

RESEARCH

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SPANISH JOURNALISM UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

La profesión periodística española a la deriva

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ABSTRACT

The Spanish journalism profession is undergoing an integral transformation, which affects the quality of "what is published" and the "perception of public opinion". The precariousness of the media, especially the traditional ones, is dramatically reducing the quality of journalistic work, which conflicts with the slogans of journalism that are axiomatic: 1) without journalism there is no democracy; 2) without democracy there is no journalism, 3) without them there is no public opinion. A new way of thinking and doing journalism is required, from training and development of the profession. Methodologically, in addition to presenting significant statistical data to analyze the evolution of the profession, we are based on professional *ethical witnessing*, which has as starting point professional observation from "should be", from the professional imperatives so that Journalism can meet all its social functions. The professional review from the theory and praxis show results that show the need for a new journalistic paradigm, recovering for it all the guiding principles from the profession, from the latest technologies. Only a harmonious conciliation of the journalistic foundations of journalism, together with the application of the most innovative technologies, will return to *journalism* the social, economic and political place that it should never have left.

KEYWORDS: Journalism; training; communication; *ethical witnessing*; public opinion, new paradigm.

RESUMEN

La profesión periodística española está sufriendo una transformación integral, que afecta a la calidad de "lo publicado" y a la "percepción de la opinión pública". La precariedad de los medios de comunicación, especialmente los tradicionales, está reduciendo dramáticamente la calidad de los trabajos periodísticas, lo cual entra en conflicto con los eslóganes del periodismo que son axiomáticos: 1) sin periodismo no hay democracia; 2) sin democracia no hay periodismo, 3) sin ellos no hay opinión pública. Se precisa un nuevo modo de pensar y de hacer el periodismo, desde la formación y el desarrollo de la profesión. Metodológicamente, además de presentar datos estadísticos significativos para poder analizar la evolución de la profesión, se

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parte del *ethical witnessing* profesional, que tiene como punto de partida la observación profesional desde el “deber ser”, desde los imperativos profesionales para que el Periodismo pueda cumplir con todas sus funciones sociales. La revisión profesional desde la teoría y la praxis arrojan unos resultados que evidencian la necesidad de un nuevo paradigma periodístico, recuperando para ello todos los principios rectores desde la profesión, desde las últimas tecnologías. Solo una conciliación armónica de los fundamentos periodísticos clásicos del periodismo, junto a la aplicación de las más innovadoras tecnologías, devolverán al *periodismo* el lugar social, económico y político que nunca debió haber abandonado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: periodismo; formación; comunicación; *ethical witnessing*; opinión pública, nuevo paradigma.

A PROFISSÃO JORNALÍSTICA ESPANHOLA NA DERIVA

RESUME

A profissão jornalística espanhola está sofrendo uma transformação integral que afeta a qualidade do “publicado” e a “percepção da opinião pública”. A precariedade dos meios de comunicação especialmente os tradicionais, está reduzindo drasticamente a qualidade dos trabalhos jornalísticos, o qual entra em conflito com os slogans do jornalismo que são axiomáticos 1) sem jornalismo não há democracia, 2) sem democracia não há jornalismo, 3) sem os dois não há opinião pública. Precisa-se de um novo modo de pensar e de fazer jornalismo, desde a formação e o desenvolvimento da profissão. Metodologicamente, ademais de apresentar dados estatísticos significativos para poder analisar a evolução da profissão, partindo do *ethical witnessing* profissional, que tem como ponto de partida a observação profissional desde o “deber ser”, desde os imperativos profissionais para que o jornalismo possa cumprir com todas suas funções sociais. A revisão profissional desde a teoria e a práxis mostram uns resultados que evidenciam a necessidade de um novo paradigma jornalístico, recuperando todos os princípios diretivos desde a profissão e as últimas tecnologias. Somente uma conciliação harmônica dos fundamentos jornalísticos clássicos, junto a aplicação das mais inovadoras tecnologias, devolveram o jornalismo ao lugar social, econômico e político que nunca deveu abandonar.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Jornalismo; Formação; Comunicação; *ethical witnessing*; Opinião pública; Novo; paradigma

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1. DOING RETROSPECTION OF JOURNALISM

Looking back without nostalgia, and without admitting that any past time was better, the truth is that the history of universal journalism, and especially the Spanish one, has gone through better times than today.

