

## Three *W*'s of in-depth journalism portraying socio-environmental conflicts in Chilean television: *What* (the agenda), *who* (the sources), and *where* (the locations)\*

Las tres *Q*s del periodismo en profundidad representando desastres y conflictos socioambientales en la televisión chilena: Qué (la agenda), quiénes (las fuentes) y dónde (las locaciones)

As três *W* do jornalismo de profundidade que retratam os conflitos socioambientais na televisão chilena: O *Que* (a agenda), *Quem* (as fontes) e *Onde* (os locais)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.syp40-79.twdj>

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Received: 30 september 2020

Accepted: 01 july 2021

Published: 30 november 2021

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### Abstract:

This article offers a case study of the Chilean investigative broadcasting journalism uncovering disasters and socio-environmental conflicts. Drawn from an analysis of 17 long-form stories aired by the two main television shows on current affairs in the country, we show that in-depth reporting on Chilean television was chronicling some of the most acute environmental issues since 1990s. Indeed, almost 13 hours of footage assembly a visual memory of conflicts in a society fueled by an extractivist based economy. It is noticeable a geographic diversity when covering the environment, as well as when covering waste production and pollution. Despite a relative diversity in sources, there is a sharp unbalance on gender representation. This article addresses the much-needed research on environment and communication while most of these studies pay attention to industrialized nations. It also contributes to building a situated knowledge considering the specificities of in-depth journalism in South America.

**Keywords:** Investigative Journalism, Disasters, Socio-environmental conflicts, Television, Extractivism.

### Resumen:

Este artículo ofrece un estudio de caso del periodismo de investigación televisivo chileno que cubre desastres y conflictos socioambientales. A partir del análisis de 17 reportajes en profundidad emitidos por los dos principales programas de televisión sobre actualidad del país, mostramos que el periodismo en profundidad fue tejiendo una crónica sobre algunos de los problemas ambientales más agudos de la década de los noventa. De hecho, casi 13 horas de metraje construyen una memoria visual de los conflictos en una sociedad impulsada por una economía extractivista. Se advierte una diversidad geográfica al cubrir el medio ambiente, así como en el reporte sobre la producción de residuos y sobre la contaminación. A pesar de la relativa diversidad de fuentes, existe un fuerte desequilibrio en la representación de género. Este artículo aborda la muy necesaria investigación sobre medio ambiente y comunicación en un contexto donde la mayoría de este tipo de estudios se enfocan en las naciones industrializadas. Contribuye, también, a construir un conocimiento situado, considerando las especificidades del periodismo en profundidad en América del Sur.

**Palabras clave:** Periodismo de investigación, Desastres, Conflictos socioambientales, Televisión, Extractivismo.

### Resumo:

Este artigo oferece um estudo de caso do telejornalismo investigativo chileno na descoberta de desastres e conflitos socioambientais. A partir de análise de 17 histórias de longa-metragem veiculadas pelos dois principais programas de televisão sobre questões de atualidade no país, mostramos que as reportagens aprofundadas na televisão chilena narraram alguns dos problemas ambientais

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mais agudos desde a década de 1990. De fato, quase 13 horas de material compõem uma memória visual dos conflitos numa sociedade alimentada por uma economia de base extrativista. É notável a diversidade geográfica tanto na hora de cobrir o meio-ambiente, quanto na hora de cobrir a produção de resíduos e a poluição. Apesar de uma relativa diversidade nas fontes, há forte desequilíbrio na representação de gênero. Este artigo aborda a pesquisa muito necessária sobre o meio ambiente e a comunicação, enquanto a maioria destes estudos dá atenção às nações industrializadas. Mesmo contribui para a construção de conhecimento situado considerando as especificidades do jornalismo em profundidade na América do Sul.

**Palavras-chave:** jornalismo investigativo, calamidades, conflitos socioambientais, extrativismo.

## Introduction

A systematic review of environment and communication research published in peer-review journals between 1973 and 2017 concluded that such studies highlighted the role of media in framing environmental issues and in directing public attention on such matters (Evans & Park, 2018). Framing, for instance, works out not only through narratives and storytelling, but “in how media institutions, as stakeholders themselves, are tightly enmeshed with and weigh in globalization and commercialization processes and governance” (Christensen et al., 2018, p. 1). In other words, media define the acceptable parameters within the public debate, and also who could join it.

Nonetheless, the role of communication and media in depicting and understanding socio- environmental issues is overwhelmingly conducted in and about industrial societies and within consolidated media systems and journalistic cultures. Such unbalance between the Global North and the Global South on the field is ironic: In 2019, the countries facing major risks by climate change are those located in areas where there is less research on the issue (Eckstein, Hutfils, and Winges, 2018).

