

## Muslim journalists in Western media: Maria TV reported by Spanish Telecinco, CNN and the BBC

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### Abstract

This article analyses and compares, in terms of five analytical categories, how three Western news channels (Telecinco, CNN and the BBC) cover a news story about a new Egyptian channel called Maria TV presented by Muslim women wearing the niqab. Although the Western TV channels narrate the same event, they build different representations of reality. The paper concludes with a reflection on how, in focusing on different aspects of the story, the Western TV channels inevitably distort a holistic view of the event.

Keywords: gender; journalism; Egypt; niqab; television; Muslim women.

### Introduction

To speak of identities and otherness is to consider two basic notions: first, in forming one's own identity one establishes some kind of otherness, and second, both identities are constructions. The task is, therefore, to consider how identities are constructed, who constructs them and why (Rodrigo-Alsina and Medina-Bravo, 2016; Rodrigo-Alsina and Medina-Bravo, 2013; Silva, 2013). The media is inevitably implicated in the construction of identities, differences and otherness (Castelló, 2010; Ebrahimi and Salaverría, 2015). Since journalists are professionals in building narratives, they must exercise rigour regarding their representations, as the construction of otherness by individuals will be conditioned by the sources of information available to them and their possibilities for interacting with others.

So, what happens when there is no interaction with people assigned a certain identity and when virtually the only source of information is the media? This is undoubtedly when the media's capacity for influence is greatest. The less experience a viewer has in reflecting on identity as a social construct, and the less plural and reliable the information available about otherness, the greater the influence of the media — we can suppose — in that it becomes the main information source. Hence the importance of televised discourse.

In this article we analyse and compare the narratives constructed around the same news story (the emergence of a new Egyptian TV channel, Maria TV) by three western TV channels (Telecinco, CNN and the BBC) with the objective of reflecting on the risks inherent in the construction of otherness. We propose that the analysis that follows could be a useful pedagogical exercise to help teachers and students of audiovisual literacy and of media production. It is a kind of case study that could be useful in the classroom, as a

pedagogical exercise.

### **The depiction of Muslim Woman in Western media**

Moore et al. (2008) pointed to how the British mass media tend to focus on religious issues (debates on the sharia, the way women dress, etc.) when reporting on British Muslims, thereby deepening the chasm between British Muslims and British non-Muslims. Such cultural reductionism is a new form of religious intolerance (Nussbaum, 2013; Sen 2007). Equally relevant is Sen's (2007) discussion of the growing trend to attempt to understand humanity solely from a religious perspective, thereby responding to the same kind of oversimplification: 'civilization' is replaced by 'religion' and people's other affiliations are overlooked. Referring to the 'Muslim world' is a dangerous oversimplification that focuses excessively on religious identity while disregarding the multitude of other identifies — whether shared or different — of Islam devotees within the 'Muslim world'.

The growing Islamophobia of Western societies has consolidated an image of a demonic 'other' slotted into the single and static identity of Muslim — an identity perceived, moreover, to be threatening for the West (Afshar, 2013; Murtuja, 2005; Sen, 2007). This kind of stereotyping, fiercely criticized by Said (1997), has been widely disseminated by the dominant discourse of the media, which presents the 'Islamic world' in an unqualified way as socially rigid and rooted in the past, oppressed by the weight of tradition and in direct opposition to the secular West, symbol of freedom and modernity (Afshar, 2013; Blair, 2012; Contractor, 2012; Doyle, 2011). In many insidious ways, the idea is reinforced that the Muslim religion is not a religion but a radical and intolerant threat to the West.

In this context of growing Islamophobia, various studies have demonstrated the complexity surrounding how Muslim women assume the construction of their own identity (Dwyer, 2000; Huertas and Martínez, 2013; Touraine, 2007). How they renegotiate their religion, the weight of family tradition and Western ideals on an ongoing basis has been demonstrated by Dwyer (2000), who studied the gender implications of the construction of a hybrid identity by young British Muslims of Southeast Asian origin. Adopting the hijab, for instance, may be interpreted as active resistance to pressures to Westernize, as illustrated by Abu-Lughod (2002, 2013). Further illustrating this inherent complexity is the study by Shirazi and Mishra (2010) of European and North American Muslim women: for the former, wearing the niqab represented personal resistance to pressures to assimilate, whereas the latter considered it acceptable to dispense with the niqab, often while defending right of a woman to wear it if she wished.

