

# The “crazy woman” in *Game of Thrones*: Gender and pop criticism in journalism

## A “mulher louca” em *Game of Thrones*: Gênero e a crítica do pop no jornalismo

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### ABSTRACT

*Game of Thrones* is a series that reveals complexities in the representation of female characters. This perception exploded symbolically through the fate given to Daenerys Targaryen. From the reading of gender, we undertake a mapping of the journalism that have built criticisms around the problematic involved in the character's destiny. From the French Discourse Analysis, we mapped and analyzed 49 texts. We perceive how the feminine and the masculine cross the pop culture, operationalized by journalism, triggering knowledge about the gender. Finally, we highlight feminist pop culture journalism as a powerful space to critically discuss how gender is implicated in *Game of Thrones*.

**Keywords:** Pop culture, gender, feminism, journalism, *Game of Thrones*, cultural critic

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### RESUMO

*Game of Thrones* é uma série que revela complexidades na representação de personagens femininas. Tal percepção explodiu simbolicamente através do destino dado à personagem Daenerys Targaryen. Empreendemos, aqui, a partir da leitura de gênero, um mapeamento dos jornais que construíram críticas sobre a problemática implicada no destino da personagem. A partir da análise do discurso francesa, mapeamos e analisamos 49 textos. Percebemos como o feminino e o masculino atravessam a cultura pop, operacionalizada pelo jornalismo, acionando saberes sobre o gênero. Por fim, destacamos o jornalismo de cultura pop feminista como um espaço potente para discutir criticamente como o gênero está implicado na série.

**Palavras-chave:** Cultura pop, gênero, feminismo, jornalismo, *Game of Thrones*, crítica cultural

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v15i1p223-247>

V.15 - Nº 1 jan./abr. 2021 São Paulo - Brasil MENDONÇA | GONZATTI p. 223-247

MATRIZES

## INTRODUCTION

**T**HE CHRONICLES OF *Ice and Fire* are a series of books written by George Martin. The first volume of the saga—entitled *Game of Thrones* (Martin, 1996/2010)—was first published in the United States in 1996, and it was translated and published in Brazil only in 2010. Initially thought as a trilogy, Martin’s current project consists of seven books (five of which are already published and two are still in development). The work in question has been translated into 47 languages and, by 2015, it had sold over 60 million copies worldwide (Flood, 2015). Adapted for television in 2011 by the HBO channel, *Game of Thrones* (or *GoT*) (Benioff et al., 2011-2019) has also become a huge success. The series was conceived, produced, and directed by David Benioff and Daniel Brett Weiss; it features eight seasons and the last, which brought the audiovisual version to an end, ended in May 2019.

*Game of Thrones*, like *The Chronicles of Ice and Fire*, is marked by superlatives: the highest-rated series in history, the most expensive, with the highest revenues and the most awards for a broadcaster. When it comes to viewership, the first episode of the last season was watched by 18 million viewers in the United States alone (Koblin, 2019). Each of the six episodes of the eighth season averaged \$15 million. The annual profit of the channel from *Game of Thrones* alone exceeds the 1 billion figures (“Game of Thrones’ Enough,” 2019). Considering the last season of 2019, the show won 59 awards at the Emmys, making it the most awarded series in history (“Awards & Nominations,” n.d.).

*The Ice & Fire Chronicles* and *Game of Thrones*, as mainstream phenomena, can be perceived as a representative of what is understood as pop culture. As Soares (2014) and Janotti (2015) point out, when we talk about pop culture, we are referring to a *popular media* and a *mass popularity*, that is, we are referring to media products aimed at large audiences and under the premises of culture industries. In this same sense, pop culture can be understood as a term for a field of tensions and symbolic disputes, which would be triggered by popular/media cultural manifestations coming from multiple spaces. Pop culture shows a volatility of cultural products—which are influenced by a transitory market logic—however, at the same time, it exerts “profound influence on the way(s) people experience the world around them” (Sá et al., 2015, p. 9). Although it is linked to the ephemeral and the transient, pop culture challenges fans and researchers as a contemporary affective constellation that talks about material and symbolic disputes, and identity constructions.

In general, the plot of *The Chronicles of Ice and Fire/Game of Thrones* takes place in an intricate context, and it deals with varied aspects: bloody political disputes (leading to numerous deaths, including of main characters), clashes between different mono and polytheistic religions, complex family relationships (marked by incest, betrayal/adultery, and murder), and the daily presence of a fantastic universe in which they live/wrangle (magic, resurrections, dragons, and, later, an army of the undead). The narrative is clearly inspired in medieval Europe, involving relations of domination between suzerains and vassals—a control of aristocratic logic—rigid chivalric codes, and also, to some extent, a place of subordination for women (Burlamaque & Barth, 2017).

The story primarily takes place in *Westeros*, a continent located in the western part of the known world, which consists of seven non-independent kingdoms that report to a monarch who rules in an absolutist way. The region is also characterized by seasons that can last for decades, alternating between long and abundant summers and also long winters that bring scarcity and threats from the supernatural. In addition to *Westeros*, the plot is also set in *Essos* (a partially explored continent with a population perceived as exotic and separated from *Westeros* by the Narrow Sea) and ‘beyond the Wall,’ which from the first moment is known to be inhabited by the ‘Free People’ (or wildlings, in a colonial perspective) and magical creatures (the White Walkers and the undead army that marches alongside them). The battles for the iron throne (symbol of control over the continent) by the richest and most powerful families—or by those who think they are entitled to it—the intrigues that take place in the capital (King’s Landing) and in other kingdoms, and the advance of an ever growing undead army sew a plot that arises powerful discussions about identity and difference, physical/symbolic domination and resistance, gender, and sexuality.

