Methodology and Design Processes of the Report on the 11 March Attacks in Madrid

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This issue of Quaderns del CAC *analyses the programming and particularly the news strategies of four television stations during the terrorist attacks of 11 March 2004 in Madrid, a situation the Council classified as warranting special requirements* [1]*.*

Without disregarding other issues, the articles focus from different angles on aspects relating to respect for social and political pluralism, an issue that hypothetically impacted voting preferences in the general elections of 14 March.

This article will attempt to clarify the methodology followed in Report No. 27/2004 entitled Considerations by the CAC on the Television Treatment of the 11 March Attacks in Madrid and Subsequent Events Through to the Spanish Elections of 14 March*, which the CAC presented before the Parliament of Catalonia on 6 April and which constitutes the empirical basis of this issue of* Quaderns del CAC.

However, to make this clarification, it is necessary to do more than simply present a collection of operating definitions and list of the analysis tools employed. First we have to make a number of reflections on the pre-methodology, i.e., the processes that take place in a public organisation like the CAC, which by law has the function of ensuring respect for audiovisual content in line with the legislation in force (which includes social and political pluralism) when faced with an event of the scope of the 11 March bombings. The explanation of the process of how the study came about will contribute towards understanding both the final result and the simple relationships of a series of methodological concepts.

That is why this article will focus firstly on the dynamics generated within the CAC's technical services department beginning 8 a.m. on 11 March when faced with an exceptional and unanticipated event such as the Madrid bombings; the way in which questions of investigation were established (*what are we looking at?)* and whether they were accepted or rejected according to the Council's guidelines; the need to establish analysis parameters *(how shall we look at it?)*; the tension between the urgency to release information and the reliability of the report. Finally, we will look at the methodological tools employed that make it possible to understand the concepts present in the other articles included in this issue of *Quaderns del CAC.*

It is important to remember the political context at the time of the attacks, i.e., the electoral campaign for the general elections, which had a number of special implications with regard to the role of television stations in disseminating political information.

"Let us see if we can clear up what is happening in Madrid this morning, because there are a number of explosions occurring in different places. To begin with, in order of the events, we know there was an explosion at Atocha Station (…) and that there were an indeterminate number of deaths. Also, at practically the same time there were explosions on three different trains in the suburban railway station of Santa Eugenia, also in Madrid. However, the fire brigade has just said it has heard of another explosion at the National Assembly in Madrid".

Tele-5, 8.08 a.m. on Thursday, 11 March

"One of the four explosions that have been heard was recorded at Atocha this morning. We are talking… and bearing in mind that the information coming in is somewhat

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disorganised and chaotic… we may be talking of 40 deaths at the station".

TV3, 8.59 a.m. on Thursday, 11 March

1. What are we looking at?

11 March was the penultimate day of the electoral campaign for the general elections. For the CAC's technical services department, an electoral campaign has two main repercussions: it involves an increased workload for the analysis team monitoring pluralism (a quantitative analysis is made of the interventions by the political parties in station programming) and it involves a very demanding timetable for releasing specific reports (the Council receives the corresponding information each day). If a very well defined work system is established as a matter of course, during electoral periods the routines become even stricter, given that the constant flow of information means that any blunder could damage the work plan.

This was the context in which the information about a possible terrorist attack in Madrid began to arrive. The first report, at around 8 a.m., spoke of a number of explosions on a suburban train in Madrid. As is the norm in these cases, the stations did not offer any hypothesis as fact and did not venture any unconfirmed figures on victims. With differences in format and timing, by around 9 a.m., the scale of the disaster was beginning to be clear and all the stations (in this article I am referring to TV3, TVE-1, Tele-5 and Antena 3 TV) modified their programming schedules, although using different strategies (see the article entitled *Television Programming on 11 and 12 March*).

This was not the first time the Catalonia Broadcasting Council had tackled an event it considered 'critical' in terms of the role of television stations and which required special attention. The start of the war in Iraq (and the monitoring of the first 72 hours of information[2]), the treatment of the news reports on the siege at a school in Hospitalet de Llobregat (18/11/02)[3] and the coach accident in Huelva (14/11/01)[4] had, at the time of the events, involved changes to work routines to focus efforts on a particular event where information had to be released immediately.

However, there was one notable difference between 11 March and the events mentioned above: in the case of Hospitalet and the coach accident in Huelva, the objects of analysis (i.e., respect for privacy of minors and treatment of personal tragedies, respectively) did brook any doubt, while the study into the war in Iraq, because it was a war that had been previously announced, meant it could be planned beforehand.

