

LOOK WHO'S TALKING – A CASE STUDY OF MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND FRAMING ON THE ABORTION ISSUE BY PORTUGUESE MPS (1996-1998)

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Abstract

The media representation of Members of Parliament on an issue as gendered and as controversial as abortion liberalization allows us a window into the degree to which the print media represents female MPs vis-à-vis their male counterparts. I analyze both the standing and framing of political and civil society actors over the 1997-1998 parliamentary abortion debate. The print media discourse on abortion provides standing mostly to state and political party actors. Parliamentary members and political leaders account for roughly three-quarters of all standing, and the only civil society actors with some representation in the media discourse are the Catholic Church and Pro-Life organizations. Women's movement organizations are almost invisible in the print media, demonstrating that the public media discourse excludes a plurality of points of view and it is clearly tilted towards the pro-life side. In terms of the gender representativeness, the findings show that women MPs tend to have less standing compared to male MPs.

Key words

Media Representation; Framing; Parliamentary Members; Gender.

Overview

The media representation of Members of Parliament on an issue as gendered and as controversial as abortion liberalization allows us a window into the degree to which the print media represents female MPs vis-à-vis their male counterparts, and both incorporates and excludes a plurality of viewpoints. What does an analysis of the media coverage reveal about which parliamentary members do the talking on the abortion issue? How does the media portray MPs and the parliamentary discourse on abortion? Are female MPs' underrepresented even in the debate on a 'women's issue'? These questions derive from a larger project entitled, "Female politics – gender policies and visibility strategies of female MPs (1975-2002)".¹ Within this project, Mata and Flores (2012) address how female MPs have been visually represented in the media by looking at the photos of parliamentary

¹ This project was coordinated by Ana Cabrera at Media and Journalism Research Center (College of Social and Human Sciences at the New University of Lisbon) and funded by the Portuguese Science Foundation.

members.²In contrast, the current article takes complementary approach, focusing instead on the textual content of news articles.

Female MPs are actively involved in many debates that would fall within the realm of “women’s issues”, but because abortion debates are highly divisive and contentious in nature, they are particularly informative of what voices prevail both in Parliament and in the media. There is also considerable variation in the number of seats women hold in Parliament. Therefore, it is important to concentrate our analysis on a time-period when women’s representation in Parliament was higher than usual. While in the mid-1980s there was an important debate on abortion (law n.6/84), the proportion of women in Parliament was only 8.5%, but increased during the abortion debates of the late 1990’s to around 13%. I focus on the latter period because when women MPs have more parliamentary presence their chances for the media exposure should also be greater.

In the late 1990s, most of the abortion parliamentary debates concerned law proposals on the decriminalization of abortion, abortion on demand, and the abortion referendum of June 1998. In this article, I analyze the coverage in the print media of the abortion parliamentary debates that stem from 1997 to 1998. By the late 1990s, we see that the increase in the numbers of female MPs in Parliament also brought an increase in the number of initiatives that they proposed on the abortion issue. However, we know little about the media coverage of female parliamentary members and their proposals. The media forum is *the* major site of political contestation (Ferree et al, 2002), and all collective actors, including parliamentary members, want their messages to shape the public discourse on abortion.

Standing and Framing in the Media

The media influences our understanding of public life, the agenda-setting of policy issues, and the overall political process (Keane, 1991; Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996). Previous research on the intersection of women, media, and politics has suggested that women politicians tend to be more invisible (relative to men) in news coverage, an idea famously summarized by the term “symbolic annihilation” (Norris, 1997; Tuchman *et al*, 1978; Gingras, 1995). Research evidence has also suggested a focus on stereotyping, “tabloidization”, and gender-imbalance in the amount of coverage given to male and female political leaders (Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Megyery, 1991; Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996, p.103). Beyond differences in the extent of coverage, women MPs often have to deal with unwanted kinds of coverage, namely when the media portrays them for their ‘novelty value’, their ‘fashion sense’, or either their ‘over-sexualization’ or ‘masculinization’ (Childs, 2006; Norris, 1997; Ibroscheva and Raicheva-Stover, 2009; Lundell and Eckström, 2008). Findings have shown how women MPs are aware of the consequences of not conforming to what the media wants, acknowledging that in order for less known