In Latin America and the Caribbean the raise of capitalism and the wealth of empires have depended upon the commercialization of commodities and people (Brown, 2012; Jenkins, 2000; Gordon and Webber, 2016; Figueroa, 2013). Hundreds of socio-environmental conflicts, where local communities and social movements mobilize against environmental impact (Temper, del Bene, and Martinez-Alier, 2015), have sprouted in the region, while social inequality and poverty intensify environmental problems (Castro, 2015). These environmental conflicts imply divergent interests and values around access and control of natural assets and the territory, the understanding of development establishes a dispute between the distinct actors, as well. Whereas differing conceptions about the territory, nature, and the environment are displayed in a context of great asymmetry of power (Svampa, 2019). Extractivism is a key feature of environmental conflicts in the continent and the cycle of consumption supporting global capitalism and neoliberal policies.

Chile's resource-dependent economy is heavily based on extractive industries. For instance, the country is the world's largest provider of copper, the second provider of molybdenum and lithium, and the largest supplier of iodine (SERNAGEOMIN 2020). Chile also provides other commodities, such as forestry, agriculture, and industrial fishing. This commodity-based economy is central to the country's development model within an open and free market, which is friendly to foreign investment and financial operations. Indeed, Chile is worldwide known due to the neoliberal policies applied since the mid-1970s (Klein, 2007; McChesney, 1999; Paley, 2001; Valdés, 1989).

Neoliberal policies reshaped cultural industries, particularly television. Broadcasting was privatized, despite its public roots. In the 1950s, it was a state sponsored system based on public, university, and experimental outlets., experimental, outlets (Hurtado 1989). Nonetheless, since the 1990s, public television must accomplish public obligations while its operations are based upon a commercial business model; that is, *Televisión Nacional de Chile (TVN)* does not receive any public funding<sup>1</sup> and compete for audiences share and advertisement investment while simultaneously should promote pluralism, cultural and national values, and human rights. Media regulation is mainly developed within free trade regulations (Lagos, 2018; Bresnahan, 2003).

Chilean television industry is small compared to other Latin American countries. Four out of seven channels of national coverage represent the 90 percent of the total free-air television consumption. More than a half of content is nationally produced and almost 30 percent of it corresponds to news (INE-CNCA, 2015; Godoy and Gronemeyer, 2012). Private players entering the national broadcasting companies since the 2000s, also have business interests in some of the most important economic areas of the country, such as mining, banking, and retail.

The environment in Chile is newsworthy by the heavy weight extractive industries have in the domestic economy and because of the nature of a small and private media system with a high influence of corporate interests dominated by a few players.

A handful studies explore the role of media in better understanding Socio-environmental conflicts and extractive industries in Chile (Dotson et al., 2012; Palma, Alcaíno, 2020). Therefore, this article aims to comprehend the ways in which in-depth broadcasting journalism portrays disasters and socio-environmental conflicts in Chile by analyzing 17 stories shown by the two main television shows covering current affairs.

The paper is organized in four sections: First, it explores the role of communication, in general, and news coverage, in particular, in depicting environmental topics. Then, it breaks down the methodological approach of this study. The third section discusses the findings organized around three dimensions: What is the agenda built-up by the Chilean in-depth broadcasting journalism in the post-dictatorship; what are the sources regarding news coverage about environment; and what are the locations where such topics and voices are placed. Finally, the article highlights its contributions and shortcomings, opening paths for further research on the way how news production, particularly audiovisual, intervenes (and is shaped by) socio-environmental conflicts.

## **Discourses and news about environment**

The concept of “crisis” is at the core of environmental communication research. The first issue published by *Environmental Communication* in 2007 devoted most of its articles remarking the role of communication under crisis. The authors addressed it whether circumstances such as earthquakes, toxic emergencies, or climate change; the debate about communication was conceived as an instrumental or applied practice or, rather in its crucial role within the processes of social meaning-building of the disaster itself (Cox, 2007). Such distinction implies fundamental differences regarding how research approaches and understands the role of media in the sense-making process of public discourses about crisis and disasters and, consequently, in the role media plays on facing environmental conflicts and emergencies.

Following historical studies of science, such news frames go beyond the discussion about the newsworthiness of environmental issues. Indeed, regarding disasters, Knowles (2014b, 2014a) points out that disasters have been historically explained as “natural”; that is, as driven by uncontrollable forces of nature, blurring other factors out of the explanation.

Such naturalization of disasters builds up narratives, most of them technologically determined, generating a partial understanding of disasters. Additionally, when studying imaginaries about disasters, they are addressed mainly under two frameworks: A macro one focused on the social construction of risk, and a micro one discussing how social players define what is and what is not a risk (Castillo, 2014). Both perspectives would narrow possibilities of a better understanding of disasters in their complexities.