Although it consists of a fantastic narrative, as highlighted by different researches that have turned their attention to the plot of *The Chronicles of Ice and Fire/Game of Thrones* (Couto, 2015; Frankel, 2014; Gjelsvik & Schubart, 2016; Hartnett, 2016; Laurie, 2015; Marques, 2019; Penkala et al, 2014; Tarnowski, 2019), the mobilized issues are broad, especially regarding gender and sexuality, putting contemporary aspects—outside the fictional universe—in dispute, such as patriarchy (Connell, 2016), homophobia (Borrillo, 2010) and racism (Davis, 2016) and, more specifically, torture, imprisonment, gender violence, rape, and feminicide.

In our research, the aim was to perceive traces that signal issues related to gender in cultural criticism, regarding the outcome of the character Daenerys



<sup>1</sup>We emphasize, at the outset, the need for the proposition of a category on the feminist cultural critique of pop culture in view of the data that emerged from the problematic core and the methodological arrangements of the article.

<sup>2</sup>It should be noted that such definitions were established by us, based on already developed research (Gonzatti, 2017) and research still under development. Definitions about each of these categories are worked out throughout the text.

Targaryen, produced in the journalistic sphere—from newspapers portals/pages, such as *El País* (Brazilian version), *Público*, *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Gaúcha ZH*)—and, more specifically, in pop culture journalism (Gonzatti, 2017)—*Omelete*, *Minas Nerd*, *Jovem Nerd* and *Site dos Geeks*<sup>1</sup>. The mobilizing question of this study, therefore, is to understand the discourses mobilized/constructed about gender issues departing from the destiny of Daenerys, and also to understand how the different journalismisms (hegemonic, pop culture/feminist pop culture and independent<sup>2</sup>) act discursively before these processes.

From a methodological point of view, the research is inspired by French discourse analysis (DA). For this endeavor, 49 reviews published in different portals were the corpus of analysis. The material was collected by searching for the terms “Daenerys Targaryen” and “criticism” (first overlapped, then with only the character’s name, in Portuguese) in Google (with the browser in anonymous mode, to reduce the action of algorithmic customization on the results). We found approximately 365 thousand references. We restricted the period to the month of May, when the last episodes of the series were aired and so were most of the reviews, and we analyzed only the first five pages in both searches; all materials that fit a critical/opinionative discussion were selected.

It is also essential, still at an introductory level, to introduce the character that mobilizes our research. Daenerys Targaryen (in *Game of Thrones* played by the actress Emilia Clarke) is, at first, a 13-year-old princess in exile, in *Essos*. She is beautiful, thin, with very light, almost white hair. Daughter of King Aerys II Targaryen, who was deposed from the throne in a revolution perpetrated by Robert Baratheon; she and her older brother have to move continuously to avoid political assassination since a very young age. Viserys, her brother, arranges his marriage with Kahl Drogo, one of the leaders of the Dothraki (nomadic and warlike population) to take control of their army and seize power in *Westeros*. Viserys and Drogo, however, do not survive the first book/first season, and over the course of the next books/episodes, Daenerys receives some titles: the mother of the dragons, since she manages to bring them to life from eggs that were petrified; Khaleesi, originally a title for the wife of a Kahl, but in her case, it refers to the rank of sovereign; and Mhysa/Chainbreaker, titles that came from her fight against slavery in *Essos* and the liberation of slaves and *Unsullied* (slave soldiers). With a large army (three adult dragons, Dothraki warriors and Unsullied, who support her, even if no longer in a regime of slavery), Daenerys returns to *Westeros*, occupies the Dragon Stone (former base of the Targaryen family) and, seeks

allies among the great families of the continent to take the throne that she considers rightfully hers.

Rape (in the audiovisual series), the birth of a stillborn/deformed child, kidnapping, imprisonment, and numerous assassination attempts are some of the issues that also constitute Daenerys' trajectory. In the eighth season of *Game of Thrones*, Daenerys heads to King's Landing to assume the Iron Throne, after fighting in Winterfell (the northernmost kingdom) against the White Walkers and the army of the dead. Even when the enemy army gives up, Daenerys ruthlessly destroys the city. In the last episode of the saga, Jon Snow, Daenerys' nephew, lover, and supporter, approaches her and unexpectedly murders her.

In this study, the relations between feminism and pop culture are established from the representations of gender in *Game of Thrones* and in the activist work engendered by certain journalistic portals that make up the analyzed data. The next topics seek to deepen these linkages before the analysis.

## ON GENDER PROBLEMS AND REPRESENTATIONS IN *GAME OF THRONES*

As already mentioned in the introduction and in other research that also paid attention to gender and sexuality issues in *The Chronicles of Ice and Fire/Game of Thrones*, the fantastic plot continuously mobilizes discussions about the allowed and forbidden places for men and women, designates specific sanctions when they break with the norm/standard, and establishes possibilities of circulation of discourses on such issues, contemporarily and beyond fiction.

Following Woodward's (2000) propositions, representation—understood as a cultural process—is a central aspect in discussions about identity and difference. Anchored in cultural studies perspectives, Woodward (2000) postulates that representation, by including signification practices and the symbolic systems through which meanings are produced, becomes fundamental in the establishment of individual and collective identities; so that certain questions can also be answered: "Who am I? What could I be? Who do I want to be? Discourses and systems of representation construct places from which individuals can position themselves and from which they can speak" (p. 17).

Fischer (2002), when discussing what he calls "media pedagogical device," emphasizes that television, as part of the process of subjectivity constitution,



teaches its audiences the ways of ‘being’ and ‘being in the culture.’ Fischer (2002), then, says that this device would continuously incite a discourse about itself and permanently reveal itself in the form of discursive and non-discursive apparatuses.

