors of home. This, in spite of an education that still preached a clear division of labour between genders: men occupied entirely the public space, and women were destined to marriage, children and household chores.

The mother had deposited in her daughter expectations of a life different from hers. A life which, without losing standing in the family, also will catapult her away from it, dispensing her from the constraints that her grandmothers had lived as “gender based”, and that began to be questioned. In the years to come, women began a road of no return: they would not return to the golden confinement of home (always confinement and not always golden). Many more would follow these unprecedented social achievements.

The contest, to which Cristina presented as one more among 120 applicants, was won by this young entrepreneur after successfully passing eliminatory tests. The new radio program, during fifteen minutes, from Monday to Friday, was called *El cine y sus estrellas*. At the time was inaugurated in Montevideo the so-called continued cinema: the continuous projection of two, three or more films, from noon until night (Casal, 1998). Cinema was at its peak; it was a decade before it started being called "the big screen", in contrast to TV.

Nine years later, Cristina was the first woman to enter the first TV station in the country. The channel director had determined that she had everything for television: "I was chubby and chubby was trending at the time... even Marilyn Monroe had some belly, it was another kind of beauty, of aesthetics..." However, the physical aspect was far from being everything that Cristina, then twenty-six, had to offer. She had entered radio as a very confident teenager, nice and resolved; in all that time she had won her own place, from where she was able to conquer the professional trust of its responsible.

In her relationship with colleagues, all male, Cristina built a friendly relationship based on camaraderie and mutual respect. She was an attractive, brash, and charming young woman; invite her to go out, seek to seduce her, constituted a temptation that some could not or did not want to resist. The social prestige of males was correlated with the amount of sexual conquests which they could display before their peers. On the other hand, the reputation of young women rested on their firmness and ability to resist a male harassment that flattered them, but that should not dishonor their virtue (Giddens, 1995). The siege of virtue which men of all times practice becomes a virile game that test their power over women, and exercises a form of "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 2000) that updates the domination-restraining relationship.

But, on the other hand, "where there is power there is resistance", states Michel Foucault (1977, p. 57). This vivacious TV presenter put on acts this resistance to male hegemony, displaying delicate and firm relationship strategies: "I did not give them the opportunity to oust me or to feel upset with this woman who was making an impression (...). You must become friends with the adversary, and I made friends with men..." She had to avoid that her brilliant success was experienced by male colleagues as a reduction of their prerogatives.

She had already been five or six years on TV, when she became pregnant: "I was radiant, of course, and I kept working all the time; but at that time, women hid their tummies with much modesty, there were special dresses for pregnant women", says Cristina. "I had won my place, it was solid, colleagues and bosses were to death with me." She felt that she had full support of the channel management. "All colleagues wanted the baby to be male, but they teased me because it was a girl, what I wanted."

The peculiarities of her work made her enter and leave the channel incessantly, travelling around the city, as opposed to the traditional workday of eight or more hours in a fixed place. This allowed her to regularly see her daughter, since between every journey she made quick incursions to her house: "I was close to her anyway: I had my car and I always waited for her at home for lunch time; she grew up with the smell of mom". She had proposed herself that her kid should have her mother every day, "making her eat, controlling her homework, monitoring her studies, seeing who she was with..." Cristina reflects on it:

For me it is very important that children get along with that attitude of the mother, to go forward... mark their life path. And I'm very happy with what I did with my daughter, because she responded excellently.

She acknowledges that it was not easy, that she very often had to "grin and bear it" and put the brake, put limits: "I believe in limits on everything: in adults, in kids, limits please!" (...) And when you have to be father and mother, limiting hurts, but you have to override the pain".

In her retrospective, Cristina perceives that she was at the proper time and place for things to happen: "Someone has to open the road: well, it was my turn to do it, and I made it happily". She had a determined attitude towards journalistic work; in a few years she conquered a well-deserved status of news professional. The following story is testimony of it.