## **News coverage in disasters and socio-environmental conflicts**

Research addressing disasters and socio-environmental conflicts and media presents three main features: First, it has overwhelmingly considered countries, phenomena, journalistic performances, and outlets in

industrialized countries. Second, most of this research has deployed methodologies such as content analysis and rhetorical frameworks and the media and journalistic production has been less explored (Andersson, 2017; Bailey, Giangola, and Boykoff, 2014; Boykoff, 2009; Campbell, 2014; Cunningham, 2018; Evans and Park, 2018; Giannoulis, Botetzagias, and Skanavis 2010; Gibson et al., 2015; Orgeret, 2018). And third, there is a lack of attention on outlets published in Spanish (Palma and Alcaíno, 2020; Bailey et al., 2014; Carabaza et al., 2007; Dotson et al., 2012; J. Gordon et al., 2010; Larrosa-Fuentes, 2018; Mercado, 2012; Takahashi & Meisner, 2012; Zamith et al., 2012).

As Newson (1988) warns that roles of mass media in critical conjunctures carries several challenges which includes journalists as mediators, the drama-style of storytelling, the difficulties in harvesting truthful sources of information, and the expected disruption of communication channels. Therefore, any endeavor to better understand media discourses and representations about socio-environmental disasters implies to acknowledge the communication process as a network of interactions involving different players, diverse audiences, and sometimes very unlikely public and private institutions involved; each of them incarnating missions and visions that might be divergent.

In Chile, the National Council of Television has conducted studies about broadcasting coverage of disasters by exploring both audiences' criticism and editors as well as correspondents' perceptions of the role that television has played in such emergencies (CNTV, 2014; 2015). Those studies verify a critical evaluation from audiences towards sensationalism and secondary victimization of disasters' survivors. The audience surveyed demands more and better sources to be included in television stories and a more accurate analysis about such events. Viewers also expect higher ethical standards to better mixing information and emotions delivered by reports.

When analyzing television shows covering such topics, some interesting facts stand out: Scientists located far from areas affected by disasters emerge as key speakers to describe or explain such events. When covering emergency on site, television correspondents must deal with inconsistent sources, specially authorities and experts, and correspondents are unable to provide timing and accurate information, contributing to spread and fuel rumors and misinformation (Puente, Pellegrini, and Grassau 2013; Campbell 2014).

## **Investigative journalism on TV and Latin American approaches**

Either defined as watchdog, as muckraking, or as the Fourth Estate, investigative journalism has been conceived as an original work produced by one reporter or a whole team, unveiling something that has been purposely kept hidden by powerful individuals or institutions. The matter exposed must be of public interest. Due to its purposes of providing information to empower citizens, making powerful people and institutions accountable, and contributing to transparency, many authors highlight the value of investigative reporting as a critical component of democracy by fueling an informed sphere (Ettema and Glasser, 1998; Hamilton, 2016).

Nonetheless, this assumption ignores a pervasive visual media landscape and a convergent technological environment. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that television, digital storytelling, and other innovative forms of reporting are not only facts-driven, but they also mobilize emotions (Mioli and Nafria, 2017; Stein, 2001). Moreover, narratives emphasizing personal stories, dramatic music, and emotions instead of plain facts have been crucial in Latin American news production (Mujica and Bachmann, 2013). However, focusing on melodrama could exacerbate the form instead of the substance of reporting, especially fueled by ratings in commercialized media systems (Hugues, 2006).

Latin American watchdogs have experienced not only violence, but also an environment that lacks accountability, transparency, and access to information due to the uneven reach of the State in emerging democracies (O'Donnell, 2007). For instance, while Sweden has a freedom of information act (FOIA) since the 18th Century and the US, since the 1960s, legal bodies guaranteeing access to information are novel in

Latin America. Trying to capture these nuances, we refer to investigative journalism as in-depth and long-form reporting, too.

After the Chilean re-democratization in the early 1990s, exposés found their way into the public sphere. Contemporary muckrakers unmask corporate, governmental, and military wrongdoings in all sort of mediums. Nonetheless, the watchdog role of journalism is the exception in newspapers (Mellado and Lagos, 2014) and there is little material about investigative journalism deployed in television (Lagos, 2019; Fuentes, 2006) and digital-native news outlets (Skoknic, 2013; Saldaña and Mourão, 2018). Moreover, there is a lack of research regarding the specific challenges driven by in-depth news coverage, particularly visual representations, of complex public affairs, such as environmental conflicts and disasters. This is relevant as long as “people pay far more attention to television when it comes to climate change than to other forms of media” (Newman et al., 2020).