As Gjelsvik and Schubart (2016) point out in the introduction to the book ‘Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones and Multiple Media Engagements,’ although multiple aspects in the saga may be analyzed, the plural modes of representation of the multiple female characters consist of a relevant point to be considered. According to the researchers, the women in *The Chronicles of Ice and Fire/Game of Thrones* receive great attention, generating discomfort, fascination, and heated debates that signal both a place of protagonism and female empowerment and, at the same time, exploitation of these bodies and reiteration of a *macho* and patriarchal logic. Bringing more than thirty first-person narrators, half of whom are women, it is possible to perceive the women of *The Chronicles of Ice and Fire/Game of Thrones* as complex, multifaceted, and intriguing figures, who even if to some extent reiterate certain gender stereotypes, also advance in relation to them (Gjelsvik & Schubart, 2016).

Frankel (2014), in *Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance*, highlights that Martin claims to take a position, as a writer, of promoting female empowerment. “I regard men and women as all human—yes there are differences, but many of those differences are created by the culture that we live in, whether it’s the medieval culture of *Westeros*, or 21st century Western culture” (Martin cited by Frankel, 2014, p. 2). Equally interesting data brought by Frankel (2014) signals that a significant portion of the audience of *Game of Thrones* are women (40%) and that female fans would initiate around 50% of online discussions about the series.

It is important to recover Butler’s (2012) discussions of sex and gender. Butler, in 1990, in publishing *Gender Trouble*, starts from the assumption that sex and gender consist of cultural constructions. Butler, then, did not merely radicalize an anti-essentialist perspective, more than that, departing from a reconsideration of the opposition between nature and culture, she refused the usual transposition of this to the sex/gender system. “Instead of taking sex as a form of material passivity on which generic characters would be built, [Butler] reconsiders sex itself as an extra place when questioning from a genealogical perspective<sup>3</sup>” (Pérez Navarro, 2008, p. 113).

Far from being permanent substances, therefore, such categories would have their coherence and relationship established to ensure the maintenance of what Rich (2010) defined as “compulsory heterosexuality.” “As a result,

<sup>3</sup>In the original “En lugar de tomar al sexo como una forma de *pasividad material* sobre la que se edificarían ... los caracteres genéricos, reconsidera al propio sexo como un lugar más al que cuestionar desde una perspectiva genealógica.”

gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which ‘sexed nature’ or ‘a natural sex’ is produced and established as ‘pre-discursive’” (Butler, 2012, p. 25).

Considering gender, then, as a continuous action, a becoming, and an activity, and approaching the notion of performativity (based on Austin, 1962), Butler (2012) states that “within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (p. 48)—a repetition that takes place in the body, within a regulated and controlled framework, that, over time, would appear natural. Since the internal truth of gender is a fabrication and, gender is a fantasy replicated in bodies, it can be neither true nor false, but rather produced as a “truth effect of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (p. 195).

From this perspective, socially replicated performative acts affect bodies by inscribing corporalities, that is, multiple bodily qualities that are activated in the urgencies of forms of expression and interaction. It is worth noting that, although it corresponds to a discursive and political construction, gender as an identity (Hall, 2000) is effective and material, demarcating places of power, submission, and resistance, which affect both men and women, even if in different ways. Hence the relevance of reflecting on the media representations of such tensions and how the different journalismisms perceive them.

## THE CULTURAL/JORNALISTIC CRITICS OF POP FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

It is important to point out that cultural criticism, with different matrices and complexities, takes place in the academic/scientific field via critical theories and in the journalistic field in platforms such as magazines and newspapers. Both perspectives, in relation to pop culture and gender studies, historically intersect and are objects of interest in this study.

In feminism, cultural criticism first focused on literature, the representation of women was one of its key concepts. Showalter (1981), with the term gynocriticism, defended how feminists should use literature to build a feminine literary tradition, with themes that deal with women’s experiences, and to rescue women writers from historical erasure—a consequence of a patriarchal society. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, a work from 1979, Gilbert and Gubar (1979/2000) analyze the character ‘Bertha Rochester,’ from the novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë. In the authors’ reading, when her

husband hides her from society for becoming excessive (for male standards), Bertha symbolizes the vulnerability of what has been historically marked as *feminine* in a patriarchal society. The “madwoman in the attic” becomes, therefore, an analogy for female experiences under male power.

Cixous (1997) proposes an *écriture féminine*, when realizing the way women have historically been erased and how their gender performativity was created by patriarchy. In her proposal, women should write about themselves and other women, as well as lead others to write, constructing representations through feminine lenses. The unfolding of this discussion may lead to an essentialist notion within critical theory, guided by a medical and biological discourse of what it is to be a woman. However, it is worth noting that cultural critique—which emerged in activism and academia but was also spread by feminist magazines, platforms of the genesis of a feminist journalism (Esmitiz, 2019)—had literary fiction as an important locus for the construction of knowledge about gender.

Dear to feminism, cultural criticism is also one of the main marks of cultural journalism, as pointed out by Piza (2004). Cultural criticism gained strength in the eighteenth century, Ballerini (2015) traces its history focusing mainly on literature, to legitimize a bourgeois culture. The author presents important names of cultural journalism, such as Oscar Wilde and Edgar Allan Poe. In Brazil, cultural journalism was born in the 19th century, in the “*Armazém Literário*” section of the *Correio Braziliense*. Looking at media structures and discourses through critical lenses enables the adoption of a posture that breaks with inertia and rescues reflections proposed by the erudite arts throughout history (Piza, 2004).

In the twentieth century, cultural journalism became less opinionated and more focused on reports and news, with a greater division of journalistic genres. In this period, a strong media industry was consolidated in Brazil and the cultural supplements began to have market predominance. In this sense, Rossetti (2015) discusses that selecting, hierarchizing, and pointing out what is mere entertainment and what has aspects of a more erudite and reflective art was the focus of cultural journalism.

Monteiro and Soares (2014) also cover these aspects when analyzing the journalistic coverage around Madonna. They note that journalists judge productions according to their repertoire, without considering characteristics and contextual specificities of pop music. They postulate, thus, an area in cultural journalism capable of breaking with purist logics and they primarily defend it as a space for coverage of erudite or popular culture, close to folklore—a place to think about pop culture coverage and criticism.