In the turbulent years preceding the coup of June 1973, the *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (Tupamaros) had mounted a hideout called *Cárcel del Pueblo*, in downtown Montevideo. The guerrilla group kidnapped and detained there several characters of public notoriety. In May 1972, it was discovered by the military. In the morning of that day, the director of the chan-

nel called Cristina to encourage her to cover such an important event. Her small six years had the flu, but she did not doubt a single second: "I wrapped her in a blanket; I went to the channel and installed her in the press room with the guys who were there". The marriage to the father of the girl, who had been in exclusive charge of her mother from her first months of life, had lasted less than two years. She was, obviously, the only woman in the group of journalists who crowded at the place, tussling for the scoop on that shocking news coverage. "The one who went down first to the *Cárcel del Pueblo* was the one who would have the scoop," says Cristina; and television had to be first: this was her conviction; "I had to fight seriously with colleagues from other media, because everyone wanted to go first." She had a strong argument with a radio journalist, to whom she said: "You know what? You will not go over me because I'm a woman: I will go over you and throw you at that well". She finally got to enter with her cameraman and cover the event successfully.

Now we will examine the socio-professional adventures of Ana María. Twenty years younger than Cristina, journalist/communicator with unique skills that she cultivated since childhood, she benefited from the achievements of her predecessor but was also a pioneer, an Explorer of territories which remained reserved for men.

ANA MARÍA: "I WAS THE FIRST REPORTER WOMAN IN A MAIN NEWSCAST"

Ana María recalls that, being a little girl, her father listened every day to a radio newscast. Very impressed with that voice so powerful and persuasive, she asked her father "how to know everything that he said," how to do to know so much. She also played to be a teacher; her students, the trees, officiated of silent witnesses of that verbal exercise that the little girl displayed with passion. It was a way of owning that radio speech that woke up all her interest and admiration. Ana María had sensitive parents, attentive to her inclinations; they spoke with the teacher of the rural school and told him of the performances of their girl. The teacher proposed to give her a place at school parties to recite poems. And so it was; "it was my first performance in public, I was four or five years."

She attended the first years of secondary in the mid-1960s. In fourth year, the literature teacher asked for a

job on world affairs. The teacher returned the work to Ana María with this succinct comment: "why don't you publish it? You have a journalist's soul". She sent it to the local newspaper, which agreed to publish it. At the end of high school, she told her parents that she wanted to study journalism and psychology. This necessarily supposed to travel to the capital, and her parents did not receive such a project with great enthusiasm. Her mother said to her "you are crazy, what are you going to do alone in Montevideo", but she also said that she would not be opposed if that was really her will. She still recalls with emotion and affection the words of her father: "True love is freedom; therefore, if you want to go to study, you'll have my support".

In Montevideo, an aunt offered to pay her a private course on journalism in the only institution offering studies of this nature. At the time, a TV channel opened in the city where she went to school: "A small camera, a microphone and a chair was the entire infrastructure". She presented to the owners of the channel a local program project; she did not ask for compensation, but only a travel allowance to solve her travels from Montevideo. The proposal was accepted, and she started to work immediately in her first incursion into the audiovisual journalism.

Shortly later, she postulated for a radio program that sought to incorporate a woman. She had to pass through countless trials, until, finally, they entrusted the realization of news stories that would then be broadcasted in the most important program from the station. "It was like today internships, unpaid," says the interviewee. One thing was clear from the beginning: the quality of her work would be under constant review. Because, for women, "contrary to what happens with their male counterparts, their ability is never taken for granted" (Instituto Nacional de la Mujeres, 2005, p. 10).

On some occasion, the International Women's Day was approaching. Her boss informed her: "If you can get a story with the first lady, you will make it to the radio". And the young journalist managed to get an interview with Josefina Herrán Puig, the wife of the dictator². Back to the station, her superiors could not believe it. Ana María was immediately incorporated into the noon news. On her first day, the journalist responsible for the program dedicated the editorial to present her. He announced that for the first time in the Uruguayan radiotelephony a female voice would

appear that would not deal with horoscope or recipes or talk about fashion, but that would read the news. The presentation of a woman colleague to the audience *imperatively demanded* a ceremony that welcomed her, at the time that it stressed the exceptional nature of the event, at the time that reaffirmed the male authority.

The big door that had finally opened up for her after so many filters, brutally slammed into her face. Ana María was suddenly fired from the station. "I never I said, because I have no evidence of the sexual harassment, but above all because... talking of that in those years... who was going to defend me, in that world of men?". The situation could not have been more stereotyped: the young journalist did not agree to the seduction attempts of someone with true power in the company, and one day she was informed that she was dismissed; "that was a month after I had pushed this man against the wall."