## Method and corpus

This study emphasizes a grounded approach. Although this inductive bottom-up strategy relatively reduces its comparative potential, it gains from developing situated conceptualizations (Hanitzsch, 2007; Geertz, 2008). The research addresses the images acknowledging “the plethora of ways in which the visual is part of social life” (Rose, 2016: 4).

Visual material presents two challenges at least: Firstly, the polysemic character of images. Thus, any point of entrance to analyze images is arbitrary and make sense when including their broader contexts into the picture. Analyzing images that implies the technological, social, political, and economic variations that shape visual production, circulation, and consumption is a challenge, too.

Broadcasting has played a key role in fueling domestic public opinion as the main source of information for both national and local audiences. This was true over the 1990s and the 2000s, as long as paid television was a luxury and only a few households in the country could afford it: By the mid-2010s paid TV reached a half of the population, according to official data. Even now, although people are increasingly going online for news and content, air-free television is the media that weights the most in the diet of Chileans. Massive lockdowns since March 2020 due to COVID-19 sharpened this trend (Arriagada et al., 2014; CNTV, 2019; Newman et al., 2020).

We conducted a close reading of 17 in-depth stories aired between the early 1990s and the late 2010s by the two main television shows covering current affairs broadcasted by air-free channels in the country: *Informe Especial* (TVN) and *Contacto* (Canal 13). The study explores the agenda of disasters and socio-environmental conflicts in both shows, the main sources in which they relied on, and the places and locations such stories took place.

*Informe Especial* has been aired by the public television (TVN) since 1984, when military authorities ran the station during the dictatorship. *Contacto* was launched in 1991 by Canal 13, a station owned by the Catholic University and the Chilean Catholic Church. In 2010, the largest corporation in the country, *Quiñenco*, with business interests in baking and mining, took over the station. During most part of the 1990s, TVN was the only TV channel with national reach. Together with Canal 13, were hegemonic during the 1990s and the early 2000s regarding advertising and audience share.

Both shows produced and cast reportages addressing current affairs or historical events updated by new insights. The scripts, the hosts' opening and closing remarks, and their self-promotion material reinforced the goal of informing, expanding knowledge, and connecting audiences to current affairs. Their networks, their audiences, the critics, and the field of journalism consider both shows as the networks' key features (Lagos, 2019).

There are no national or local media archives in which to explore the whole production of both television shows. Public television charges a fee for each hour using its media archive. So, the purposeful sample of stories analyzed in this study was obtained from a spreadsheet manually filled out in a previous research (Lagos, 2019) by consulting what Mihelj and Huxtable (2018) call “paratexts”. The spreadsheet includes dates, episodes’ title, authors, topics, and whether corresponds to foreign or national coverage and contains material produced by both shows between 1984 and 2015 (*Informe Especial*) and between 1991 and 2015 (*Contacto*)<sup>2</sup>. The study focuses on domestic stories; that means, stories that took place in the country without foreign participation (Porath, Mujica, and Maldonado, 2009). To classify stories’ topics, we relied on keywords originally assigned to each item in the library catalog or archive consulted and from reports’ abstracts. Finally, we compared them to the categories used by Hamilton when analyzing stories submitted to the Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) award (Hamilton, 2016).

Adapting criterion from previous research (Carson 2014; Hamilton 2016; Protess et al. 1991), we considered a story as an investigative one if: It reported on domestic/national topics, it triggered peer recognition, it produced public impact, and it was fully available. 93 stories, 55 produced by *Informe Especial* and 38, by *Contacto* fulfill those criteria. Combined, both shows produced 22 stories (out of 93) on “Environment” during the period. For the present study, we updated the stories aired by both shows up to 2018 following same criteria. There were stories unavailable in media archives, libraries’ catalogs, or online repositories. Therefore, the final sample considers 17 stories addressing environmental issues. There complete more than 12 hours of footage.

These stories correspond to what Cottle calls “thick journalism” that are “exceptional” on television “because they subvert current programming trends and also because they are of outstanding quality” (Cottle, 2005, p. 110). Indeed, the episodes here analyzed constitute a purposeful sample of works addressing complex environmental problems usually undeveloped on television, at the same time they are products driven by commercial goals of gaining audiences and advertising. These intersections complicate the narratives that result in a mix of infotainment styles and documentary features.

We elaborated a coding instrument, deductive, emerging from the research questions and previous studies on news production on television regarding disasters and socio-environmental conflicts. We adapted the coding sheet from previous research (Lagos, 2019; Antezana, 2007).

The instrument had two sections: The first one, collects basic information about the story (title and main topic, correspondent’s name, date, and duration), as well as places included in the story (named and/or portrayed). The second and larger section of the instrument, collects data about sources (number, identified/not identified, and types of documents). Such part also must register each source as identified on the story (name, gender, affiliation, and role). The viewing and coding processes were conducted between July and October 2019. We watched all the episodes included in the sample and qualitatively analyzed the content registered through the forms once coded. The findings mix both the material coded and reports’ excerpts illustrating the key themes organizing the study.