From this conceptual and historical rescue, a space of distinction was proposed between territories dedicated to pop culture and cultural journalism that strived to trigger the critical lens to look at different artistic and cultural expressions. In pop culture journalism (Gonzatti, 2017), what comes from pop started to be looked beyond emptiness, however, many practices of this type of journalism are often devoid of criticality and too aligned with the logics of the cultural industries (see Gonzatti, 2017). In Brazil, seven categories of this journalism are perceived: pop music, celebrities, movies and series, geek/nerd/otaku, soap operas, comedy, and general (which deals with all categories). Two production links are also perceived: fans and activist fans. Fan activism (Amaral et al, 2015) is present in both, either by the way pop culture coverage is done, prioritizing discussions and information that hegemonic journalism (more conventional portals and focused on general topics, like G1) does not understand for not having journalists that are also part of fan communities—the activism, here, would be present in the way fans appropriate communication technologies to build their own informative vehicles; whether in the construction of critical texts that rescue the practice of feminist cultural criticism of reading, not only literature, but pop culture productions, in initiatives such as *Delirium Nerd*, a space for the construction of pop culture criticism from a gender perspective<sup>4</sup>.

When studying hegemonic journalism, Silva (2014) realized that values historically attributed as masculine and heteronormative are predominant. Some examples are the *journalistic scoop*, reason over emotion, the power of the economic factor, and the denial of diversity. Criticism of pop productions point to this same path. According to a study (“Report Critics,” 2018) conducted by the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, men wrote the overwhelming majority of reviews on sites like *Rotten Tomatoes*. Of 19,559 stories analyzed in the survey, 77.8% were written by men. In *Top Critics*, where the reviews of major portals are found, men were the authors of 76% of the texts. The study also adds that of the top one hundred films at the box office in 2017, 67% of the top critics were white men, less than 25% were white women, 10% were black men, and only 2.5% were black women. We wonder, as a provocation intertwined with the research problem, whether the predominance of gender performativity closer to masculinity and whiteness corroborate the invisibility of gendered lenses. We are interested, thus, in looking at pop culture criticism of different platforms in contemporaneity in hegemonic, independent vehicles—which we understand as portals of collaborative, NGO or activist content, without direct links to fans and pop culture—and pop culture vehicles, including those with a feminist coverage of pop culture.

<sup>4</sup>We do not mean to say that there are no agendas and categories around pop culture in what we established as hegemonic journalism. On the contrary, they exist and have visibility. When we distinguish hegemonic journalism, pop culture journalism/pop culture journalism with activist ties (feminism, for example) and independent journalism, we are referring to portals with greater visibility, which are configured as large companies and focus on many categories of news and are, therefore, hegemonic in the Brazilian context, in comparison with portals exclusively focused on different pop culture themes closer to fan communities (analysis of music videos and trailers) and also to those that use pop culture to exercise some activism, as is the case of those dedicated to feminist criticism of pop culture, and portals that are not focused on pop culture, but are not linked to large companies/commercial interests, respectively. For more information, see Gonzatti (2017).

## THE FRENCH ANALYSIS OF SPEECH AS A THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL SUPPORT

According to Foucault (2007), the discourse is perceived not only as that which hides or manifests desire, but as the object itself. From this perspective, discourse would not be reduced to the translation of the domination systems but would consist in its own motivation. The discourse is also understood as the transit of senses, the movement of meanings, and the space of wandering of the subjects (Orlandi, 2009).

Considering that not everything can and not everything should be said within a given scenario, the discourse works equally via materialization of what it says—and of what it does not say, therefore, silences—and as a space of observation of ideological disputes that mark the consolidation of meanings (Pêcheux, 1997).

Recovering the propositions of Charaudeau and Maingueneau (2008), it is possible to see that discourse analysis has a transnational and plural origin, making it difficult to precise a founding act. About DA in specific, the authors point out that it would have emerged in the mid-1960s, based on the association of structural linguistics with the notion of ideology and psychoanalysis.

Pêcheux (1997), the most representative author of this current highlights different elements of this path when discussing the three periods that would mark the DA development. The first moment is marked by a conception of discursive production as “a self-determined machine, closed in on itself” (p. 311); then, we move on to another moment marked by the forgetfulness of the subject, in which the concept of discursive formation (DF) and the perspective of retaking what has already been said are central. The centrality of heterogeneity issues—which would be a constitutive characteristic of each and every saying—the importance of the interpretative gesture and the character of discourse occurrence mark a third and last phase. It is important to discuss the notion of DF, since it will be later operationalized during the analysis. For Foucault (2012), discourse formation is related to the regularity, order, and correlations that can be observed and described in a certain number of utterances and a similar system of dispersion. By establishing connections with what is external to this formation and activating the Althusserian concept of ideology, Pêcheux (1997) develops the perspective that FD represents, in language, its correspondent ideological formations.

The concept of ideology, central to the works produced from this matrix, comes from the work of Althusser (1974), for whom ideology “represents the imaginary relationship of individuals with their real conditions of

existence” (p. 77). It will be through the bias of ideology that individuals will be interpellated into subjects. Thus, when looking at journalism as a discourse that is, at the same time, reader and hyper producer of a great conversation (Fausto Neto, 1999), it is understandable that we turn to DA as a possible way to ascertain and analyze its meanings. Benetti (2016) suggests that discourse analysis should be one of the possible methodological devices for communication research.