There is no doubt that journalism, and therefore newspapers, have been evolving in a constant way. It is true that the information newspaper had its maximum splendor in the mid-nineteenth century, and as Casasús (2006: 63) states: "the old European empires had fallen into decline and the expansion of the new modern press was a phenomenon determined mainly by economic and industrial factors, as it happens today with regard to the accelerated process of the irruption of constant novelties in the computer and telematic instruments", an affirmation that will be retaken below.

It has been precisely at times of great social and economic changes when Spanish journalism has shone especially (with Cuban episodes in 1898, for example). For this reason, it is at the end of the 19th century when the first professional association of journalism was created by chance, back in 1895, coinciding with the appearance of the first centers of industrialization (Basque Country and Catalonia) and political parties (PSOE), 1879).

The twentieth century was equally interesting coinciding with all the social movements of the first third of the century and after the Civil War (1936-1939) in Spain, and after World War II (1939-1945) in the rest of Europe, being this way that it returned to having glorious decades coinciding with the Spanish transition (1975-1990). All these milestones are now history and therefore unrepeatable, but undoubtedly journalism remains one of the most wonderful jobs in the world, and there have been many universal journalists who have affirmed so, from García Márquez to Kapuscinski on the international scene, while, transiting the skin of a Spanish bull, we can mention figures as different as Eliseo Bayo to Iñaki Gabilondo, to name just a few of them. However, the profession goes through dark times that, given that they coincide with the great technological changes and the financial crisis, are expected to generate a glorious chapter that is yet to emerge in the public sphere, which until now is rather a desire than a reality.

However, the reality of the journalistic profession today is really calamitous. This is not a personal assessment, but corroborated by the latest *Report of the Journalistic Profession, 2014*, which offers data that must be highlighted, from within the profession in order to go proposing some proposals that can get the profession out of the pit into which it has fallen. If the financial crisis has touched all sectors, the journalistic sphere has suffered its consequences that, together with the technological changes introduced by ICTs, are convulsing the profession and will be discussed in the next section.

Intellectuals of all times have questioned the mission of journalism, its notion and its evolution. Each of them has contributed his vision and what its mission should be. In that sense, it seems appropriate to bring up some lucid glances that, without being exclusively journalistic, their owners have exercised as journalists on different occasions, and with different functions. Rarely have visions of journalism coincided, which has always been subject to different avatars, and which has not stopped

evolving, but it is desirable to maintain its essence: public service, and the consequent social dynamism, as well as the transformation of reality. Two personal profiles with two different visions that, although critical, project a certain hope in the future, because the situation they describe was not free of uncertainties either.

Therefore, the importance and anticipation of these two intellectuals is unquestionable. They both belong to different signs, and different countries, and different historical moments and professions other than journalism, but the exercise of which they enjoyed. They are José Martí (1853-1895), a Cuban who lived for a time in Spain, and Francisco Ayala (1906-2009), a Spaniard who lived for a time in Spanish America.

Pedro Pablo Rodríguez (2012a, p.16), who could be said to be his journalistic biographer, affirms that "modern journalism started the cultural industry and the mass industry (...) Public opinion, the authorized criterion of the connoisseur, diversity of opinions, were gradually established as the props of journalistic objectivity ...". In another moment, Rodríguez (2012b, p.141) transcribes the words of José Martí, when he said that "in this time of transition, we live in anguish in all parts of the world, and we feel that life in these big cities is consumed, thinned and evaporated (...) and it is also that most individuals lack hope in the future ". If you do not know the owner of these words, today you could say them with a total sense of validity. For his part, Francisco Ayala (1985, p.45), in his speech to the Royal Spanish Academy, said: "journalism, as an instrument of a political-social system governed by public opinion." The periodical press, there is no doubt that it itself was born as another business, at the service of business, "but as he says at another moment," very *sui generis* business (p 47).