In media representations of this issue, Muslim women are a silenced 'other' (Torres, 2009) enclosed within the walls of their homes, veiled and subject to their husbands or the men in their family (Ali, 2003; Read, 2003). In most Western media discourse, Muslim women are represented as concealed, passive, non-autonomous individuals controlled by men and religion — incontrovertible proof, for some, of the incompatibility between Islamic and European values (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Doyle, 2011; Macdonald, 2006; Martín Muñoz, 2010; Nawar, 2008). Their invisibility and consequent lack of recognition is still an issue in certain media that aspire to multiculturalism (Nash and Marre, 2001). When it comes to women, it is quite common for Western media to reflect sub-otherness and stereotypical perspectives of cultural diversity

(Bying, 2010; Contractor, 2012; Runnymede Trust, 1997). This is undoubtedly the result of an identity overload, as women are ultimately made accountable for tradition and respect for the past (Dwyer, 2000). The paternalistic view of Muslim women (Coene and Longman, 2008) is that, in comparison with liberated Western women, they are repressed. Not taken into account, however, is that the Muslim woman may — or may not — opt for a more Western lifestyle and that violence towards women is not limited to any one religion or geographical area.

The hijab, the niqab and the burka (see note 1), as indicators of social class, religion, ethnic origins and gender, have inevitably become central emblems in a growing Islamophobia — a newsworthy item for Western media and a source of tension between communities (Doyle, 2011; Hoodfar, 2003; Sloan, 2011; Welch, 2007). Rasmussen (2013) criticizes Western societies for their reductionist oversimplifications of the 'Muslim world' and 'Muslim women'. The Muslim woman, in fact, is doubly discriminated against: as a woman and as a Muslim.

This work aims to reflect on such oversimplifications by analysing the discourse strategies used to present a news story about a new Egyptian channel staffed by female journalists (Maria TV). It is a kind of case study that could be useful in the classroom, as a pedagogical exercise. This exploration will enable us to highlight how journalists, in developing and transmitting a news story, may develop discourses generated from both androcentric and ethnocentric stances.

### **Objectives and methodology**

The roots of this research are in a funded project to analyse the aims and values communicated in newcasts in six Spanish TV channels between May 15 and July 15 2012. More than four thousand news stories from two national commercial (Telecinco and Antena 3), one national public (La 1) and three regional (Canal Sur, Telemadrid and TV3) TV channels were analysed. We coded all the news stories, and focused on those related to technology, religion, gender, sexuality and interculturality. One of the news stories related to religion caught our attention. It was one about a new Egyptian channel, called Maria TV, broadcasted by the commercial Telecinco. Telecinco is one of the most popular TV channels in Spain. Its programming mainly consists of films, series, entertainment and junk talk shows. Their newcasts are often considered as sensationalist, and more than 60% of the complaints sent to the Spanish Committee of Self-Regulation are addressed to this channel (Guerrero-Solé, Besalú and López-González, 2014).

The news story about Maria TV reported on the emergence of a new TV channel in post-Mubarak Egypt. Journalist women in niqab were depicted following the usual sensationalism of its newcasts. None of the other five TV channels analysed talked about Maria TV, and we decided to perform an exploratory search on the Internet for other international channels that covered the appearance of this new channel (we used Google.com, and the search was performed in May, 2014). We used several keywords such as Maria TV and its different forms (Mariya, Marya), 'women in niqab' or 'journalist in niqab'. We found several written news stories in international online newspapers, and two TV news stories broadcasted by the British BBC and the American CNN. Considering the presumable different approach to the story by the three channels, we decided to perform a comparative analysis by means of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Despite the fact that the size of the sample could be considered small, we thought that the action described (women in niqab

working as TV journalists) deserved a special attention. An academic approach to women in niqab in Salafist satellite TV has been already done by Hussein (2015). In her work, the author criticizes the fact that international TV channels did not properly describe the social changes that accompanied the so-called Arab Spring, nor the real reasons and causes why women wear niqab on TV. Maria TV, which belongs to the Ummah Channel, was — at the time of the news story — preparing its first broadcast, which went out on the first day of Ramadan 2012 (Batrawy 2012). Since then, however, the channel was censored several times and was finally banned once the military officer Abdul Fatah Al-Sisi took power in July 2013. Broadcasting for four hours a day and targeted at Muslim women, it is presented by female journalists wearing the niqab.