Benetti (2016), then, defines four productive approaches from which DA could be mobilized. The analysis of subjects (1) that would reflect on who speaks and to whom one speaks; the analysis of silencing (2) that would address what is silenced, in view of what can and cannot be said under given conditions; the analysis of discourse structuring (3) that would address the ways in which the discourse organizes itself, considering, for example, how places of speech and interpretation injunctions are established; the analysis of meanings (4) (developed here) that refers to the search for discursive marks that allow us to establish regularities and the corresponding ideological formations beyond the textual surface. In the works inserted in these type of analyses, as a methodological procedure, it is necessary to extract significant fragments (then called discourse sequences) from the corpus that point to the respective ideological formations through the perceived meanings in these fragments. The discourse sequences are intentionally selected passages by the researchers, in the light of a particular research question. They may be numbered to facilitate the corpus construction.

### **AFTER ALL, WHAT DOES CULTURAL/JOURNALISTIC CRITICISM HAVE TO SAY ABOUT DAENERYS TARGARYEN?**

Based on the collection of the 49 texts that composed our corpus with theoretical and methodological inspiration from DA, we undertook an exercise of sense analysis, as suggested by Benetti (2016).

The texts, published between May 5th, 2019 and May 29th, 2019, were numbered in ascending order, from first to last. From them, 108 discursive sequences were collected, that is, excerpts that contained elements capable of answering the research question (Benetti, 2016). The sequences were also numbered in ascending order.

Throughout these movements of collection, reading, tabulation, and clipping of sequences, the existence of three central nuclei of meaning was perceived, that is, three major FD that mobilized/constituted meanings that mention broader material and symbolic disputes.



The first one (FD01), which proved to be hegemonic, encompassed 56 discursive sequences (51.85% of the collected corpus), related Daenerys’ destiny and, consequently, her behavior at the end of the series, to a macho and patriarchal logic that crossed/constituted the saga and, in particular, its adaptation for television. We called this FD ‘Dracarys in GoT’s machismo,’ in allusion to Daenerys’ speech inciting her dragons to throw fire. The sequences included a concrete indication of misogyny and an illustration of women disqualification from the logic of madness and inability to deal with complex situations, observed in the incoherence of the end of the narrative arc of the Chain Breaker. Examples of some of the sequences collected then serve as illustration.

Although Daenerys is not my favorite character, it horrifies me to see how she has spent so many seasons having to prove all the time that she is a leader and deserves respect, only to be turned into a lecture freak. This seems even more inconsistent when we consider that George R. R. Martin describes himself as a feminist and the series (despite the producers’ mistakes) does not hide this worldview of the author, with the presence of characters like Daenerys, Arya, Brienne, Catelyn, Cersei, Sansa and so many others. (Monteiro, 2019, para. 9) (Clarissa Monteiro, *Minas Nerd*) (T03 SD11)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> It is necessary to justify the way of citing the sequences. Besides the citation according to the technical norms, we added the first name of the author of the critique to identify genre (an extremely relevant issue in this research) and the vehicle/portal in which the text was published (something equally important in our analysis). The information that follows refers to the number of the text (T01, T02, T03...) and the number of the sequence (SD01, SD02, SD03...).

By positioning Jon as the most acceptable ruler, the series is returning to its patriarchal beginnings, undoing Daenerys Targaryen’s heroic character arc. . . . the series reminds us of the mental gymnastics people go through in the real world to declare women incapable of handling situations of power. (Carvalho, 2019, para. 8) (Debora Carvalho, *Garotas Geeks*) (T10 SD26)

Emilia Clarke deserved more than a couple of measly close-ups of restrained rage in an agonizing chapter. We didn’t get to see her. The roar of her dragon, that symbolic animal metamorphosis of the Mad Queen, was pretty much the only information given to the viewer about her evil turn. Perhaps she never needed to be the feminist heroine we all believed, but a twist in the script is well worth the overall disappointment that drags down those who dreamed of being Khaleesi instead of a princess. (Ramirez, 2019, para. 4) (Noelia Ramirez, *El País*) (T25SD62)

Out of nowhere, we feel betrayed by the series we love and idolize so much. And if its unpredictable insanity was unfair, even more so was her death. Murdered in the arms of her “love.” The annihilation of an incredible character and all

her development. When Robert Baratheon authorized the death of a child (the butcher's son in the first season) for getting into a joke with Joffrey, no one accused him of insanity. When Joffrey himself performed horrific acts, he was not insane. When Stannis Baratheon killed his own daughter, no one dictated he was mad. How many men have performed terrible deeds, but when a woman does it, then she is crazy, jealous, unbalanced, hysterical. Mad. Mad. Mad. (Carvalho, 2019, para. 8) (Isa Carvalho, *Quarta Parede Pop*) (T46 SD 97)

The scriptwriters forced the transformation of Daenerys the Chainbreaker into a genocid, made the queen who promised to end wars end up promoting more wars. The flip left everyone who followed the series stunned and not without reason. It was a forced flip to fulfill a well-established moral in today's world: revolutionaries, dreamers, radicals who have a project of society should not be followed, they are just potential tyrants. (Pimenta, 2019, para. 9) (João Jorge Pimenta, *Diário Causa Operária*) (T48 SD 104)

For "Game of Thrones," a powerful woman comes to power quietly and endures violence under the justification that it makes her stronger. To face violence by fighting is something of an unstable dangerous woman. Anyway, as much as Sansa's final fate is one of the few positives of the series finale, when analyzed in a larger context, it reinforces many stereotypes. (Bastos, 2019, para. 42) (Athena Bastos, *Delirium Nerd*) (T49 SD108)

The first sequence integrates a text by Clarissa Monteiro, for the portal *Minas Nerds* (<http://minasnerds.com.br>). Created in 2015, *Minas Nerds* aims to repair a gap in the Brazilian journalistic/informative market: women who consume pop culture. *Minas Nerds* is produced by women and aimed primarily at them (data exposed on the page itself indicate that around 60% of its audience is female and that 80% of them are between 18 and 35 years old). Feminist gender discussions are common on the page. Thus, SD11 shows a discomfort with the trajectory of Daenerys, perceived as a character who constantly needed to prove her ability—which was proven, in Monteiro's perception—but who ended up as crazy, in a macho logic that would contradict the very ideals of the author of *The Chronicles of Ice and Fire*.