Consistent with the research questions, the paper organizes the findings around three out of the five *Ws* in journalism: *What* are those stories about? *Who* are the people that has a say about it? And *where* those stories occurred and those people acted? In other words, we explore the agenda of in-depth journalism, the authorized voices that made it to the public sphere to dispute what and how to talk about environment conflicts, and, finally, how spaces and locations are depicted in such debate.

## Findings

The issues addressed by the stories analyzed, how important could be, or the extent of its impact do not explain exclusively their time on-air. Indeed, there are conditions of production and programming unfolding through

the period analyzed affecting Chilean broadcasting as a whole that also played a role in shrinking stories over time in both TV shows. Such conditions include media management policies increasingly controlling labor, budget cuttings, exacerbating metrics in evaluating journalistic productivity and performance, and the growing importance of genres such as reality TV in programming. Both shows also went through changes regarding their place in the stations' overall programming, especially during the 2010s (independent show, a section featured in evening newscasts, on prime-time, and so on). Nonetheless, these stories compose a rich and interesting snapshot of in-depth broadcasting journalism uncovering socio-environmental conflicts, combining fact-driven reporting as well as audiovisual features to raise awareness of such issues.

For instance, a very emotional, unidentified, woman in an extreme close-up opens up the report *La fiebre del agua* (The fever of water) (Contacto, 1996) saying "I would like the minister of Agriculture knew our problems and, once and for all, do not take the water out of us anymore". The woman is one of the local inhabitants in dry zones of the north of Chile exposing the increasing scarcity of water due to, as the correspondent says on camera, "it is controlled by mining, sanitary, and agricultural companies". Although the shorter story in our sample (22 minutes), *La fiebre del agua* combines data from official sources, on-site reporting in different towns affected by drought, and authorities, companies' representatives, scholars, grassroots leaders, and individuals affected by the problem. Relying on post-production tools, such as zooming, music, and speed of footage, the story portrays a complex public issue in Chile while the country was also experiencing sustained economic growth and expanding its foreign trade.

At the other end, the longest report analyzed, *Contaminados* (Contaminated, 2009, an hour and a half), is probably one of the most refined and powerful example of visualization of data in the sample. Relying upon an extensive and long-term on-site reporting, the television team built up trust with local sources and the inhabitants poisoned by heavy metals because the public housings they lived in were built over an old chemical dumpsite. The crew took soil samples and sent them to a laboratory to test them for heavy metals. The story revealed the long-term consequences of lead and arsenic exposure on people suffering rare diseases or developing illnesses at higher rates than the national average, the corporate responsibilities in it, the lack of action from public officials to prevent contamination, and the neglect involved in appropriate diagnose and treatment of the affected population.

Both *La fiebre del agua* and *Contaminados* are at the extreme ends of the sample regarding the reports' duration because, on average, they last 41 minutes. Stories produced by *Contacto* last 26-minutes on average, while stories produced by *Informe Especial* almost double them (43-minutes on average). The shorter story aired by *Informe Especial* is 26 minutes length (*Voces de Arauco*, 2015), while the longest lasts one hour and 19 minutes (*Quintero, el plan que no funcionó*, 2018).

## What (agenda)

Despite a wide criticism regarding a lack of high-quality media coverage of socio-environmental conflicts in Chile, since the 1990s, in-depth journalism on television has addressed several of the key issues, regions, and crisis still relevant in contemporary Chilean public debate on the topic. The material portrays a rich overview of some of the most salient socioenvironmental problems driven by an economic model relying on extractivism. Putting together, these stories present the tensions between economic growth, sustainability, and ecology; the impact of extractive industries and privatization of land and water; poisoning by chemical products used by manufacturing and mining industries and their impact in local communities, public health, workers, environment, and indigenous populations.

Between 1990 and 2018, in-depth reporting sharply chronicled the loss of native forest and its impact in biodiversity, indigenous people, and lifestyles (*Bosque nativo*, 1996; *Voces de Arauco*, 2015); the steadily process of desertification, drought, and agricultural emergency (*La fiebre del agua*, 1996; *Alerta en los ríos*,

1998; *La Guerra del agua*, 2011), phenomena that has informed recent national government's order of agricultural disaster in wide areas across the country.

The sample also shows that in-depth broadcasting reporting also addressed these conflicts from a multidimensional perspective in which the economic model of development is at the center of the discussion, as when the correspondent points out that only a 20 percent of the native forest is under protection while the 80 percent can be privately exploited (*Bosque nativo*, 1996) and the sound of the chopping trees machinery opening up the report is a powerful trace illustrating the argument. Even more, race inequalities and income, for instance, are also included in the portraits analyzed, as when introducing the report on indigenous people with a song from folk singer and activist, Violeta Parra: *Arauco tiene una pena* (Arauco has a sorrow in *Voces de Arauco*, 2015).