A few decades after these claims, the media industry has fully incorporated to the latest advances in technology to produce more and faster, but continues or must continue to be business and the fundamental basis for other businesses. More recently, Flores Vivar (2009, p.77) ratifies the idea, stating that: "the objective remains the same: to have a presence in the Network within these segments of the population that, after all, are an audience. In this sense, technology does nothing more than reinforce or enhance the strategy proper to informal networks that have always worked for these activities ".

2. ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY

This paper is approached from a qualitative methodological perspective, known *ethical witnessing* (Oliver, 2004, Wessels, 2010) professional, which allows us to focus on different aspects. The first starts with the use of statistical data presented in the *Report of the Journalistic Profession, 2014*, the reliability of which is not questioned, and which allows an assessment of the journalistic profession from within, as well as the *White Paper of the Press, 2014*, which present the situation of the profession in figures. The second very succinctly goes through some of the basic and central aspects of the profession, from its essence. It is paradoxical that this series of basic principles of journalism today are included within a specialized journalism, the consolidation of which is universal, and which receive different denominations depending on the schools or the countries in which they are framed. They can range from Investigative

to Precision journalism (*Data journalism, or Fact Journalism, Big data Journalism, or others*), depending on the tools used for their development, and which have been wielded throughout the history of Spanish journalism.

The analysis of their comparison will allow us to reflect, understand and respond to the reasons why 21st century journalism is going through the situation described in the two annual and professional reports of 2014, as well as to draw some conclusions that allow us to reflect on the training that the students of the Journalism Degrees are receiving at the Spanish universities, and why not, also to re-place the journalistic profession in the place that it should never have left, in view of professional *Ethical witnessing* (Oliver, 2004; Wessels, 2010), which will allow us to propose a change of paradigm in the current journalistic profession.

In order to operationalize the concept, we have established the following dimensions of analysis: 1) valuations of the profession; 2) ratings of Public Opinion; and 3) valuations from the observation of the profession.

This perspective, together with the crossing of these data, will allow us to establish a comparative analysis between the principles that are fundamental in Investigative Journalism, which coincide with the negative aspects that these surveys throw to justify, on the one hand, the loss of prestige of the profession and, on the other hand , the situation which journalism goes through.

3. THE JOURNALISTIC HERITAGE

The twentieth century gave rise to the first faculties of Journalism and therefore it was very prolific in terms of establishing its principles and foundations. It is worth remembering that what we know today as Investigative Journalism is what was originally Journalism, without more attributes. Jose Maria Caminos Marcet (1997a) pointed out that investigative journalism is characterized by its depth and therefore requires a lot of dedication and time. It is a constant search with more and greater demands and broader horizons. Pepe Rodríguez (1996) points out the importance of investigative journalism today because it creates its own information: elaborated after the investigative process. It is good journalism that investigates, analyzes, contrasts, verifies and publishes.

On the other hand, Petra María Secanella (1986) pointed out that investigative journalism intends to propose reforms or expose injustices, disclose frauds and corruptions, or express abandonments of institutions, making known everything that the public authorities want to hide. In turn, Héctor Borrat (1989) proposed to consider five fundamental premises: 1) its exercise in a specific field that the social actors wish to keep hidden; 2) you investigate other people's interests (you cannot be a judge and a party at the same time); 3) the disclosure of the results is decided in an extraordinary way, according to a specific strategy that enhances their goals; 4) this disclosure may be total or partial, depending on the medium; and 5) this strategic disclosure does not imply that one must always act in the same way.

A few years later, Montserrat Quesada (1996) pointed out the characteristics of precision journalism, consisting of: 1) find out unpublished data on topics of social relevance; 2) denounce, after verification, illegal or allegal facts or situations; 3) use a double-contrast system of data: documentary and independent sources, with zero

risk; 4) break the silence of the official sources involved by forcing their response to public opinion.

To Ramón Reig (2000), these characteristics are essential: a) observation and critical capacity of the journalist, even better accompanied by his professional experience; b) long and deep work process, due to its complexity; c) Novelty in the subject or originality in its treatment, at least; d) knowledge and support of the medium in which he works, given that the results will not be immediate.