2 In the article “Politique au feminine – Représentations visuelles des femmes parlementaires pendant le débat de l’avortement au Portugal”, Mata and Flores address the discrepancy between male and female MP media representation, where women are often portrayed in a limited and stereotypical way, as objects more than subjects. Specifically, they are portrayed as isolated from the context of their political interventions, and not actively engaging in the decision-making process.

politicians to get any kind media coverage they must engage in controversial statements (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996, p.107).³

According to Ferree et al (2002), success in the media forum can be measured by two criteria: standing and framing. When the media voices an actor's positioning or interpretation in a direct quote the actor gains *standing*. Being simply mentioned in the news or being object of discussion does not provide standing. Framing, on the other hand, implies that the actor's preferred frames⁴ are presented in the news. Therefore, a political actor might have standing without the media portraying the actor's discourse in a favorable way (metatalk) or publishing what the actor wants, but when there is an alignment between what the media portrays and the frames valued by the actor, the actor gains both standing and framing.

While women are significantly underrepresented in parliament, they are also looking "beyond the numbers to focus on what they can actually do" (Lovenduski and Karam, 1998, p.1). Making inroads in the media is a way to evaluate how female MPs might be making an impact beyond their presence in Parliament. Women MPs can maximize their impact in the legislative process by strategically gaining standing and framing in the media. Therefore, this research sheds light into the visibility of female parliamentary members, which has implications on gender representation and inclusiveness of the media forum.

Data and Methods

The analysis focuses on coverage of a purposive sample of articles from five main Portuguese newspapers three dailies, two weeklies: *Diário de Notícias*, *Público*, *Correio da Manhã*, *Independente*, and *Expresso*.⁵ Articles were selected based on the following criteria: reference to *both* the abortion issue and parliamentary member(s) during the period of the parliamentary abortion debates (1997 to 1998).

A total of sixty-two articles were analyzed and their text coded according to the following categories: mentions in the text of female and/or male deputies, political parties, social movement organizations, and "other" actors.⁶ For all of these categories, I assess the number of times any of these categories appear (quantitative data) and do a content analysis of the correspondent descriptive information on each (qualitative data). This allows for an assessment of each of the actors' standing. Another set of categories are coded in the text in order to analyze how MPs and their discourse are framed by the media as a way to get at how the media public discourse frames the role of parliamentary members.

3 This is connected to the argument about how politics in the news media is being turned into an entertainment (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross, 1996).

4 Frames are the interpretive schemata that simplify and condense "the world out there" to a designated set of idea elements. Framing, as a system of meaning, identifies causes of injustice linking them to specific goals (Snow *et al.*, 1986).

5 Dailies have a higher representation in the data compared to the weekly newspapers.

6 This category makes reference to the standing of actors that are not MPs, political party members or representatives, or movement activists. This category includes both individual and collective actors (e.g., a Catholic organization spokesperson, the leader of the Professional Doctor's Association, etc).

The Abortion Law Debates

It was clear by the early 1990's that the restrictive abortion legislation that had passed in the previous decade (law n.6/84) lacked real methods for implementation. This law allowed decriminalization on three grounds: rape, eugenic, and therapeutic reasons. Nonetheless, legal abortion procedures were rare and stigmatized in hospitals, therefore, abortion remained mostly underground.⁷ While women and family planning organizations voiced their concerns early on (Tavares 2003), the center-right government of the Social Democrats avoided the issue altogether.

With the new Socialist government elected in 1995, one could expect that there would be a change in the political opportunity structure favoring the abortion agenda. However, the new Prime Minister António Guterres was personally against the decriminalization of abortion. And the Communist Party took the lead in resurrecting the abortion issue, and bringing it back to Parliament after more than a decade.

In 1996, the Communist Party proposed abortion decriminalization at women's request (n.177/VII). A few months after the Communist proposal, the more progressive faction of the Socialist Party, the Socialist Youth (JS) also proposed a similar law (n.236/VII).⁸ Both proposals were rejected in Parliament, but the JS proposal was defeated by just one vote.⁹ The parliamentary debate that followed these two abortion proposals was not inconsequential. First, it led to the approval of extending the deadlines for legal abortion to 24 weeks (law n.90/97).¹⁰ Secondly, it created momentum for this agenda in Parliament leading to further proposals on abortion decriminalization at women's request. In 1998, the Communists and the JS were back at proposing similar laws to the ones rejected just the year before.