To situate the analysed news stories in context, while Mubarak (who succeeded Anwar el-Sadat) was in power in Egypt there were various prohibitions regarding use of the niqab, such as the edict by the Egyptian Ministry for Education in 1994 that prohibited its use in universities (Herrera, 2001) and in the media, especially on TV. The 1970s and 1980s had been characterized by a phenomenon called re-veiling when, for social, political and economic reasons, millions of Muslim women in the Middle East adopted the veil. Their dress, a form of protest against the hegemony of Western values, was associated with anti-colonial movements and with certain Islamic movements offering incentives to Muslim women who wore Islamic dress (for a complete description of the re-veiling phenomenon, see Patel, 2012).

Egypt in particular has been the backdrop for dispute between those that support and oppose the use of the niqab. There is, for example, dissension regarding the use of niqab within the Muslim Brotherhood, who mostly, however, believe that women should wear the hijab. Maria TV was launched soon after the rise of Muslim Brotherhood's seizure of power with the election of Mohamed Morsi in June 2011.

We adopted the critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to our analysis to explore the role of discourse in maintaining and reinforcing ruling ideologies, which in turn shape media discourse. Despite the existence of independent media concerned to offer a critical perspective on social complexity as an alternative to hegemonic discourse, most media work to construct and reproduce reality for the establishment, which imposes its vision of the world on the dominated class (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1995). TV news programmes, in particular, quite often focus on negative issues when narrating events occurring in foreign countries, particularly developing countries (Richardson, 2007).

As pointed out by Gerbner and Gross (1976), readers/viewers/audiences develop a perception of reality from media discourses. In this sense, news broadcasts (and here we include, of course, those of Maria TV) can be considered as transmitters of cultural meanings. In our research, the three TV channel reports were analysed in terms of discourse categories (Table 1) as described by Brown and Yule (1993).

Table 1. Discourse analytical categories (adapted from Brown and Yule, 1993).

<b>Analytical category</b>	<b>Description</b>
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<i>Opener</i>	The introduction to the news story prepares the ground for how the rest of the story is expected to be interpreted.
<i>Agent identity</i>	Of interest is the lexical level of propositions and the space/voice given to agents.
<i>Topic</i>	This refers to news story topics on the semantic level.
<i>Phonetic strategy</i>	Phonetic switches are a device used to transmit information on how the story is expected to be interpreted.
<i>Duration</i>	How much time is given to the story may indicate greater or lesser newsworthiness.

Although many different aspects of the TV discourses could be analysed, we selected those that seemed most significant from the point of view of our research objectives.

The 'opener' is important because, as the first information received by the viewer, it defines how the news story will be covered. Throughout our analysis we will also refer to the initial images, although without offering any exhaustive analysis, as this would require a level of detail that is not necessary for the purposes of our research.

Another category of analysis is 'agent identity', referring to the protagonists of the news story and also to anyone else given a voice and therefore acquiring the category of information source. The category 'agent identity' illustrates how the subject of enunciation appears and how the story is constructed from different sources.

The third category is 'topic', which is superficially the same for all three channels. However, we are interested in both discursive strategy (van Dijk, 2009, p. 168) and local meaning (van Dijk, 2009, p. 169). Discursive strategies emphasize specific information; for example, semantic interpretation differs depending on whether information is transmitted in a headline or as a conclusion. Local meanings, particularly relevant for our study, reflect assumptions transmitted as implicit and unspoken information.

The fourth category is the particularly subtle one of 'phonetic strategy'. This aspect of enunciation contributes to the construction of meaning through emphasis and accentuation.

Finally, the 'duration' of the story is a possible indicator of the importance attached to it, as the time spent may reflect the perceived complexity of the issue.

Links for the analysed news stories and an English translation of the Telecinco news story are provided in the corresponding sections.

## Telecinco's approach

Telecinco: <https://youtu.be/ViNrTN889Bw>

The text is as follows (translated from Spanish): *'Egyptians will be seeing something on television that was unthinkable during the Mubarak period. Very soon, a channel presented by fully veiled women will be broadcast. They will appear, as you can see, wearing the niqab, a garment that only permits, and just barely, the presenters' eyes to be seen. They do not consider themselves to be ultraconservative, rather as quite progressive, as tradition compels them to stay at home.'*

**Opener.** The first image is of the anchorman, Pedro Piqueras, who begins narrating the news. Using the rather dramatic adjective 'unthinkable', he states that 'Egyptians will be seeing something on television that was unthinkable during the Mubarak period. [pause] Very soon ...'. Recall that Mubarak, Egypt's president until 2011, was characterized by his pro-Western politics. Hence, the news story transmits the fact that as long as the government was an ally of the West, it was 'unthinkable' that what would happen — niqab on TV — would happen, and 'very soon'. This start, the pronounced pause and the opening of the next sentence ('Very soon ....') are communicative resources intended to create expectations of something novel. This emphatic start is reinforced by intonation, which, as we will see, attaches a significance to the story that is not borne out by the level of detail or duration. This emphasis, furthermore, situates Egyptians as the active subject of the news, even though they are not mentioned again.