In 1980, and after working in other radio stations, she entered a TV contest that she won. "Once again, I was the only woman", says Ana María. Months later, the management incorporated her on the central newscast. "I was also the first woman to work as a journalist in a main newscast, as a reporter". At the beginning she gave the information on the lottery and the currency, and some pieces of general information. Little by little she gained greater relevance in the information team, until they credited her in the Government House and assigned her the exclusivity of political news stories.

In spite of a public recognition that comforted her and filled her with satisfaction, she had to live very bitter moments on the occasion of her return to the profession after a risky pregnancy. During her absence and through anonymous rumor, the voice was spread that her disappearance from the screen for so many months was due to the fact that she was the lover of the President of the Republic, and that he was the father of her daughter. "They slandered me, poisoned my reputation to kill my credibility and hurt my morale in the worst way," says Ana María with a pain that memory revives despite the elapsed time.

Ana María was for many years the only woman in the team of professionals of the channel. She had to sort daily situations of harassment in the most diverse grades and scenarios: on the street, between colleagues, in public settings where she was working, in the events that she had to cover. She had to be mild-mannered and

at the same time keep the distance, she had to generate empathy avoiding seeming she was giving herself away, she had to examine herself with the male gaze: her outfit, her look, the disposition of her hands, her legs, her entire body. In sum, to win the recognition and respect of the men as a professional, she had to put herself in their place, evaluate herself by adopting their perspective. At the same time, she knew that any misleading signal could be misinterpreted, so she could not depose for a moment the attitude of alert.

In a large group of journalists who were waiting long hours for the emergence of a public character or for the end of an event, there was always one willing to have a good time at the expense of the few women present (and on countless occasions, Ana María was the only one). In general, they made jokes benign for ordinary people. In the context of this ritual of masculinity, her colleagues called attention to her hairstyle, the length of her skirt, her makeup; some said phrases like "you have a sleepy face, what did you do last night...?", with a sly smile that his peers replicated. Women were expected to celebrate such jokes with tolerance and kindness. And if someone did not accept stoically that supposedly innocent game, she was treated as a bad partner, bitter, hysterical. These practices naturalize gender inequality. In the words of Ana María, "there is a pointing out that you are a female, a subtle gender differentiation". Changing the gender of the protagonists –what feminists have called the "inverted rule"– evidences the one way sexism that these situations represent.

It is now the turn of Norma, that access audiovisual journalism when women communicators are already beginning to be more visible on television.

NORMA: "I HAVE TRIED TO PLAY WONDER WOMAN: I DO EVERYTHING, I DEAL WITH EVERYTHING, NO ONE NOTICES THAT I DIDN'T SLEEP..."

Like the previous interviewees, Norma had the firm support of her family regarding her life choices. The love for books, the imperative of personal cultivation and of obtaining a professional title, was the atmosphere breathed at her home. Her teenager years took place in the sixties, when the country –and the world– was experiencing a deep socio-cultural upheaval that shook the foundations of Western societies. It was the era of the so-called second feminist wave, which called for gender equality. The maelstrom of modern times was

dragging everyone, but shook women more than men. New situations that challenged them multiplied, which could not be included in advance in a learned code, as it happened even in the twentieth century (Riesman, 1968). Family and social origin still were important for the possible future of young women; however, as never before a range of achievable goals opened to them through formal education and regardless of their origin. But they must compete –and above all demonstrate their skills– in areas still strongly androcentric.

In the last third of the last century, the women literally stormed into higher education, to the point of being an overwhelming majority in nearly all degrees, including those traditionally male. Even more: in those years, women were best students than men, obtained on average higher marks than males; this includes mathematics, bastion of rationality held historically by men (Graña, 2008). The attitude of Norma's parents was according to the times: she had to study, be a good student, and there was no question of settling for high school. This family legacy was amalgamated into her personality with a strong volition and security in herself, double determination that helped to shape her character.