On the other hand, at 9 a.m. on 11 March the question was 'What are we looking at?' or, in more academic terms: what is the object of the study? News treatment from the point of view of personal tragedies?[5] The news reaction of the TV stations? The impact of the events on the electoral campaign? Certainly the idea of an analysis that covered *all* these aspects by *all* four stations and with short release times seemed, in practice, impossible.

The perspective that arose as time went by, once the nature and political repercussions of the bombings became known, very clearly suggested that the report had to deal above all with respect for political pluralism in the news. During the period that began with the Madrid bombings and ended with the election night on 14 March, the object of the study was not clear at all.

According to notes made at the time on the processes for designing the report, at 11 a.m. on the day of the attacks, the analysis service staff was called to a crisis meeting to release the procedures guide. The meeting resulted in a preliminary team of 3 analysts and 11 monitors, which would later be modified in number and composition. The technical services department was asked by the Council to carry out an extensive analysis of the programming on the morning of 11 March to prepare a preliminary approximation of the behaviour of the TV stations. From then on, it was possible to assess the most important points to be analysed with better criteria. The routines inherent to monitoring an electoral campaign were thus interrupted.

2. How shall we look at it?

According to the first procedures guide, released at 11 a.m., the purpose of the report would be to analyse "the news attention and the presence of political and non-political actors", and the analysis parameters were established as news time devoted to the attacks, the sources of information quoted in the account of the events and the speaking time

of the actors. The study universe would be "all free-to-air stations" and the report would be structured around three blocks of viewing times: 7.30 to 9 a.m., 9 to 11 a.m. and 11 a.m. to 12 midnight.

The final report featured two minor changes to procedures, made on Friday 12 March and then (in the definitive version) on Wednesday 17 March.

In short, the first change concerned the variables to be taken into account after 9 a.m. on 11 March and throughout the days of 12 and 13 March, eliminating the reference to the sources of information and introducing *statements* and *public appearances*, and the variables were temporarily limited to the days of 11 to 13 March. The definitive design, particularly with the perspective of the eventful day of reflection, resulted in the report focusing on studying respect for pluralism.

Leaving aside the logical evolution of a study in the light of events as they occur, it is interesting to analyse how the CAC had the *structural* ability to prepare analysis parameters between 9 and 11 a.m. on 11 March and begin to work immediately. A subsequent reflection suggests a number of conditions that help explain how it was able to do so:

The existence of previously operationalised concepts that had been tested repeatedly in previous studies. For example, the concepts *speaking time, news time* and *political actor or group* were adopted from the systematic reports on pluralism. The analysis of *news response* (speed in reporting an event) was inherent to studies such as those devoted to the war in Iraq or the television coverage of the assassination of Ernest Lluch.

Previous experiences in situations of analysing isolated and exceptional events had created a *modus operandi* for crisis situations within the heart of the CAC.

The eminently descriptive nature of the reports prepared by the CAC's technical services department had also contributed to the creation of valid viewing routines for very different reports.

These three factors point in the same direction: over the years of its existence, the CAC has developed a series of methodological tools that make it possible to apply certain analysis protocols with proven speed and reliability. The tools are peculiar in so far as they are based on a number of theoretical considerations, characterised by their orientation towards immediate applicability.

However, 11 March involved a series of factors that made preparing and developing the report more difficult.

Most importantly, as I said before, was the fact that the attacks coincided with the electoral campaign. Giving priority to the report on the events in Madrid meant leaving aside, even if only temporarily, the monitoring reports on the electoral campaign.

Secondly, despite the existence of already defined concepts, the preliminary analyses highlighted the need to define two new concepts (*statement* and *public appearance*) as indicators of the news attention the stations gave to the public institutions of the State and the different political formations.

Thirdly, there was the question of the state of mind of the technical services team, forced to watch and describe hours of information about the attacks. Something that is theoretically a non-participative task of observation (i.e., watching and analysing television content) became an *emotionally* participative observation. 11 March was not the sort of environment most favourable to methodological reflection.

The final structure of Report No. 27/2004, *Television Reports on the 11 March Attacks in Madrid and Subsequent Events Through to the Spanish Elections of 11 March,* was thus the result of all these favourable and unfavourable factors and the context explained above. This issue of *Quaderns del CAC* does not simply compartmentalise and distribute into articles the information contained in the report but aims to re-examine and restructure a large part of the information presented. The articles deal with events that range from the modification of the programming schedules on 11 and 12 March in response to the events in Madrid (*Television Programming on 11 and 12 March*), to the different approaches the television programmes took towards the tragedy (*Television Information on 11 and 12 March*) and the presence of the actors with regard to speaking time (*The Actors on Screen*). The day of reflection before the general elections of 14 March warrants individual attention (*Television Programming and Information on the Day of Reflection*), as well as the monitoring of election night (*Information on the Results of 14 March).*

All of the articles followed the methodology set out below.