However, overall and long-form of television journalism has actually performed as professional witnesses, agents of memory, or primary storytellers, as the corpus of research on memory and journalism has described in context others than the Latin American one (Zelizer and Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014).

By analyzing the sample we can also trace journalistic portraits regarding the effects on human health produced by heavy metal poisoning due to industrial activities (*Plomo, veneno en su casa*, 1997; *Asbesto, contaminación mortal*, 1998; *Asbesto*, 1999, and *Contaminados*, 2009), and the heavy impact of extractive industries and power production in local communities, biodiversity, and labor (*Potrerrillos*, 1999; *HidroAysén, el gran dilema*, 2011; *Relaves mineros*, 2014; *La batalla de El Salvador*, 2015).

## Who (sources)

When analyzing who has a say regarding stories about socioenvironmental conflicts in Chilean television programs on current affairs in the last three decades, it appears a sharp unbalance on women's voices. Indeed, there are 338 on-the-record sources identified in the sample. Most of them (70%=235) are males. Two out of 17 reports do not include any woman interviewee among the cited voices: *Alerta en los Ríos* (1998) and *Mina San José* (2015). In *Alerta...*, 17 out of 17 interviewees are men, while in *Mina...*, 7 out of 7 sources are also males. Although both stories are almost 20 years apart and public awareness on gender equality, women's rights, and women's representation on cultural production have gained track over the period, strong male-oriented practices in who speaks and appears are very likely anyway. This is consistent with criticism of a persistent media misrepresentation of women (Ulloa 2020; Ananías and Vergara 2016).

In the first example, *Alerta...*, it is noticeable a relative diversity regarding class when analyzing the subjects depicted on screen: fishermen, gatekeeper, experts and scholars; public and private companies' top executives (corporations such as the national company of mining, middle-size companies, private water suppliers, and fossil fuel gas companies), and public officials (ministers, local authorities, and spokespersons from technical governmental offices). When analyzing the report *Mina...*, sources tend to represent organizations involved in dealing with the disaster. Both stories demand a relatively long time of production, take longer than daily news reporting on air (more than 30 minutes each), and include a relatively large number of interviewees comparing to regular TV news. Nonetheless, it only include men's voices.

Besides these all-men-voices' stories, the sample include reports with very few women interviewees, too: For instance, three out of 17 stories include just one woman among their sources (*Ecología y Desarrollo*, 1994; *Bosque Nativo*, 1998; *Las voces de Arauco*, 2015). Although there are women included, they are noticeable as long as they fill up a role as sources for television hard news reporting, like public officials or experts.

For example, the report *La batalla de El Salvador* (2015) includes only 3 women out of 16 interviewees. One of them is Ana Lamas, a leader of the National Union of Workers in Copper (*Confederación de Trabajadores del Cobre*). Then, she has a say on the story because her position as a unionist. The other two women interviewed are so because their affective role (a sister in law of one of the victims) and random inhabitant of the village where the riots occurred ("*vive en la toma de El Salvador*", she lives in the shanty



town of El Salvador). On the contrary, all men cited and included as sources in *La batalla...* are part of the law enforcement forces (policemen, public attorney, lawyers) or members of the labor force (union leaders, workers, and top executives).

Then, the report *Voces de Arauco* (2015), 1 out of 8 interviewees is a woman. She appears as a guild's representative (Angélica Tepper, president of the Araucanía's guild). The other sources, all the seven men, are local leaders (an indigenous representative of the Mapuche people), a religious leader (a Catholic priest), and players in the so-called Mapuche's nation-Chilean conflict, such as forestry's companies' executives, truck drivers, or law enforcement officials.

The last example illustrating in-depth television reporting based upon a very few numbers of women sources is *Quintero, el plan que no funcionó* (2018). That story includes 4 women out of 20 interviewees and there are two unidentified women depicted in wide shots that are well-known as leaders in their communities. Women's voices in the report appear as long as they perform roles as experts, authorities on public health, and a representative of an environmental NGO with headquarters in the capital of the country and not in the community where the conflict takes place for decades. It is interesting to note that this report lasts more than an hour and was aired on prime time. In other words, it could be expected that a longer report would provide more diversity.