**Agent identity.** No voice is given to the protagonists of the news story, as the women in niqab featured in the news story do not speak. The only voice is that of the presenter (although a female voice can be heard in the background of the clip). The subject of the enunciation is the Spanish newsreader, who reflects the opinion of the women journalists as follows: 'They do not consider themselves to be ultraconservative, but rather as quite progressive, as tradition compels them to stay at home.' The proposition is interesting because it represents the answer to an implicit unformulated question: Are you ultraconservative? Topic. The story begins by highlighting something that would be 'unthinkable' in the Mubarak era, implying that this event was made possible by political changes in Egypt. The Spanish viewer is informed that this 'unthinkable' event is a TV channel run by 'fully veiled' women and is then told that these women are wearing the niqab. The expression 'and just barely' reinforces the significance of the niqab. The story ends by presenting an ideological dilemma regarding whether the journalists are 'ultraconservative', as indicated by the Spanish channel or, as self-defined, 'quite progressive'. They are indeed progressive because they are out of the home — but this is a rather weak argument for Spanish society in the 21st century. Thus, the discursive strategy is to inform viewers that the current government allows presenters to wear the niqab, with the conclusion transmitting the message that Egyptian women journalists are unaware that they are ultraconservative.

**Phonetic strategy.** The presenter continuously uses different types of phonetic intonation and emphatic silences. This facilitates the expected interpretation and keeps the focus on what is being said. For instance, the phrases 'fully veiled' and 'just barely' underline the 'oddness' of the women's clothing. Furthermore, the fact that the women are covered head to toe is not only highlighted lexically but also phonetically. The newsreader raises voice pitch and slows down when pronouncing these words ('fully veiled' at 00:12 and 'just barely' at 00:19). This phonetic modification, aimed at retaining attention, highlights the discourse

elements in a similar way to underlining or italics in a written text. The Spanish journalist thus draws attention to precisely what makes the event newsworthy.

**Duration.** Telecinco devotes 32 seconds to the news. Note, however, that in those 32 seconds Maria TV is never once mentioned by name, which might make it difficult for an interested viewer to obtain further information about this news story.

### **CNN's approach**

CNN: <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/07/31/world/africa/egypt-veiled-tv/>

**Opener.** Since the first image is of a man speaking in Arabic to the women presenter, the opener is a translation of what this man is saying: 'Talk naturally .... as if you're talking to your sister ...'. The reporter then goes on to say: 'because on Maria TV it's all about your voice'. Particularly noteworthy is his final phrase in this introduction: 'The audience will never see her face'.

**Agent identity.** The first person to appear is a man advising the journalist to speak naturally, as if to a sister. Voice is then given to Heba Seraq-Eddin, a Maria TV director and camerawoman, to Alaa Abdullah, the channel manager, and to the latter's father, Abu Islam Abdullah, owner of Ummah Channel and introduced as 'The man behind Maria TV'. Note that male information sources open and close the story, one as the adviser and the other as the owner. Hence, this channel for women is guided and controlled by men. The journalists, however, are given a voice to explain their points of view. Ian Lee, the CNN journalist who interviews Alaa Abdullah in Arabic, is also featured. As with Telecinco, the subject of the enunciation marks his disassociation from the opinions expressed by clearly identifying the source ('she says...', 'he calls...', 'he sees ...', etc). This is a journalistic strategy of disassociation from the others' views and opinions.

**Topic.** The discursive strategy unfolds in five successive shifts. First, there is a description of the main feature of the new channel: all the women staff wear the niqab. As already noted, the local meaning is that of a TV channel for women advised by a man. Second, the TV camerawoman explains that this is the only channel where she can work, as other channels do not allow journalists to wear the niqab. Implicit here is the complaint of limited work opportunities due to wearing the niqab. However, in the third part this discrimination is neutralized in a brief interview with the channel manager (Alaa Abdullah), who situates the creation of Maria TV in the context of the Arab Spring in Egypt. Here the CNN journalist reflects on the paradox that, thanks to this new freedom, conservative Islam sectors exercise freedoms that they would deny others: 'While [Alaa] Abdullah fights for greater freedom for voices like hers, she warns of giving too much freedom to others'. Thus, a certain injustice is made patent.