SD26 presents a similar point of view and it is part of a text written by Débora Carvalho for *Garotas Geeks* (<http://www.garotasgeeks.com>). *Garotas Geeks*, a blog founded in 2010, describes itself as an informative portal about pop culture marked by a feminine and empowered vision.

As highlighted in their media kit (<http://www.garotasgeeks.com/about/midia-kit/>), the team is composed only by women and, in relation to the readership, 75% of the audience is female, around 45% of them are between 17 and 27 years old and about 70% live in the South and Southeast regions. The monthly number of page views for *Garotas Geeks* is over one million. SD26 emphasizes how Daenerys’ destabilization narrative (and the relative representation of Jon as a more appropriate ruler) finds echoes in a patriarchal everyday life that teaches women not to feel capable of occupying certain positions.

SD62 is part of the text published by Noelia Ramirez for the *El País* portal (<https://brasil.elpais.com>). The author lamented the limited (and fragile) way in which Daenerys’ supposed madness would have been constructed, questioning the trajectory of a heroine who reverberates feminist ideals to a supervillain, merciless tyrant. For the author, the process reveals a mythological narrative that wishes to decapitate women who endanger the order of male power (Ramirez, 2019). The Brazilian version of *El País* (Spanish newspaper) brings news and informative texts (such as reviews) on issues of general public interest in its digital version. The website does not present specific information (such as a *media kit*) that would allow us to draw a profile (especially about audience). On its social networks, however, *El País Brasil* has around 2 million followers.

SD97 is a review written by Isa Carvalho for the portal *Quarta Parede Pop* (<https://quartaparedepop.com.br>). Created in 2016, the informative/journalistic page turns, primarily, to the entertainment universe and, more specifically, to the audiovisual segment. In the sequence brought as illustration, it lists a series of male characters from *GoT* (such as Joffrey) who despite having perpetrated acts of cruelty, were not considered insane, while the women, as Isa says, were continuously labeled hysterical, unbalanced, and crazy.

The collaborative and independent website *Diário Causa Operária* (<https://www.causaoperaria.org.br/>) is linked to the political party PCO (*Partido da Causa Operária*). It appeared in 2003 as an organ of the *Causa Operária* newspaper, which was founded in 1979, a product of the workers’ mobilizations that overthrew the military dictatorship. It is a revolutionary and socialist publication, with the objective of defending the working class. Only men compose its columnists’ section. SD104 understands that pop culture, in this case, the *Game of Thrones* narrative, focuses on maintaining the contemporary status quo, marking everyone who has projects to transform this condition as a threat.

SD108 was collected from a review written by Athena Bastos on *Delirium Nerd* (<https://deliriumnerd.com>). The site, which exists since 2016 and is also

produced exclusively by women, brings news/criticism about pop culture, highlighting the female protagonism in the sector. In the sequence, inserted in FD 'Dracarys in GoT's *machismo*,' a comparison is established between the character Sansa, who becomes queen of the north, and Daenerys, constructed throughout the narrative as crazy. Bastos (2019) highlights how the woman who achieves a prominent position in a discreet way—even if she suffers various violence, such as imprisonment and rape in Sansa's case—is accepted, while the one who chooses a violent response to violence is considered unstable and unprepared.

Equally expressive, the second FD (FD02) encompassed 46 discursive sequences, corresponding to 42.6% of the collected corpus. Entitled by us as 'A goddess, a madwoman, a sorceress: Daenerys has always been like that,' this second FD was marked by a discourse that promoted an erasure of a macho narrative in the series, perceiving the protagonist's outcome as logical (and even expected). It is worth noting that, while defending the ending of the plot, claiming that it matched the narrative arc of the character, many of the texts included triggers of sexist arguments and/or disqualified Daenerys. Here are some collected sequences, as examples.

In this questioning, I see room for Daenerys to get totally lost, she who has been questioned a few times for being too harsh, even with attitudes compatible with those of her father, the Mad King. I can't see Daenerys accepting Jon as King and giving him everything on a silver platter, even though he is the man she loves. (J. Ribeiro, 2019, para. 6) (Julio Ribeiro, *Ultimato do Bacon*) (T01 SD01)

What cannot be said is that the series is forcing this in the final stretch, when the plot of the Mad Queen has always been present in Daenerys' story. Perhaps the main problem is that they accelerated the fall and her insanity this last season for the conclusion of the story. (Rantin, 2019, para. 61). (Cristiano Rantin, *Legião dos Heróis*) (T04 SD17)

Daenerys' expression of hatred after Missandei's death, however, seems to be Daenerys' major turning point to madness. (Endress, 2019, para. 12) (Julia Endress, *Gaucha ZH*) (T07SD22)

With the death of another of her dragons and the beheading of Missandei, Daenerys is devastated. It seems that actress Emilia Clarke just woke up and the team handling her makeup and hair is on strike—or she died in the battle of Winterfell.