Then, there is a group of reports appearing as relatively more balanced regarding their sources, although their depictions and the roles they fulfilled tell a more complicated story. *Hidroaysén, el gran dilema* (2011) consults 10 women out of 39 interviewees. Only one of those women play a role as an official (Pilar Cuevas, the main regional authority in Aysén by then). The other women play individual and not official or community roles. In other words, women appear to be self-representing and as inhabitants of specific locations. They are labeled as “*Coyhaiquina*” (people who lives in Coyhaique), “settler” (from Baker River, for instance), “*pobladora*” (from the fishermen's village, Tortel, and the O'Higgins village), and five “*Pebuenche*”<sup>3</sup> women from Alto Bío Bío<sup>4</sup>. Although male voices are also generally depicted as “settlers” and “inhabitants”, men appears deploying a wider range of roles in their communities and in the conflict represented by the report: radio broadcaster, companies top executives, officials (such as local majors and national legislators), representatives of NGOs, and scholars.

Although the report *Plástico: doble filo* (2012) contains an unbalanced frame regarding men and women interviewed (6 women out of 14 sources), it depicts a wider range of roles women can play. Indeed, they are activists and experts.

Finally, in the report *Relaves mineros, la amenaza del arsénico* (2014), 11 out of 24 interviewees are women. Although several of them are depicted as undetermined “neighbors” (from Caimanes and Lampa, both rural villages far away one from the other), there are also women that are scholars and experts in highly technical areas, such as law, epidemiology, and public health. Nonetheless, men appear as neighbors, but also as top executives, scholars, and workers. It seems this example provides a wider range of complexities regarding men and women's depictions amidst socio-environmental conflicts and disasters.

## Where (space and location)

There is a certain geographic diversity depicted by the material analyzed: The topography explicitly portrayed includes small fisher towns, beaches, and rivers (such as Loa, San Salvador, and Baker), as well as the desert and islands (like Chiloé Island and Eastern Island), and foothills' areas (like the one located in the Maule's region). The stories also unfolded in urban areas (we see cities such as Antofagasta, Concepción, Santiago, and Temuco), as well as villages and rural areas (like Caimanes, Chiu Chiu, Lampa, Santa Bárbara, or Villa O'Higgins).

Alongside the technological innovations experienced on television over the time, reports rely on air shots (from an helicopter and a drone) in depicting extensive areas (forests, shores, desert), on-site in rather dangerous or polluted locations (an abandoned mine, nearby a mine tailing), or include post-production features increasing empathy, suspense, or portraying nature as virgin or conflicts as a war. For example, a slow motion editing, an emotional music, and close-ups when framing interviewees mobilize nostalgia when portraying the shutting down of a mine town (*Potrerillos*, 1999), tensioning environmental and health issues with community ties and small town kin lifestyle typical of such settlements.

Disasters and socio-environmental conflicts addressed by the reports occurred in sites of extraction, implying that extractive industries are at the base in triggering socio-environmental conflicts in the last three decades. Then, in-depth journalism on Chilean television has actually explored sites in mining<sup>5</sup>, forestry and agricultural industry<sup>6</sup>, as well as energy, mainly electricity<sup>7</sup>. Technological settings are also key scenes where deploying stories (such as labs in the national mining company, universities, or governmental offices supervising extractive industries, such as the National Service on Geology and Mining, Sernageomin). These high-tech locations go along with the prominence of experts as sources cited by the reports, mostly men.

It is also noticeable a certain geographical distance, des-centering, when covering processes of waste production, pollution, and contamination. For instance, the report about pollution derived from plastic (a 50 minutes-story produced by *Informe Especial* and aired in 2012, nationally and internationally awarded) happens somewhere else, such as Eastern Island<sup>8</sup>, Hawaii, or the coasts of California, not in the Chilean backyard.

Then, the whole cycle of producing, using, and disposing plastic in the environment appears as a process happening far away from domestic audiences' daily lives. Such depiction of contamination occurring somewhere else is consistent to what previous research has conceptualized as distant suffering, slow violence, and compassion fatigue when analyzing visual depictions of e-waste and its life cycle (Andersson, 2017). It also follows the same logic of making extractivism a less visible process, detached from zones of extraction (Szeman, 2017).

## Final remarks

This case study is relevant to better understand complex interplays between extractivist economies, the global trend of capitalism, and the role long-form of TV journalism has when uncovering the environment. In the case under scrutiny and due to the increasing privatization of national broadcasting, the most influential corporations have business interests in extractive industries as well as broadcasting companies.

The visual landscape created by investigative journalism shows how extractivism, disasters, and conflicts are not singularly spatially situated, following the general understanding that these are events that happen in a specific place (Palma, 2019). It instead creates narratives that visualize the network that sustains extractivism, and along with it, it brings to the surface some of the actors that contribute to the development of disasters and socio-environmental conflicts. These actors might be portrayed as the main responsible for the situation, as experts, as victims, or people in resistance. However, still, the narrative of disasters and socio-environmental conflicts are highly dictated by class and, overall, gender relations, which opens a gap in the understanding of the complexity of these events.