The JS drafted a new law proposal (n.451/VII), which was more restrictive than its earlier version, since it reduced the time period in which women could perform a *legal abortion-on-request* to 10 weeks. The rationale of the more restrictive proposal was to gather a larger support base from among the different MPs. The second law was proposed by the Communists (n.417/VII), which also sought to decriminalized abortion at women's request but now up to 12 weeks. A third law proposal, submitted by individual Socialist MPs, covered the decriminalization of abortion based on socio-economic grounds (n.453/VII).¹¹ A fourth proposal submitted by the Christian Democrats (n.448/VII) defended the right of the fetus to be treated as a person with legal rights. Finally, the last proposal, submitted by the Social Democrats consisted of having a national referendum on the issue of abortion-on-request (38/VII).

Surprisingly, it was outside of Parliament that the trajectory of the abortion issue would

⁷ Source: *Visão* 8/2/2007.

⁸ In February 1997, Socialist MP Sergio Sousa Pinto presented a law proposing on the decriminalization of abortion at up to ten weeks per the woman's request.

⁹ Pirralha argues that the JS could not count on the formal support of its own party (Pirralha, 2008, 180).

¹⁰ This law was proposed by the Socialist MP Strech Monteiro but maintained the 6/84 law.

¹¹ António Barros and Eurico Figueiredo (source: DAR I série N.º.36/VII/3 1998.02.05).

be determined. In fact, the JS proposal (abortion-on-request up 10 weeks) was approved in the Parliament¹², but this result was later revoked by a political agreement between the Socialist Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition on having a national referendum on the issue instead.

Standing

The standing of women MPs in the print media is connected to both their presence in Parliament and to their involvement in the debates. If women are fairly underrepresented and do not participate in the debates to begin with, one should not expect them to have standing in the media. Therefore, we should assess for the 1997-1998 abortion debates, both their relative presence in Parliament and their political involvement, then utilize this information as a baseline to understand their standing in the media.

In terms of gender distribution in Parliament, women MPs accounted for about 13% of all MPs (29 out of 230), and their presence within each political party varied from 10% to 15% (with the exception of the Green Party¹³ in which both MPs were women). In regards to their participation in the debates, we know that the time allocated to each political party depends on that party's political representation in Parliament. Therefore, women MPs from the governing Socialist Party and the opposition party the Social Democrats have, at least in theory, a higher chance of participating in the abortion debate compared to women MPs from the smaller parties.

In the overall debate, there were twenty-five women MPs proposing a total of sixty-six political initiatives on the issue¹⁴, and most of their political participation occurred when voting on changes to the abortion law (the first one in February 1997, the second one a year later in 1998). In 1998, for example, there were a total of nineteen parliamentary members participating in the abortion debate, six of whom were women. This shows an overall participation of women MPs at around 32%.¹⁵ This involvement, both in presenting abortion law proposals and in debating them, is far superior to their gender representation (13%) and to their average participation in other debates for that same year (20%) (Peniche, 2007, p.123). These data also demonstrate an increased interest by women MPs on the topic at hand, the abortion issue.

When an actor is quoted or paraphrased in news reports or in commentaries, he or she, has *standing* within the media public discourse. As Ferree et al. pointed out, standing refers to how a group or an individual is treated in the media as an agent, not merely as an object of the discussion (2002, p.86). This leads us to ask who has a voice in the media and who is left out?

12 Source: *Expresso* 1/17/1998.

13 *Os Verdes* (PEV).

14 Mata and Flores (2012). The MPs with the more initiatives were the leader of the Partido Popular (PP) Maria José Nogueira Pinto (thirteen initiatives); followed by the Communist Odete Santos (eleven initiatives); and by the Socialist Helena Roseta (eight initiatives).

15 According to Peniche (2007, p.123), the participation of female MPs in other debates is around 20%.

In Figure 1, I compare female and male MPs' standing to other individual and collective actors with standing in the media. Within the sample of sixty-two articles spanning from 1997 to 1998, there was a total of 246 utterances providing standing to three different actors. According to these data, male MPs have the most standing with 52%, while "others" had 34%, and female MPs accounted for 14%.