Tyrian tells her that someone has betrayed her. “Jon Snow,” says Daenerys, in the sense that if Jon had kept his mouth shut, he wouldn’t be about to crack a huge problem. (Farinha, 2019, para. 4) (Ricardo Farinha, New in Town) (T19 SD 47)

Now, since Dany had no salvation left and was stone-cold crazy like her father, thinking she was the savior of the world, why not let the person who loved her the most put an end to everything? She deserved it, for everything she lived and suffered, for everything she represented in the story. To have died in the arms of the man she loved was a nicetribute. (Leão, 2019, para. 10) (Flávia Leão, Dom Total) (T37 SD82)

However, in the last few seasons the character has suffered a curve in her construction, becoming what people saw in her ancestors, a despot. Without going into the merits of the cliché of the mad woman, it is interesting to note that this curve, made explicit at the moment when the character looks directly at the Iron Throne, demonstrates that power corrupts . . . So, like it or not in Daenerys’ fate the fact is that this narrative choice reflects a lot about human nature itself and the societies we have experienced to date. Who knows, maybe that’s not what the screenwriters wanted to pass on to us? (“The Fate,” 2019, para. 3) (*Indutância Nerd*) (T41 SD 88)

The SD01, part of a review written by Júlio Ribeiro and published on the portal *Ultimato do Bacon* (<https://ultimatodobacon.com>), suggests that Daenerys’ behavior has always attested an emotional imbalance, with attitudes similar to her father’s, who was called the Mad King and was also murdered. What also draws attention is the argument that Daenerys should give up the throne to Jon Snow—who, in fact, would also have a hereditary right to the crown—because he is the man she loves. *Ultimato do Bacon* provides little editorial information on its page, only indicating that it is a portal specialized in pop culture and geekdom and that it would aim to bring information in a simple, uncomplicated, and accessible way. Similar arguments are evoked in SD17, which composes Cristiano Rantin’s text for *Legião dos Heróis* (<https://legiaodosherois.uol.com.br>). Rantin (2019) also does not consider Daenerys’ madness incoherent, although he thinks it was addressed too quickly throughout the last season. *Legião de Heróis* presents itself as a communication portal focused on the Brazilian and international cultural scene that aims to contribute to the dissemination of solid, accessible, and high-quality content. The team, as mentioned in the page itself, is composed of fifteen people, of which only one is a woman.



SD22, from a text written by Júlia Endress for *Gaúcha ZH* (<https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/>), recovers facial expressions of the character that would evidence her insanity. *Gaúcha ZH* is a news portal of the RBS group (*Rede Brasil Sul*). With a traditional journalistic structure, the page has more than 2 million followers on Facebook and had, in the first half of 2019, around 90 million views, it addresses plural subjects, such as politics, economy, health, well-being, and culture/entertainment.

SD 47 integrates a review written by Ricardo Farinha for the Portuguese portal *New in Town* (<https://nit.pt>). Founded in 2014, *New in Town* presents itself as a digital lifestyle, culture, and consumption magazine that aims to produce broad and plural information. Regarding the portal's team, it presents a classic journalistic structure (editors, reporters, columnists), composed of men and women in a balanced way. On its various social networks, *New in Town* has more than half a million followers. Farinha (2019) points out that, after several losses, Daenerys would be devastated (i.e., would be in decay), emphasizing the little aesthetic care that, until then, marked the character: "it seems that actress Emilia Clarke has just woken up and the team that deals with makeup and hair is on strike—or died in the battle of Winterfell." By evoking the change in appearance, Farinha (2019) also suggests an index of madness or imbalance, taken, therefore, as consistent with the narrative perpetrated by *GoT*.

SD82, from a text written by Flávia Leão for the portal *Dom Total* (<https://domtotal.com>), argues that, since she was crazy, Daenerys would have been killed in the best possible way: stabbed by the man she loved. The author of the review also points out that such a death would have been a nice tribute. Presented as the most complete digital magazine in Brazil, *Dom Total* is a non-profit organization, maintained by the Movement, Law and Citizenship Foundation, linked to the Dom Helder School of Law and the School of Engineering of Minas Gerais. Culture and entertainment are presented as some of the central focuses of the publication.

The SD88, an unsigned text, was published by the portal *Indutância Nerd* (<http://indutancianerd.com.br>), while it criticizes the "cliché of the crazy woman," it suggests that the goal of the scriptwriters would have been to show, beyond gender issues, that power corrupts and that, like her ancestors, Daenerys would have become a despot. With less than a thousand followers on its social networks, Nerd Inductance was founded in 2019 and is produced only by men (according to information present on the page itself); it is dedicated primarily to geek culture.

Throughout the collection, although in a residual way, the presence of another nucleus of meanings was observed. Although a minority—since it



included only six sequences, only 5.55% of the corpus—a third FD (FD03) was found, which received the title ‘She was furious! And who wouldn’t be?’ The FD03 mobilized arguments stressing that, even if she had acted ruthlessly (murdering innocents), Daenerys had acted coherently, in view of the succession of losses she had suffered, and that this would not necessarily represent a trait of insanity, even it was cruel.

In a world like 2019, I’m much more into the French burning their cars. Because as my grandmother used to say to Jon: the road to hell is paved with good intentions. And this, *GoT* has always represented very well: men and women are susceptible to corruption, to evil, to ambition. There is no political system that can solve “that”: not democracy, not circanda, not monarchy, nothing. We have to set everything on fire. What to do? Valar Morghulis, bitches! And be a Dragon. (Alcântara, 2019, para. 12) (Fernanda Alcântara, *Minas Nerds*) (T03 SD15)

After the death of the people closest to her, it is understandable that she would now seek revenge. And if we see that happen in the next episode, the revenge will be nothing short of righteous. (Carvalho, 2019, para. 12) (Debora Carvalho, *Garotas Geeks*) (T10 SD28)

Was it an act of madness? Could it be that like her father Aerys II Targaryen known as Mad King, the Mother of Dragons went mad? For the author of these words, no. Tired of using good practices, of taking advice from others, after being fully aware that the people of *Westeros* will never accept her with good eyes, the woman took the option of violent conquest. This is nothing new if we take into account that for years she used violence against violence as an argument or technique. She wanted to conquer the world without regard to means and when she was confronted with resistance, she used atrocity as a response. (Santos, 2019, para. 17) (Sofia Santos, *C7nema*) (T32 SD 75)

The SD15, collected from a review signed by Fernanda Alcântara for *Minas Nerds*, suggests that, in a scenario in which no political system would be able to solve a series of tensions—here, the author establishes a comparison with the current political scenario—maybe the most reasonable act would be, in fact, to “set everything on fire.” The SD28 text was written by Débora Carvalho for *Garotas Geeks*, she also considers Daenerys’ “revenge” a coherent action, since the recent events have affected her (such as the loss of the closest people and betrayals by allies). SD75, a text by Sofia Santos for the *C7nema* (<http://www.c7nema.net>),

does not consider that the character was mad, but that she would have chosen to achieve her goals through violence, employing atrocity as a response to what she had experienced. *C7nema* is a Portuguese information portal, produced collaboratively by film fans. Launched in 2002, it focuses on entertainment.