There is previous research regarding flows of information and gender in a local socio-environmental conflict. This research suggests that women are not only less likely to be selected as a source of information, but their lack of access to information regarding technical aspects of the environment and wrongdoings of a company, impacts their life and their perception of risk (Palma, 2015b).

The distribution of risks when facing disasters is differentiated by gender attributions (Echegoyemberry, 2018). Thus, we could argue that the way how these television shows select their sources helps to obliterate

gender differences when facing a disaster. Nevertheless, overall, the lack of women's participation, as reliable sources of information, creates narratives of the environment that privilege patriarchal structures, which at the end erase alternative practices that women enact in the territories when facing these situations.

In the long-term, the study brings recent history to the surface, though this was an unintended result, it tells us about the role that investigative journalism has in portraying and building historical narratives. Through this outlets, we can look at the landscape that investigative journalism creates in such a comprise narrative. This fact could be useful to the advocates of the historicization of disasters (Knowles, 2014a; 2014b), in which investigative journalism functions as a tool to help situate disasters in their complexity, rather than vanishing the responsibilities that allow disasters to exists.

Over the course of the analyzed episodes, cities, labs, mountains, rivers, dumpsites, and other places appeared as part of the global economy and part of an extractivist network (Sassen, 1991). On the other hand, research problematizing the role of communication and journalism on environmental issues is overwhelmingly conducted in and about industrialized nations and mostly published in English. To overlook places and perspectives replicates the peripheral role that assigned to Latin America in the history of extractivism; as a supplier of resources and a place to leave empty, but not as a player, that articulates knowledge, will, and power. That is also a main actor when it comes to the study of the environment and communications.

At the end, the visual representations that these reports built seem dominated by class and gender. Locations appear also detached from the rest of the country, creating a feeling of disconnection to disasters. The economic model and its consequences are portrayed at the center of the stories, creating in this way a particular symbolic landscape where socio-environmental conflicts happen.

The present research opens a gate to continue deepening the understanding of the different sort of landscapes and places that investigative journalism produces and portrays, as well as the connections between the global economy, economic models, nation state-building, and the role and use of nature in which journalism participates.

This article enriches the corpus of research regarding the role of journalism in covering environmental issues. It sheds light into overlooked media systems, and a small-size journalistic field as the Chilean one, but fueled by global trends in extractivism and capitalism.

## Acknowledgments

Authors would like to thank to the Cineteca at the Universidad de Chile, particularly to Luis Horta, its head; Gonzalo Santander, responsible for the filmic archive, and Carlos Ovando, in charge of Cineteca's area of restoration. The fieldwork would have not be possible without the key support from the staff at the Universidad Católica de Chile-Campus San Joaquín's library: Nélida Muñoz and Rodrigo Álvarez. Finally, peer reviewers' suggestions improved our article.

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## Notes

- \* This article is the result of a combination of a doctoral investigation on investigative reporting in Chile since the 1990s and disasters and socio-environmental conflicts in different sites in the country along the same period. Funding: "Fondo para apoyar e incrementar la productividad académica", Dirección de Investigación del Instituto de la Comunicación e Imagen, Universidad de Chile; Vicerrectoría de Investigación y Desarrollo VID, Universidad de Chile, PROA011/17; Centro de Investigación para la Gestión Integrada del Riesgo de Desastres (CIGIDEN), ANID/FONDAP/15110017
- 1 In 2018, the Congress passed a bill allowing and extraordinary injection of public funding into TVN as a one-time expenditure.
  - 2 By 2021, *Informe Especial* will launch a new season after being off-air during the pandemics. Canal 13 cancelled *Contacto* a few years earlier.
  - 3 Pehuenche are indigenous people, part of the Mapuche nation.
  - 4 Berta Quintremán mentioned among them. Quintremán was an indigenous leader who resisted the construction of a power plant in indigenous land.
  - 5 Chuquicamata, El Salvador, Los Pelambres, San Antonio, and San José.
  - 6 Work on chipper wood in Puerto Montt city and monoculture plantation forestry in El Barco and Las Palmas.
  - 7 Such as hydroelectric power stations, like Central Ralco-Alto Bío Bío.
  - 8 Eastern Island is Chilean territory, but there are problems of political integration and intercultural understanding that might result in perceptions of foreignness in continental's and Eastern Island's inhabitants.

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*Cómo citar el artículo:* Lagos Lira, C., Palma, K. Y Limonado, F. Three W's of in-depth journalism portraying socio- environmental conflicts in Chilean television: What (the agenda), who (the sources), and where (the locations). *Signo y Pensamiento*, 40(79). <https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.syp40-79.twdj>