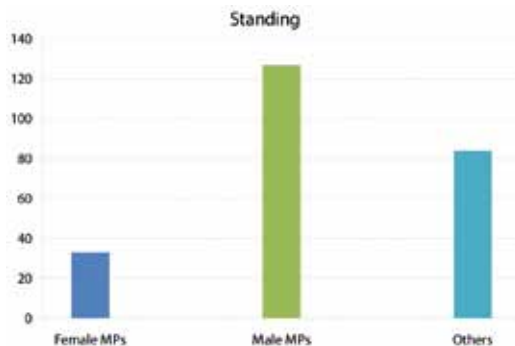


Figure 1

As we see in Figure 1, there are significant differences in the standing of male and female MPs. If we want to use as a point of reference the women's overall participation in Parliament throughout the abortion proposal discussions, we see that it was around 32%, but the media only gives standing to women MPs on this issue at 14%. Although, many perceive that the topic of abortion liberalization would be one in which the views of female MPs would be highly valued as agents in the construction of meaning, in reality that cannot be accomplished when most of the talk on these issues excludes them.

The prevalence of standing among male MPs also needs to be contextualized by the fact that some of the abortion proposals being debated were initiated by male parliamentary members. It is important to note that two of the male MPs with more standing, Strecht Monteiro and Sergio Sousa Pinto, were both involved directly in the drafting the abortion proposals. Nonetheless, there were forty-one male MPs with standing in the sample of articles. Since there is a total of 201 male MPs in the Chamber, the overall standing for this group is approximately 20%.

The list of women MPs that are either quoted or paraphrased in the media during the 1997-1998 abortion debates includes only seven members.¹⁶ This figure corresponds to about 24% of all female MPs, thus showing that the media provides standing to only a quarter of women MPs. An important finding in regards to the standing of women MPs when compared to male MPs is the overrepresentation within the former group by just two parliamentary members. Maria José Nogueira Pinto and Odete Santos both account for more than 50% of all female MP standing. Another way to understand this result is by

¹⁶ Those were Maria do Rosário Carneiro, Isabel Castro, Elisa Damiao, Maria José Nogueira Pinto, Helena Roseta, Helena Santo, and Odete Santos.

acknowledging that the other five women MPs with standing in the media only had standing once (twice at most). Therefore, while most of the male MPs with standing had been quoted multiple times, the majority of women MPs (except for Nogueira Pinto and Santos) only had standing once, reflecting an overall underrepresentation and lack of visibility of this group within the print media.

Another finding regarding the standing of women MPs concerns a group described by the media as “twelve Socialist women” or the “Socialist women MPs”. This specific group is mentioned a few times because on the same day that the Socialist parliamentary group was deciding on the possibility of a referendum, twelve Socialist women MPs undersigned a document showing their continuous support for the Socialist Youth proposal, thus distinguishing themselves from the rest of the party.¹⁷ Although some newspapers mention this group, none provide them with standing. Two main explanations are suggested. On the one hand, this group’s lack of standing can be understood as part of an overall underrepresentation of women MPs in the media. On the other hand, it might be correlated with the fact that it is easier for the media to give standing to individuals rather than to groups. If that is the case, this necessarily has implications for the political strategies women MPs pursue. Women politicians are often attributed a political leadership style that tends to be more cooperative and collectively-driven compared to their male counterparts (Dow and Tonn, 1993). Therefore, in evaluating potential media coverage women MPS might need to take into account that there might be inherent costs in remaining an aggregate political actor.

Within the sample of newspaper articles that give standing to parliamentary members, some show the standing of another group of individual and collective actors, as shown in Figure 1 under the label of “Others”. Overall, this group accounts for 34% of all instances of standing, compared to just 14% given to women MPs, and 52% to male MPs. But what actors are included in this group and why does the print media gives them visibility?

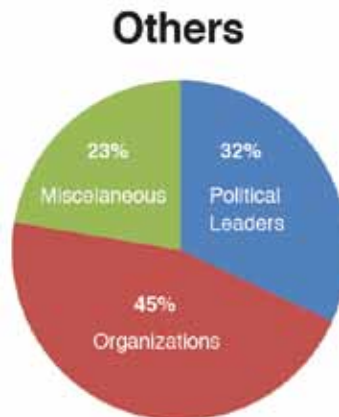


Figure 2

17 Source: *Correio da Manhã* (2/6/1997) and *O Independente* (2/6/1997).

A major part of this group is political leaders, including the Prime Minister António Guterres, the President of the Republic Jorge Sampaio, and the leader of the opposition Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. These political leaders account for about one-third of the standing of the category “Others”. Their voice in the print media is connected not only with their political roles but also with the specific political context in which the abortion agenda unfolded. The proposal for abortion decriminalization at women’s request appears in Parliament at the initiative of a Socialist parliamentary member, however the Catholic Socialist Prime Minister did not support the bill.