Thirty years earlier, the path undertaken by Cristina had supposed an enormous boldness that, as we could see, had to be carefully steered through a family strategy to persuade the father. You will remember, also, that the success of that work depended a lot on the complicity of the mother. Moreover, both Ana María and Norma had the understanding and support of both their parents, which was determinant in the direction taken by their lives. Three decades after the solitary and unprecedented achievement of Cristina in the middle of the last century, the social circumstances had undergone considerable changes; and under the shelter of such changes, the modalities and ways of family support also changed.

In an era in which women were already bursting in the workplace and in public life, Norma's parents instilled her with the sense of free professional choice founded on broader knowledge, formal education and certification. Norma had been formed in letters, aiming towards teaching, and very particularly towards research. In the mid-1980s, the country came out of the dictatorship; a TV channel made public the application for "people who investigate social issues". Norma presented a research that broadly met the claims of the station. She was asked

a bi-weekly work of that nature, which would be used as an input to an important program of the moment. She worked alone; she says with pride that she was "the only freelance journalist of the channel". She made sixteen works in which the management of the program gave her an issue and she carried out the research. That socio-cultural research field corresponded very well to what she had learned, both at home and in the education system: "We have a training universal enough to allow us to retrain in other skills and knowledge".

At one point, the channel authorities asked her for a few days substitution on the main newscast of 8pm. At the beginning, she refused. On the one hand, she lectured on the night shift; but, above all, she feared that doing something so different from which she had done so far, will jeopardize the autonomy and freedoms allowed by the journalistic work undertaken from more than two years. But someone reminded her at that time: "to decide is to grow"; it is what she now transmits to her children, she confesses with a complicit smile. Eventually, she accepted the challenge.

Norma's hesitancy before the possibility of gaining public notoriety that will limit her freedom and privacy, show this sense of self-determination. That sense of the free choice of her life choices was already within the reach of women born in the second half of the 20th century, heirs and perpetuators of the female struggle for labor and intellectual equality with men. Norma decides by herself what to do of her time, with margins of choice that clearly show the professional spaces already conquered by women. In her task, she fights to be considered as a professional, regardless her gender; she does not want to be treated differently because she is a woman. At the same time, she recognizes that "it is not easy in some media for women to have a space of equality with men".

Norma measures her congeners with the demanding standards from someone used to measure herself in the same way, from her earliest education. Women should become strong in the professional work: this is the legitimate claim for Norma to her peers, accompanied by a veiled reproach to those who opt not to give the battle and contribute with their attitude to devaluing the female achievements already accomplished in the field. That fight for equality develops from a historically unequal place for women, and must be done

in a professional field where “you have to be better”. The equity claim is then a singular effort, inevitably marked by competition and power relations.

In the pair of presenters of the newscast –it could not be otherwise–, the division of tasks is marked by the traditional stereotypes that validate the male primacy in the public space. Soon, Norma began to experience the discomfort of an inequality only explainable by gender bias; a discomfort much stronger since she felt perfectly able to competently execute all roles and issues likely to be approached in a newscast.

Well, one day it occurred that my companion did not come, and then I had to do everything. That day, the brain injury that apparently prevented me to say hello at the beginning and at the end, disappeared (...) when you stick the foot between the frame and the door you cannot get it out, can you? It had no sense to go backwards.

How has Norma experienced being a mother of three children? What about the odd combination of responsibilities that motherhood brings for working women, and more particularly, to those exposed to the general audience? Her story exhibits traces of that transitional period in which her life and career unfolds. Like so many women, Norma had to do much to hold both spheres of her everyday life, family and work, to prevent short-circuits or interferences.

In another text we have dealt with the interactions between motherhood and career; many women live their motherhood as an obstacle to the work, and act as if certain rights already sanctioned by law –the maternity leave, the permission of breastfeeding during working hours– were gracious concessions and not a legitimate historical conquest (Graña, 2001). Norma is part of a generation of professionals who started to live their maternal responsibilities without those constraints. This does not preclude the subsistence of some attitudes in a still very recent past, manifesting in the perception of motherhood as a problem for others, which has induced her to make an effort to neutralize it: “I have strived so motherhood would impact as little as possible my professional life, i.e., that it is not seen as a problem”. However, she feels that today –twenty years later– she not would proceed in the same way:

I... regret that, but I have tried to play Wonder Woman: I do everything, I deal with everything, no one notices anything: no one notices that I didn't sleep... It is a strain that I am convinced that many women make and that no man has to do. That is something that I hope new generations live differently, and say ‘if I didn't sleep all night, I won't go’...