From these theoretical assumptions together with the distillation of the practical task, this decalogue could be extracted:

- 1) the search for a hidden truth, the information about which citizens have the right to know.
- 2) mistrusts the official information sources and is not interested in the information provided in press releases. He is not interested in the "pseudo-events" generated by communication cabinets of different organizations / institutions. His interest is in what they do not say.
- 3) the methods of the social sciences are used, in addition to databases, surveys, statistical data, etc. (*Data, big data, precision or fact journalism*).
- 4) the investigative journalist seeks relationships with anonymous people or not, but they are not necessarily part of the usual circuits of information, who wish to remain anonymous.
- 5) his agenda is made up of people who are not regular informants. He needs people who have data on the subject and are willing to collaborate with him.
- 6) never publishes a scoop for the sake of giving the data in an exclusive. He is used to exclusive information, the result of his work.
- 7) is quite independent of the sources of information. His starting point is the systematic rejection of official versions.
- 8) His information is usually unknown by the media of the competition. That is the informative value of the investigation: its texts are exclusive.
- 9) is ahead of the facts themselves, bringing to light what is hidden, creating informative news of his own. It is an active journalism and news generator where the news can serve as a clue to start an investigation, but it is never an end in itself.
- 10) is oblivious to the pressures of closing time and daily work planning. This journalist works on his own, as a team, and publishes his texts when he has completed his investigation, strategically.

Once its characteristics are described, the comparison becomes inevitable and it is so evident that this painting, which contrasts in a clear way. The column on the left shows the practices of investigative journalism, that is, what *should be and is not always*, while the column on the right shows *what is, and not what should be*.

4. ON THE DRIFT OF THE JOURNALISTIC PROFESSION

In addressing the drift that the journalistic profession has been taking, it is advisable to highlight the most important data that show the painful situation that the profession is going through. After analyzing the *Journalistic Profession Report, 2014*, based on a wide survey carried out among journalism professionals and carried

out by the Press Association of Madrid (APM), Corral (2015) collects these remarkable data:

a) unemployment and job insecurity. It is considered that, since 2008, 11,875 jobs have been destroyed and precariousness is present even in the employed journalists.

b) a significant number of journalists have had to move to communication agencies or communication departments of public bodies, which in 2014 reached 47% of the total number of employed journalists.

c) journalists have been forced to launch their own media, due to both unemployment and precariousness. After different vicissitudes, the number of media that remain open is 406.

d) journalists place their hope on the Internet with increasing force. The average is close to 70%, and among those who work in digital media this figure rises to 90%.

e) among the latest promotions of graduates in Journalism, 47% of them have been looking for their first job for one to two years.

f) communication remunerates professionals better than journalism, which means that the aforementioned percentage is increasing.

g) women continue to suffer wage discrimination.

h) female executive journalists reach 36% in digital media,

i) 31% of journalists are self-employed, and 69% work for others.

j) the number of media closed in Spain begins to decrease. New ones appear (mostly digital).

Public opinion negatively values the professional practice of journalists, using the arguments for this. In this sense, David Corral (2015, p.38) makes a statement that is as realistic as devastating: "The assessment and confidence of Spanish society in journalists and in their work in the last three years has been and is low and discouraging. Even so, citizens think that they have a significant influence on the country's politics, economy, sports and culture." This description of professional reality being an assertion that cannot be questioned and is also supported by the statistical data collected and prepared by the Press Association of Madrid for *the Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession, 2014*, cannot go unnoticed, they have to be considered very seriously by professionals in general, but even more so by the trainers of the professionals, that is, by the professors in the Degrees of Journalism of all Spanish universities.

In this sense, it is important to highlight the opinions coming from extensive professional lives. Thus, when Lozano Bartolozzi (2013, p.30) talks about the evolution of the media: "that confirms two evident realities: its metamorphosis and its interactivity", they do not justify the type of journalism that is being done and, therefore, the assessment citizens make of it.