Additionally, once the proposal was approved in Parliament, an agreement between the PM and the leader of the opposition overruled this decision and took the issue of abortion-on-demand to be decided through a referendum. The print media coverage focuses on how this political process unfolded outside of Parliament, therefore contributing to the visibility given to the “political leaders” group.

The other main sub-group within the “Others” category consists of organizations or representatives of organizations usually involved in debating the abortion issue. Those include Catholic, women’s, doctor’s, health, family planning, and legal organizations. This sub-group accounts for almost half of all instances of standing in the “Others” category. The most striking finding within this sub-group is the imbalance in standing among organizations and their representatives in terms of their pro-choice or pro-life positions. We are also making assessments if it is or not balanced in terms of a pro, anti, or even neutral positioning regarding the liberalization of abortion. For example, women’s movement organizations, such as, UMAR¹⁸ are unequivocally in favor of abortion liberalization. This is the only women’s organization given standing, and only on three occasions.¹⁹ On the other hand, social movement organizations, such as, the Movement in the Defense of Life, and the Association of Catholic Doctors²⁰ that have a pro-life or an anti-liberalization stance are given standing by the media on several occasions. Likewise, representatives of Catholic Church share this stance. These include the Movement in the Defense of Life, the Movement United Pro-Life, the North Pro-Life Movement, the Association of Catholic Doctors, the Portuguese Episcopal Conference, Cleric José Policarpo, Priest Feytor Pinto, among others. These organizations and speakers have standing twenty-one times, seven times more than the standing given to women’s organizations. This demonstrates that the media provides standing in a fairly unbalanced and skewed way regarding different positions on abortion. While organizations that are anti-abortion liberalization are overrepresented, the pro-abortion liberalization side is underrepresented and rendered almost invisible in the media.²¹

18 *Movement for Social Emancipation of Portuguese Women.*

19 Helena Pinto is the UMAR representative that receives standing in the print media.

20 *Movimento de Defesa da Vida* and *Associação de Médicos Católicos* respectively.

21 Adding to this is the fact that even organizations that could potentially be neutral or pro-liberalization, such as, the Family Planning Association (*APF*), the Doctor’s Association (*Ordem dos Médicos*), the Lawyer’s Association (*Ordem dos Advogados*), the National Ethics for Sciences of Life Counsel (*CNEV*), and the National Health Organization (*Direcção Geral*

The remaining standing within the “Others” category is spread among miscellaneous actors including journalists, union representatives, intellectuals, bureaucrats, and so on. This sub-group represents about one-quarter of the overall standing within this category, and the tendency for the overrepresentation of the anti-liberalization position can also be seen within this subgroup.

In conclusion, state and party actors dominate the debate coverage and only Catholic Church/Pro-Life actors have major standing among civil society actors. The dominance of state and party actors (74% of all standing)²² in the Portuguese media coverage is consistent with findings about other European countries. In a comparison with Germany and the U.S., Ferree et al. also found that the German press predominantly gives standing to state and political party actors, while U.S. media provides social movement actors with major standing (2002, p.103).

Framing

An important component of framing success is how the media portrays the discourse of female MPs on the abortion debate, also known as discourse about discourse or *metatalk*. Ferree et al. explain that “metatalk examines a discourse with an implicit set of normative standards... it praises or condemns from the standpoint of some often-unstated ideal that is used to assess what is observed.” (2002, p.255). The media can make assessments about the involvement of women MPs and the nature or quality of their discourses within the overall abortion debate. In this case, the media can either praise or criticize the participation and discourse of female MPs. Therefore, “media success” is assessed by the media’s favorable portrayal of MPs.