We have tried to examine the paths of Cristina, Ana María and Norma, emphasizing on the one hand the obstacles they had to face attributable to gender, and on the other hand, the achievements that set precedents for future generations of women journalists on broadcast TV.

CONCLUSIONS

In this work, which ends here, we followed the career of three of the first women communicators that gained public notoriety in the Uruguayan TV, in order to describe, from a gender perspective, the challenges and resistance they had faced. We wanted to see through their eyes the world in which they attempted to gain a space as professionals in broadcast TV. We stated in the introduction some historical gradation in the process of conquest of a professional place by women communicators; the gradation is particularly verifiable in a point: the professionalization of journalism, contributing –partly– to reduce the gender gap since it is about knowledge and skills that do not have gender. Now we recapitulate, by way of conclusion, the main findings of the work. With them we account for some of the questions posed in the introduction: about the profile of the pioneers; their singularities at that time and in their lives, and the way in which they faced situations of discrimination and harassment.

There is a common denominator in the stories of childhood and youth of the three interviewees: the existence of a strong family support, parents who provide them security and affection at all cost, supporting them with determination and even enthusiasm in their early life choices. Cristina was a teenager when she started in radio in the late 1940s. At that time, men occupied virtually the entire public space and expected that women enshrined entirely to marriage, home and children. Understanding and the solid backing of her parents facilitated a boldness that would have not been able to succeed before a parental veto. It is also the case, twenty years later, of young Ana María, who leaves behind the calm native village to study journalism in the “big city” and engages in a profession hitherto overwhelmingly male; her early adventure is not imaginable without the faith that her mother and father placed in her. In her childhood and adolescence, elapsed between the sixties and seventies, Norma incorporates habits of reading and study, in line with the family mandate of curricular training and founded knowledge. Their tutors instill her with a sense of autonomy and free will that encouraged a journey marked by professionalism and confidence in her own abilities.

The existence of an unwavering determination that guides them from their first steps in the communication business is evident in all three cases. Cristina was still a teenager when she began to build from scratch a female professional profile on the radio and then TV, and conquered from the beginning a recognition that did not cease to grow. Ana María read a lot and aloud as a child, recited poems at school parties, later directed a school newspaper, discovered that her dream was to be a journalist, and since then she tried to materialize it against all odds. Norma showed since a very young age a thirst for knowing that inclined her for social research rather than mere communication; since the beginning of her professional performance, she jealously protected these inclinations, and in correlation with this, she firmly hold the rudder of her private life, keeping it safe from public notoriety.

In an overwhelmingly male area as was radio and TV in the 1950s, Cristina lived the siege of colleagues as a fact of everyday life: those who “flirt to see what happens” are a legion. Aware that they have all the power of decision, she knows or suspects that she should keep them away without hurting their self-esteem, and beat them in the professional lid without humiliating them: “You must become a friend of the adversary, and I became friend of men”. Ana María suffers in the sev-

enty an episode of sexual harassment that ends with her dismissal. Those are years of dictatorship and the victimization is triple: the violence of the harassment, the ignominy of the dismissal, the painful silence with which she buried the whole affair to continue with her professional life. Faced to incessant harassment situations, she learned how to develop a strategy of resistance that does not interfere with her work performance: “My resource was to play the distracted card...” Entering the 1980s, Norma access investigative journalism on TV with a solid professional training that implies two virtues: on the one hand, it is the standard by which she wants to be measured; and on the other, it contributes to minimize the possible discrimination by gender bias by taking the theme to the field of the quality of the journalistic production. She recognizes that it is not easy for women to conquer a fair spot on TV, although she perceives as main obstacle women's own blocking on “taking for granted that we have equal rights”.

We have tried to highlight the principal vicissitudes experienced by the first communicators of the small screen, with strong emphasis on those attributable to social relations between men and women. This is a first step in this line of research, which we will continue with the path of women communicators in activity since the 1990s to the present.

FOOTNOTES

1. Thus has been called the feminist outburst of the late sixties and early years of the next decade, in reference to the “first wave” involving the suffragettes at the beginning of this century.
2. Juan María Bordaberry, elected President in 1971, led the military coup of June 27, 1973.

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