From tables 1 and 2 we developed some reflections:

**Table 1**

*Analysis with feminist pop culture journalism*

	FD <sub>1</sub>	FD <sub>2</sub>	FD <sub>3</sub>
Pop culture journalism	45	30	5
General/hegemonic journalism	10	13	1
Independent Journalism	1	3	-
Total	56	46	6

Female authorship	50	13	6
Male authorship	6	33	0

*Note.* Prepared by the authors.

**Table 2**

*Analysis without feminist pop culture journalism*

	FD <sub>1</sub>	FD <sub>2</sub>	FD <sub>3</sub>
Pop culture journalism	16	30	1
General/hegemonic journalism	10	13	1
Independent Journalism	1	3	-
Total	27	46	2

Female authorship	21	13	2
Male authorship	6	33	0

*Note.* Prepared by the authors.

In view of the collection, it was possible to observe that most texts that perceived in Daenerys' madness as an index of sexism/misogyny were written by women and were mainly published in portals specifically focused on pop culture and/or specialized in feminist discussions. As shown in Table 1, of the 56 discursive sequences inserted in '*Dracarys in GoT's machismo*,

the hegemonic FD, fifty of them were written by women (around 90%). In contrast, out of the 46 sequences included in ‘A goddess, a madwoman, a sorceress: Daenerys was always like that,’ 33 were written by men (about 70%). As represented in Table 2, when we disregard the DS of pop culture journalism vehicles that propose a feminist reading of media productions (29 of 108 sequences—27%), like *Delirium Nerd*, the FD2 (46 of 75—61%) is predominant and, at the same time, we have a greater presence of DS written by men (39 – 52%). The logic, however, is maintained: more women (21 of 27 SD) appear in FD1—the group that perceives sexism in *GoT*—and more men (33 of 46) appear in FD2—the group that does not propose to discuss gender and reiterates, sometimes, sexist discourses.

In relation to the portals in which the texts were published, it was also possible to verify that, in general, portals specialized in pop culture and, more specifically, pages produced by women with a feminist focus, pointed the structural sexism of the series as a central issue regarding the character’s destiny (madness, cruelty, and death). In the category of pop culture journalism, when considering these portals in our analysis (Table 1), FD1 was predominant (45 SD of a total of eighty in pop culture portals). When we do not consider them, there is a predominance of FD2 (30 SD from a total of 47 in pop culture portals). In hegemonic portals, related to big vehicles, there was an interesting division. While certain pages aligned themselves with this criticism of sexism (such as *El País*, *BB,C* and *Público*), others did not include it (*Gaúcha ZH* and *Folha de S.Paulo*). A predominance of FD2 was still observed in what we understand as a hegemonic journalism focused on general agendas (13 SD of 24).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main objective of this study was to understand which gender issues were mobilized/constituted in the fate of Daenerys Targaryen, one of the protagonists of *GoT*, using reviews published in different news portals (hegemonic, “independent,” and pop culture). From 49 collected texts and using discourse analysis as theoretical and methodological inspiration, 108 discursive sequences were selected and three FD were located, which showed an intense dispute of meanings. ‘*Dracarys in GoT’s machismo*’ (FD1), hegemonic, denounced a macho/patriarchal logic that tends to relegate to women the space of unbalance and madness, in the series and in current society. ‘*A goddess, a madwoman, a sorceress: Daenerys has always been like that*’ (FD2), equally expressive, mobilized discourses that conceived

the character's fate as logical and expected, criticizing feminist critics that were made at the time. 'She was furious! And who wouldn't be?' (FD3), residual, distancing itself from the thesis that Daenerys would have gone crazy, elucidating her destiny not as something sexist, rather than as fitting to her character and that, then, she suffered the consequences. It is worth noting, however, that a criticism of sexism in *GoT*, as illustrated in our tables, came mostly from specific portals (feminist pop culture journalism). Table 2, which excludes the sequences from these spaces, shows an inversion: in this other context, FD02 becomes hegemonic.

D. Ribeiro (2017), from a black feminism discussion about places of speech, suggests that the notion should be perceived not from individual, singular positions, but that it is related to the conditions that would allow or interdict subjects and that, consequently, would shape the meanings that they could mobilize. This discussion also evokes the notion of subalternity, proposed by Spivak (2010), which would question whether people in non-hegemonic positions could speak (would they have a voice?) and how they could expose their views.

It is also necessary, however, to consider the place of speech in a journalistic/editorial scenario. Even though there are large portals of pop culture journalism in the country with millions of followers, news portals of large vehicles present a distinct mode of credibility, once they approach what is understood as a journalism of reference. As Amaral (2005) reminds us in a discussion about popular journalism, to understand (and to study) the journalistic/informative discourse, it is also necessary to know the constitutions in which this discourse is created, that is, to take into account the ways of addressing and of constituting itself as a vehicle with its own identity (Amaral, 2005).

Thus, we realize that pop culture journalism, with respect to a coverage focused on the *Game of Thrones* universe, may also engender gender readings that refer to the masculine, insofar as it denies gender and reiterates power relations. There is, however, resistance. The feminist perspective present in portals that integrate feminist pop culture journalism through fan activism, appears as a possibility to break with the hegemonic matrix—which is male, heteronormative (Warner, 1991), and white.

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