Only a few references to the role of women MPs can be found within the sample of articles used for this study. The daily *Correio da Manhã* points out that only a few women in Parliament became actively involved in the debate:

“Odete Santos was in fact the MP who was always the face of this issue. Her 28 female MP colleagues were not, with a few exceptions, such as Helena Roseta (in favor) and Maria José Nogueira Pinto (against). And even in the day that this controversial issue was debated in the Chamber only ten female MPs spoke up about where they stood.” (*Correio da Manhã* 21/2/1997)

This excerpt shows that the newspaper expected more female MP involvement in the overall abortion debate, portraying their lack of participation as somewhat problematic. Even when it acknowledges that about one third of women in Parliament did mention their stance on the issue, it is framed almost as “too little, too late”. While *Correio da Manhã* recognizes the women MPs leading the debate (Santos, Roseta and Pinto), it also

de Saúde) tend not to be. Even though these organizations and their representatives have standing in the media, they generally tend to position themselves in the anti-liberalization side, thus reinforcing the overrepresentation of this position.

²² State and party actors include MPs’ standing (66%) and political leaders standing (8%).

criticizes the majority of female MPs for being absent from the debate. Furthermore, this newspaper also uses Santos' statements to support their narrative on the lack of women MPs' participation:

"Odete Santos declared to *Correio da Manhã* an absence of attitude and involvement [of female MPs] that she regretted. "This is a women's and men's issue, however it is women who go through pregnancy so they are the ones who can evaluate this unique situation. That is why I regret the fact that female MPs did not have a more important role in this debate." Claiming, likewise, that women opinion makers should have also had been more involved, and stating that civil society woke up to the issue relatively late." (*Correio da Manhã* 21/2/1997)

Santos also frames the lack of most women MPs' involvement as problematic, specifically because she believes that the abortion issue is one that women are in a "unique situation to evaluate". Santos argues that women have a particular understanding of the issue that *should* have been presented and represented in Parliament as well as in civil society. In fact, another female MP mentions this issue of underrepresentation of women on abortion debates:

" (...) Elisa Damião underscored that women need to be heard in all of this process, criticizing the fact that they have not been "heard enough" in the abortion debates.

"Do you think that women were sufficiently heard in this debate? As long as the debate is constructed around constitutional matters, we do not debate the problems that women face in Portuguese society." (*Correio da Manhã* 21/2/1997)

Claims that women are underrepresented (including women MPs) in the abortion debates are part of how the media frames abortion' discourse, even though it is mentioned as a frame only a couple of times. Both journalists and MPs often share the belief that issues have closure and a "natural life cycle and that public discourse about them should move toward some sort of resolution" (Ferree *et al.*, 2002, p.264). At the end of the cycle of the abortion issue, coinciding with the voting in Parliament, *Correio da Manhã* was the only newspaper suggesting the lack of participation of female MPs in the whole process. There was no other account in my sample of articles competing with this view or providing an alternative assessment. Nonetheless, there are several accounts that highlight the leading role of individual MPs in the debate, particularly Odete Santos. The following are some examples of those accounts from daily newspapers,

"Despite the defeat of the liberalization of abortion, Odete Santos came out victorious from the whole process that ended with the Thursday debate. She was the first one who put together a law proposal that introduced abortion into the political agenda more than six months ago. ... On Thursday, Odete Santos was at her

best level and was one of the personalities that influenced the debate.” (*Público* 22/2/1997)

“If there was an individual MP that differentiated herself from the rest and made her mark on the abortion debate was without a doubt MP Odete Santos. Just because of that she deserves to be highlighted here, even if the law proposal from the Communists was rejected. The Communist MP demonstrates honest convictions every time she presents her arguments in Parliament, and possesses a superior ability to argue compared to the other MPs.” (*Diário de Notícias* 8/2/1998)

“Odete Santos (PCP), Strecht Monteiro (PS) and Sérgio Sousa Pinto (JS) were the main protagonists in the parliamentary abortion debate, by advocating their own law proposals.” (*Diário de Notícias* 21/2/1997)

“Odete Santos was always the face of this issue [abortion liberalization]. (...) Among the Communists, the “star” of the debate was Odete Santos.” (*Correio da Manhã* 21/2/1997)