It is not at all a problem of theoretical conception, given that the theorists of twentieth-century journalism have constantly and in detail postulated the presuppositions and principles around which the profession has to pivot. It would be good to remember some of them, such as Hector Borrat (1989), when he spoke of the newspaper as a political actor, or Jordi Fontcuberta (1993) who proposed what news should be, which should be the keys to understanding reality and the world, or Luis

Nuñez Ladevéze (1991) when he recommended us the indications for good journalism, or Petra María Secanella (1986) who dared to speak about *investigation journalism*, or already in the last years of the century, José Luis Dader (1997) will present to us his: *Precision journalism, as a way to discover news*. It cannot be considered a truism to say that, if all these recommendations had been fulfilled, the current situation of journalism would not quite probably be as it is. The reality shows that, in the second decade of the 21st century, the profession is clearly discredited, as the latest Reports of the Journalistic Profession, which do not present a corporatist view but a realistic and critical one, prove.

Certainly, the implementation of ICTs is already a fact, which has changed the praxis. It has been a few years since Marc Prensky (2001) spoke of *digital natives* and *immigrants* and, therefore, coined the terms that are already in the vocabulary of the profession and although he referred to the university community (educators and students). While students were "native speakers," the rest, the unborn in the digital world, would always be "Digital Immigrants." Likewise, it does not seem too risky to affirm, in line with Meso Ayerdi (2002), that: given that the press and later radio and television made possible a massive but unidirectional communication, the Internet and digital journalism break that trend. Current trends (digital television and radios, Internet, etc.) allow us to think that, in the short term, all journalists may end up being "digital", regardless of whether it is their personal choice or decision or not. To this statement it should be added that, although in 2015 it is already a reality, this is not the reason for the professional loss of prestige. Admittedly, habits and routines have changed, both in journalism professionals and in their audiences / readers.

5. DISCUSSION. RETHINKING THE PROFESSION

The journalistic profession today is facing great challenges, in which the dilemma persists. The concern is international and affects all levels, channels and genres of the profession. In fact, in the face of the emergence of a need for transparency, claimed in many cases by national laws, the change appears in some regulations and decrees, from the passage of the spirit of "public service" to that of "public interest", which may be substantially different and allows people to act differently under a legal umbrella.

The title of Huey's work is striking; Nisenholtz and Sagan, Paul (2014): *Undertow. What happened with the business of journalism*, because the term *undertow* appears as a new space that aims at the disappearance of the old space to give rise to a new one. In this new space, you have to know how to float and swim, and above all have a great resistance, a heroic resilience. Instead, they themselves point out: (p.23) "the importance of the institutional information media for democracy and the public good", while adding that "there is fierce disagreement".

As previously mentioned, the current trends in praxis are directed towards instant, low cost, transcription journalism, *churnalism*, or whatever you want to call it, there is no doubt that good journalism exists, and not marked by individual protagonism, but with a vocation for public service. In this sense, Víctor Sampedro (2014, page 61) affirmed that: "Good journalism, like good medicine, is alien to

personalities. It does not matter who writes a piece of information. Equally irrelevant is the doctor who prescribes a prescription, if it presupposes knowledge and deontology. (...) We need journalists who remain at the head of the public. " These words recently pronounced, which do not stray at all from others that Walter Lippmann (2011, p.39) said some decades ago: "The ordering of the news is not made by a single man but by a crowd, which in the end is curiously unanimous both in its selection and in its emphasis. Once you know the party and the social affiliations of a newspaper, you can quite certainly predict the perspective under which you will present the information. A perspective that is not at all completely deliberate."

The facts must be known so that the opinions crystallize and consolidate: "True opinions can prevail only if the facts to which they refer are known; if they are not known, the false ideas are as effective -or even more so- than the real ones "(Lippmann, 2011, p.58), which instructs us to inform properly, for which we must adequately have trained the future journalists. Hence the convenience and even the need to reflect on the role of universities, as factories of journalists.