In the fourth part, the owner reveals what is behind Maria TV: he blames Christianity for what he calls 'society's loose morals' and criticizes heretical democracies that allow '...women to dress immodestly, work as dancers and even be Members of Parliament. For Muslims like me, this is sheer madness'. The final part of the discursive strategy points to the current financial situation of the channel — which so far broadcasts for just four hours daily — and future expectations. Maria TV is currently supported by donations, but it is hoped that 'someday Maria TV will be able to spread its conservative message 24 hours a day' (the last sentence before the byline). Unlike Telecinco with its exclusive focus on the niqab, the CNN discourse explores the ideology behind Maria TV while also drawing attention to the fact that it is undemocratic, anti-

liberal and unjust in not recognizing the freedoms of others. The last line of the CNN news story arguably may express fear of Islamic ideology or the possible threat of an Islamic state.

**Phonetic strategy.** Throughout the news story the reporter makes several intonation changes as a strategy to retain the viewer's attention. Also of note is how the American-English accent of the male journalist marks the identity of the subject of the enunciation.

**Duration.** CNN allowed 2:44 minutes for their news story, the longest time of all three channels (Telecinco, 32 seconds; the BBC 1:50 minutes). In TV terms, this can be considered a lengthy item — although, logically, length does not necessarily imply a more thorough approach.

### The BBC's approach

BBC: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-18932212>

**Opener.** The first image — of a fully veiled Maria TV presenter wearing dark glasses that hide her eyes — is perhaps the most striking of those shown by the three channels. The story begins by highlighting her clothing using the word 'unusual' (quite a descriptive adjective): 'A presenter wearing the full Islamic veil or niqab, an unusual appearance on a TV channel'. The image, therefore, is striking, whereas the verbal statement is descriptive.

**Agent identities.** In relation to the lexicon used, the reporter and other agents use the term 'munaqqabāt', which is a colloquial way of referring to women who wear the niqab. This would imply that the average viewer should probably be familiar with this term. All attention is focused on two types of agent. First, Maria TV staff are interviewed: Heba Seraq-Eddin, a Maria TV director and camerawoman, and an unidentified female employee. Second, four Maria TV viewers are given voice: a man and a woman in favour of, and a man and a woman against, the niqab on TV (alternating those in favour and those against). Whereas Telecinco gives no voice to any protagonists and CNN only gives voice to Maria TV agents, the BBC also seeks out viewers. The BBC presenter's statement suggests an attitude that (potential) viewers of the Maria TV program also deserve a voice in its assessment.

**Topic.** The discursive strategy unfolds in four parts. First the 'unusual' nature of the journalists' clothing is highlighted, more so than the actual niqab itself. Second, as happens in the CNN report, information — the difficulties of women wearing the niqab obtaining work and the lack of media outlets in which to air their views — is provided via the protagonists. Third, a new protagonist — the potential Egyptian viewers of the programme — is introduced and given voice, which has the effect of situating the event in its real context. Also transmitted is the impression that opinions are 50% for and 50% against among both men and women. The religious origin of the channel name is explained, although the concluding words make it clear that Maria TV will have to successfully compete with other channels to survive: 'It grew out of the increasing influence of Islamists following the Arabic Spring. But Maria still has to face the flood of satellite channels filling the Arab airwaves'. Implicit in this discursive strategy is an empowerment of the viewer. Finally, interesting details regarding the local meaning of the news reinforces its informative nature, specifically when broadcasting will start ('the first day of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan') and the origins of the name ('Maria is the name of one of the Prophet Mohammed's wives').

**Phonetic strategy.** The non-visible, anonymous female news reporter has a markedly Arabic accent. This

reporter is, in fact, Maha El-Gamal, an Arabic journalist employed by the BBC. Even though she is not identified by name, her accent and sex are highly significant to the story.