As seen earlier, more than half of the standing provided to women MPs, was attributed to Santos and Pinto. Nonetheless, all three daily newspapers highlighted Santos' leadership, commitment, and influence in the overall debate. There was no evaluation of the role of Pinto in the print media. As seen earlier, newspapers give standing mostly to two women MPs, but in *metatalk* only Santos is framed as “successful” or evaluated positively by the media. Nonetheless, there are specific traits or evaluations that the media attaches to both of these parliamentary members. MP Pinto is framed by the media as having “the strongest argument” (*Correio da Manhã* 21/2/1997) and “as former director of a Maternity Alfredo da Costa was the least restrained [compared to the other MPs]” (*Diário de Notícias* 21/2/1997). Likewise, Santos is described as “tenaciously defending her position” and as “incisive” (*Diário de Notícias* 21/2/1997). Both MPs are framed by the print media as possessing traits connected to strength, leadership, and persistence. However, not every woman MP is framed this way. For instance, Helena Santo, MP from the conservative Popular Party, is mentioned by the media as being vulnerable to the pressures from the leader of her own party:

“Helena Santo and Manuel Monteiro had lunch together yesterday a little bit before the beginning of the debate. They also arrived together in Parliament. There were immediate rumors that during lunch the leader of the Popular Party had pressured the MP to not go against party voting discipline. Helena Santo denied the rumors. In the end, at the moment of voting the Strecht Monteiro proposal, she abstained from voting instead of voting in favor as she had admitted before.” (*Diário de Notícias* 21/2/1997)

In fact, just a week before the voting, the daily *Público* quoted Helena Santo stating that she had not decided if she would abstain or vote in favor of the proposal. She said she was “sympathetic to it” and considered that it would “improve on the current law” (*Público* 14/2/1997), but her abstention was interpreted or at least speculated as a sign of a woman MP who weakly succumbed to the pressures of the party leader, and not as someone that autonomously decided to abstain. These data show in the few times the print media attributes specific traits or evaluates women MPs’ discourse or stances, it tends to dichotomize between two poles, either one of strength and leadership, or one of weakness or apathy. Nonetheless, of all 33 utterances by the media providing standing to women MPs, the vast majority was neutral, that is, the media simply reiterated what MPs have said in Parliament.

References to the pressure on women MPs can be also understood as part of a broader and dominant narrative in the print media regarding the voting process on the JS and Communist proposals. Parliamentary members, male and female, were framed by the media as subjected to party pressures and backstage politics with a few exceptions. MPs were less framed as individuals capable of keeping their own personal convictions and autonomy. Examples of this dominant narrative are:

“Many Socialist MPs refused to sign in the dotted line for a decision imposed from the outside. “We are being treated as submissive, which is unacceptable. There is a big upheaval in our parliamentary group”, said a Socialist MP yesterday, while another assured that the parliamentary group “will not accept” the referendum. (*Diário de Notícias* 7/2/1997)”

“Indecision, pressure and depression: Freedom of voting is assured by the Socialists and the Social Democrats, but backstage the ‘game of influences’ reigns.”
 ... “Some (MPs) will give in because they know if they vote against the Socialist Youth proposal they will end up ostracized in their everyday tasks of the parliamentary group” (...) said a Socialist MP.
 ... The most ludicrous case comes from MP Miguel Genistal that subscribed the JS proposal but ended up voting against its own proposal” (*Diário de Notícias* 21/2/1997)

“There was some “anguish”, a lot of turmoil, and backstage politics yesterday in the parliamentary corridors of São Bento. MPs pro and against the extension of time limits for abortion try to influence one another. And the Socialists and the Social Democrats parliamentary groups counted their ammunitions regarding the voting of the proposals...” (*Diário de Notícias* 20/2/1997)

“The ideological barriers continued to influence, and the abstention votes within the Socialists extended even to women.” (*Público* 21/2/1997)

The dominant narrative within the print media was that since the voting was so close and since the Socialist Prime Minister did not support the proposal and agreed with the leader of the opposition that the issue would be decided through a national referendum. All of these factors led to many internal struggles and pressures influencing the stance and voting of many MPs. Helena Roseta was one of the few MPs who voiced her concern regarding how the voting played out and her disappointment with some of her Socialist colleagues,

“Many parliamentary members did not hide their desolation. “I am disappointed because the JS proposal did not pass due to the way several of my own MP colleagues voted. The generosity of the Socialist Youth deserved to be supported” said MP Helena Roseta to the DN.”(*Diário de Notícias* 21/2/1997)

“We will not accept to end up “as followers” of our political adversaries” vented several Socialist parliamentary members contacted in the last couple of days by our newspaper.” (*Diário de Notícias* 21/2/1997)