As (Gómez and Patiño, 2013) said at another moment, it would be desirable that the good professional of conventional journalism is also so after mutation or transformism to "the digital", and that the fact of being a "neo-born" or "native" journalist does not guarantee the quality of journalistic work in relation to the vocation of public service, critical spirit and social responsibility. Having said that, it would be desirable that the mutation or the journalistic transformation, propitiated or promoted by the new technologies, affect exclusively the professional tools and the style of "digitized" journalistic writing, but it should never transform the essence of "being a good professional". The good professional should be in all bodies: land, sea and air: he must be an *amphibious* journalist, a term coined or at least made known by Arianna Huffington, she states that: The media industry crosses its *Amphibian Age*, where models and practices of the 'old' and 'new' order coexist. She states: "When we hire traditional journalists in the United States, we make sure they are what we call amphibians, that they can walk on land and swim on the sea. We need that kind of amphibious journalists for the future, because we want them to embrace the great traditions of classical journalism on the one hand, in terms of accuracy, verification, equanimity, search for truth or informative impact, and at the same time we feel very comfortable with the new rules of the road, the real time, the technology that allows us to interact or the participation of the readers. And not everyone is prepared for both facets" (Mancini, 2011, 2011a). In short, they must be able to work on land or sea conditions, as the name suggests, which requires an adaptation to the environment and the ability to combine traditional journalistic techniques and uses together with the most advanced of the digital age: ie the *Amphibian Age*. (Gómez and Patiño, 2012).

6. THE FUNCTION OF UNIVERSITIES

Given that we are working with the latest data from *the Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession*, 2014 and regarding that 16.8% of respondents denounce the poor training of journalists. At least, it will be useful to reflect on this situation that affects both professors and students alike, and therefore the whole society. Javier

Fernández del Moral (2015, p.170), in the chapter dedicated to the faculties of journalism in the *White Paper of the Press*, 2014 states that: "Once the way to manage the human thought has succeeded in defining the university institution, this will evolve continuously, universities will appear and disappear, but the most logical thing is to think about their permanence as an institution. It is true that, with the perspective of millennia, the different universities are ephemeral, just as stars are ephemeral with the perspective of the light years, but in no case it seems sensible to think that humanity can do without universities.

These positive and full-of-hope words should be complemented with the words of Giovanni di Lorenzo, when he picked up the prize that the *Diario Madrid Foundation* had given him this year. This journalist from the weekly *Die Zeit* represents a remarkable case of professional success, surpassing half a million copies with a product of quality and rigor. His speech can be summarized in:

- 1) Do not discredit us, or discredit our own products.
- 2) Realistically assess our strengths
- 3) it is necessary to offer guidance and support to our recipients
- 4) cooperation between our different products is becoming more and more necessary, not prioritizing ones and letting others die
- 5) you have to take advantage of times of change to try new contents
- 6) you have to change calmly, avoiding losing readers because of the obsession to win others
- 7) the media have to organize public discourse
- 8) we have to be politically relevant and differentiating without resorting to easy and deceptive headlines
- 9) it is not necessary, nor is it convenient, to invent a new scandal to draw in each issue, it is enough for our journalists to be brave and independent
- 10) we have to fight permanently for freedom (Fernández del Moral, 2015).

Before presenting some conclusions, it is convenient to ask, as García Avilés (2007) asks himself, if journalism, or at least, traditional journalism has died or is going to die...

7. AS A WAY OF CONCLUSION

The approaches and assessments presented herein allow us to conclude that journalism has not died, especially because it is not convenient that this be the case, especially because: 1) without (good) journalism, there is no (real) democracy; 2) without (real) democracy, there is no (good) journalism, 3) without them, there is no public opinion (criticism), but also we would have no excuse to let it die.

These assessments allow us to conclude that a new paradigm of journalism is absolutely necessary. In essence, it is easily verified that there are great technological changes, both in professional routines and in production that lighten and facilitate the task. Therefore, it is worth asking whether, in addition to facilitating the task, they also lighten the differentiating quality of the media. Each time there are more

sources, also democratized by the use of new technologies, which unify the final journalistic product, while lightening it, in all senses.

With relation strictly to the level or to the journalistic quality of the journalism students, from the professional *ethical witnessing*, from which it is possible to watch the journalistic training in the different Spanish, public or private universities. If, according to the considered estimations, it is considered that, according to 16.8% of the interviewees, journalists are not well trained, it will be necessary to reflect on this and implement some corrective measures that make it possible to correct those deficiencies that have been pointed out in the form of a decalogue in the previous section. These recommendations include the need to review the quality and quantity of training that is being offered in the respective Faculties of Journalism, a task that deserves an upcoming work. The future of journalism, both in its training phase and in that of professional development, is open and offers a wide panoply of training options.

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