3. Study Method

3.1. Study Universe

The content broadcast by TV3, TVE-1, Tele-5 and Antena 3 TV on 11, 12, 13 and 14 March in the following blocks of viewing times:

Thursday 11 March: 7.30 a.m. to 12 midnight
Friday 12 March: 8 a.m. to 12 midnight
Saturday 13 March: 8 a.m. to 1.30 a.m. Sunday 14 March
Sunday 14 March: electoral information beginning 7.40 p.m.

3.2. Definition of Concepts

News Time

The time resulting from the sum total of the duration of the news (on news bulletins, special news reports and other programmes) referring to the Madrid bombings.

Speaking Time

The time resulting from the sum total of the duration of the sequence where an actor intervenes as the subject, making an insert (insertion of images and voice of a political or non-political actor, without any type of locution on the part of the journalist). As such, this time measures the direct presence of the actors, with their voices and images, on the air.

Intervention Frequency

The number of times an actor appears on a news bulletin, special news report or other programme.

Actor

Person who appears on a programme and given speaking time. In the case of news bulletins, actors are considered to be all the people who intervene through an insert. In the other programmes, the term covers the representatives of associations, political parties and public institutions.

Groups of Actors

Groups are large categories that allow the different actors who meet the defined criteria to be included within them. Actors appear not just individually but in groups and make it possible for us to discover information referring to the different groups that have been established.

We thus established a first major category that grouped together political actors. We can distinguish between two types of groups of political actors: institutional groups, e.g., the Spanish Government, the Spanish administration, the Parliament of Catalonia, etc., and groups of parties or political formations that act in Catalonia or Spain, e.g. PP, PSOE, IU, PSC, CiU, ERC, PPC, ICV, etc.

The second major category established in terms of groups of actors concerns non-political actors. These were grouped into the following categories: cultural actors; actors from the health sector; economic actors; actors from the sports sector; neighbourhood associations; professional associations and collectives; the Catholic church; experts; the associative sector; business organisations; non-Catholic religions and churches; unions; universities and the education sector and others.

Information Format

Structure of the information, whether on-set, with live images from the events as they occur, or telephone connections. This variable was applied to the viewing hours of 7.30 to 9 a.m. on 11 March.

Source of the Information

Origin of the information provided. This variable was applied to the viewing hours of 7.30 to 9 a.m. on 11 March.

Statement

Intervention of an actor as a subject with speaking time in the television programming, independently of whether it takes the form of an insert of interview.

Public Appearance

Press gathering called by a political actor belonging to an institutional group or party.

Witness Information

Making the concept of witness information operable led to it being defined as news stories structured around statements by victims, their relatives or loved ones, and all the occasional actors included in stories to express their state of mind, experience or support for the victims. For the

purposes of this report, it included information where at least 75% of the inserts corresponded to this description.

The following two concepts were used only in the article that refers to information broadcast on election night.

Live Crosses

This occurred when a journalist from a station was present at the place where events occurred, i.e., in this case the party headquarters or data centres of the State and the Generalitat, in order to follow the news live. The images of the electoral headquarters recorded were not analysed in this report.

Candidatures

The concept of candidature was introduced as an exceptional feature to group together the speaking time of the political groups that supported the same candidate to the presidency of the Spanish government.

4. Dissemination of the Report

Report 27/2004, *Television Reports on the 11 March Attacks in Madrid and Subsequent Events Through to the Spanish Elections of 11 March* was approved by the Plenary Council on 7 April 2004.

Up to 6 analysts and 11 monitors worked on viewing and analysing the report at different times, spending a total of 1,100 working hours.

The report was officially sent to the Parliament of Catalonia, the Government of the Generalitat and the stations that were analysed. It was later made available to the public on the CAC[6] website.

Notes

1 *Considerations by the CAC on the Television Treatment of the Attacks in Madrid of 11 March 2004 and Subsequent Events Through to the Elections of 14 March.*

2 Report i4/2003 *Quantitative Analysis of the News Treatment of the War in Iraq during the First 72 Hours of Conflict*
www. audiovisual.net/recerca/informe 28-03-03.pdf)

3 Report i19/2002 *News Treatment of the Siege at a School in Hospitalet de Llobregat on 18/11/02*
www. audiovisual.net/recerca/informe 19-02.pdf

4 Report i28/2001 *News Treatment of the Coach Accident in Villarrasa on 14/11/01*

5 The Council has prepared a number of recommendations on the news treatment of personal tragedies (21/2/2001) www.audiovisualcat.net/recerca/recomanacions1.html

6 Between 8 April 2004, the date of publication, and 30 June, the document was downloaded 4,711 times.