Despite the fact that the newspaper *Correio da Manhã* mentioned the lack of involvement of the majority of women MPs, the daily *Diário de Notícias* highlights how Socialist women criticized factions of the Socialist party (including the leadership) on how it handle the abortion issue in Parliament. In the cover page one could read: “Socialist Women Are Unhappy: Women MPs consider that the Parliament was delegitimized with referendum” (11/2/1997). Elisa Damião is also quoted by this newspaper commenting on a meeting held exclusively by women parliamentary members, in which they agreed on “what was essential” on the abortion issue, that is, to “solve women’s problems and for the Parliament to be respected” (*Diário de Notícias* 11/2/1997).

When the Prime Minister and Socialist leader made an agreement with the leader of the opposition that abortion liberalization would be decided over a referendum, that de-authorized the Parliament as capable of deciding on the issue even after the voting and approval had already taken place. Women MPs and the Communist leader Carlos Carvalhas were the main political actors mentioned by the media that framed the impact of that agreement as a problematic delegitimization of Parliament and to the negative impacts such a decision could have on women.²³

In regards to framing, we see that the specific political context of how the abortion agenda unfolds affects how the print media framed the abortion debates and the role of women MPs in them. The dominant framing narrative of the abortion parliamentary debates was significantly tied to the “backstage politics” and to the “internal party struggles” that went on during the voting of the JS and Communist proposals. Women MPs were framed by the

23 Carvalhas argues that “the political life and the democracy ended up discredited from this agreement that happened outside the institutional mechanisms, and mostly without taking into account the values and aspirations of women” (*Diário de Notícias* 7/2/1997).

print media as influenced by these pressures, and Socialist women MPs in particular were framed as critical of the delegitimation of Parliament, and in stressing the underrepresentation of women, and women's interests in the whole process. *Correio da Manhã* was the only newspaper that underscored the lack of involvement of women MPs in the abortion debate, but all of the daily newspapers mentioned the pivotal role of Communist MP Santos in the parliamentary discussions. While most of the framing of individual women MPs was neutral, when traits or evaluations were attributed by the media they seemed to fall into either the strength/leadership or vulnerability/apathy camps. More research over a larger period of time is needed to find if this is, in fact, a common framing tendency of women MPs by the print media.

Standing and Framing: Concluding Remarks

Who does the talking on abortion in the print media? To answer this question, I analyze both the standing and framing of specific political and civil society actors over the 1997-1998 parliamentary abortion debate. The print media discourse on abortion provides standing mostly to state and political party actors. Parliamentary members and political leaders account for roughly three-quarters of all standing, and the only civil society actors with some representation in the media discourse are the Catholic Church and Pro-Life organizations. Women's movement organizations are almost invisible in the print media, demonstrating that the public media discourse excludes a plurality of points of view and it is clearly tilted towards the pro-life side.

In terms of the gender representativeness, the findings show that women MPs tend to have less standing than male MPs. However, the most significant difference between these two groups is the overrepresentation of MPs Odete Santos and Maria José Nogueira Pinto within the overall female standing (over 50%). Other women MPs only have standing on one or two occasions, impacting the inclusiveness of different perspectives in the overall debate. In contrast, the standing among male MPs is distributed in a more balanced way, with parliamentary members representing multiple points of view and from all political parties. Still, the focus on these two particular women MPs might be the result of the fact that they were involved with legal initiatives on the issue (this tendency is seen also among male MP standing). Nevertheless, it might also illustrate how the media favors more extreme ideological positions on the abortion issue – an effect already alluded to by Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross (1996) – since controversial or more ideologically charged statements tend to increase media coverage.

The dominance of state and party actors in standing has continuity in the framing adopted by the print media. The focus on political leaders and parliamentary members is connected to the dominant framing narrative put forward by the media. Backstage politics between the Prime Minister and the leader of opposition, as well as, internal party struggles among parliamentary members, monopolize most of the framing surrounding the abortion debate. Male and female MPs were framed as influencing and being influenced by these pressures and internal struggles. While most of the newspapers underscored the vital role MP Santos had in the whole debate, they offered no assessment of the role of the

women MPs as a collective entity. Finally, the print media seems to agree that there was a general underrepresentation of women and women's interests in the overall abortion liberalization debate.

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