**Duration.** The news story lasts 1:50 minutes, that is, longer than CNN and shorter than Telecinco.

## Conclusions

The media in general, and news stories in particular, build social reality and consequently contribute to the construction of identities, both the producing culture's own and that of "the other" represented (Castelló, 2008; Sampedro, 2003; Ebrahimi and Salaverría, 2015). The three approaches to the Maria TV news story — by Telecinco, CNN and the BBC — relate the new facts to the 'Arab spring' and regime change in Egypt. All three programs, albeit in different ways, construct a post-Mubarak Egyptian identity in which women wearing the niqab stand as a prominent symbol of women's submission to men in a context of fundamentalism and, more generally, as a dominant representation of a culture that is interpreted, in the Western imagination, as backward and primitive.

That the focus of the news stories is on women journalists exercising their profession wearing the niqab also serves as a warning (Ashfar, 2013; Murtuja, 2005; Sen, 2007) regarding the risks of representing a Muslim world — as characterized by immobility and a focus on a religious tradition — in opposition to a secular and free West. The Western news reading is, thus, eminently political, but also negative: the change in regime to one no longer an ally of the West is described in terms of attributes that further accentuate differences with Western values. Our systematic critical discourse analysis throws light on three different approaches, varying in depth, to reporting the same fact.

The report by Telecinco, which seems to be approached from a gender perspective, transmits the perception that Muslim women are blissfully ignorant of their oppression by an ultraconservative religion. The phonetic strategies of the news presenter, the stereotyping of women who, moreover, are not given a voice (Torres, 2009) and the fact that the women are not presented as journalists all would indicate that the Telecinco report, in the guise of a defence of women's rights, is nothing less than an exercise realizing 'patronizing Western patriarchy' (Coene and Longman, 2008), as widely denounced by leading Muslim feminists (Hussein, 2015).

The CNN news report focuses on the 'paradoxical' situation of the journalists: they are occupationally discriminated against by their religion but, thanks to Maria TV, they can exercise their profession. The fact that the women are given a voice could potentially serve as the basis for an analysis of the complexity of the motivations of an Egyptian Muslim woman journalist wearing the niqab. However, the true focus of the CNN report soon becomes clear: Maria TV is yet another way in which radical Islam seeks to combat what is viewed as the moral decay of Western societies. Once again, the Muslim woman is not the subject but the object (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Doyle, 2011; Hoodfar, 2003) of the declared battle between West and East. Finally, the BBC report — in what we would consider to be a more in-depth approach — points to a more complex debate. Reporting from the location of the news, it not only gives voice to one of the women journalists, but also to Egyptian people in the street, thereby transmitting local opinions both in favour of and against Maria TV. The fact of giving voice to four Egyptian people would seem to be a strategy designed

to avoid a 'Westernized' focus. The question arises whether the BBC could have produced a journalistic report had the the owner of Maria TV been interviewed (as was done by CNN). That said, what seems more significant is how the British channel zooms in on a reflection on the existence and possible continuity of Maria TV. Thus, the BBC — unlike Telecinco with its rather patronizing and patriarchal Western viewpoint and CNN with its vision of a religious crusade — leads its viewers to a consideration of the globalization of business: Maria TV is a product like any other whose future will depend on the laws of supply and demand governing global capitalism.

News stories tend to build conclusive narratives that try to depict a reality understandable to viewers. The narrative itself seeks to establish the significance of the phenomenon. However, the social sciences are becoming increasingly aware of the risks involved in simplified explanations of complex phenomena. As Morin (1997: 143) points out [our translation]: "Simplification is necessary but must be relativized". He goes on as follows: "I accept conscious reduction of what is reduction, not the arrogant reduction that believes it possesses the simple truth behind the apparent multiplicity and complexity of things." Complex thinking is essential to a better understanding of other cultures because complex thinking enables us to accept different truths even if they are contradictory.

As a final consideration, our analysis of three Western TV channel reports (by Telecinco, CNN and the BBC) of the same event — the Egyptian Maria TV as a channel run by Muslim women journalists wearing the niqab — can be understood as an exercise that provokes critical reflection not only on religion, gender and the complex intersection between East and West, but also on journalistic responsibility and the risks of Manichaeism.

## Notes

1. The word hijab comes from the Arabic word *hajaba*, meaning 'hide' or 'conceal'. Sometimes referred to as 'veiling', nowadays the hijab refers generally to the modesty or demureness of veiled Muslim women. In a narrow sense, it is also the name for the scarf that Muslim women wear on their heads. The niqab is a veil covering the face (except the eyes), which some Muslim women wear as an elegant form of the hijab. It is particularly popular in the Middle East, but is also used in North Africa, Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The burqa, often called the full or Afghan burka, is a garment that entirely covers the body and face.

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