

Crimes of Power: Coverage of Transfemicides in Veracruz's Digital Journalism



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ABSTRACT

The production of information with a gender perspective focused on cases of transfemicide implies multiple tasks of analysis, observation, and specialized language for the digital media. Currently, in the state of Veracruz, Mexico, coverage is offered that addresses discrimination, violence, hate crimes and transfemicides in a superficial way, that is, without contextualizing or using inclusive language with a gender perspective.

Keywords: Violence, Crimes of Power and Journalism.

1 INTRODUCTION

The production of information with a gender perspective focused on cases of transfemicide implies multiple tasks of analysis, observation and specialized language for the digital media. It is modified according to the social, cultural and political constructions that govern society. Currently, in the state of Veracruz, Mexico, coverage is offered that addresses discrimination, violence, hate crimes and transfemicides in a superficial way, that is, without contextualizing or using inclusive language with a gender perspective, thus generating disinformation, dysfunctionality of journalism and discrimination.

The Center for the Support of Trans Identities A.C. mentions in its 2020 report that the state of Veracruz holds the first place nationally in the number of transfemicides, so news coverage of these cases should be a priority. However, that same year, when the trans women Nelly García, Denisse Torres, Brandy Cortez, Ana Karen and Anel Valenzuela were murdered, the digital media did not publish the news or only worked on the informative note of the event, without delving into the subject, leaving many doubts in the reader.



It is important to note that trans women are immersed in a cycle of violence, discrimination and criminalization that generally begins at a very early age due to the exclusion and violence suffered in their homes, communities and educational centers (Vera, 2020).

This research seeks to analyze the hegemonic perspective with which three digital information media outlets in Veracruz —*Al Calor Político*, XEU and La Silla Rota Veracruz— *handled the data, as well as the incorrect technicalities used in journalistic language for the dissemination of these events.*

It is specified that these media outlets, *Al Calor Político* and *La Silla Rota* are digital newspapers, while XEU is a radio company of the Pazos Group, which replicates its information on a website, so for this study it will be the analysis of the digital version of this media outlet.

To this end, we begin with the approach of Rita Laura Segato, who addresses transfemicide as a "Crime of Power", since, together with femicide, they are crimes generated by an impulse of hatred related to patriarchy, which when overcome or attacked by a woman, acts to show its power (Segato, 2006).

Faced with this problem, journalists have the opportunity to publicize the facts in an ethical way and with a gender perspective, as they do with other crimes against people who do not belong to the LGBT+ community. Gone would be those informative notes in which phrases such as "the man who dressed as a woman", "the dressed" or "Daniela or Daniel" are used. The journalistic quality of news works with a gender perspective must apply its ethics, without entering into morality, since it could fall into subjectivity.

The journalist can deal with a transfemicide without the need to interfere with their political, cultural or ecclesiastical ideologies, because in this way they can benefit the contextualization of these violent events. Journalism, as indicated by the theoretical support, must inform society, since otherwise it would misinform, in addition to the fact that multiple crimes would remain unpunished or invisible. Thus, in this essay it is argued that digital portals in the state of Veracruz do not have an LGBT+ agenda that pays for or facilitates an adequate context in terms of transfemicides and/or hate crimes, therefore, in the content worked on, either by their reporters or editors, Inclusive language is not applied.

To this end, three arguments are submitted:

1. The language used lacks the necessary codes to consider that journalism fulfills its function, which generates a lack of concepts in its readers.
2. The sources mentioned in each and every one of the information notes analyzed are always, or almost always, government agencies or agencies, which means that people close to the victims are not required, since they are not even mentioned.



3. The context of the events is null and the type of narrative tends to victimize the murdered person, because contrary to what happens with media cases, there is little follow-up, thus occupying a maximum of two days of exposure in the digital portals analyzed.

2 VIOLENCE AND CRIMES OF POWER

To conceptualize violence and crimes of power in the digital media, it must be clear that the typology used in the information is important.

When society and the media talk about violence, they can fall into a language that detracts from information, one of the main objectives of journalism, according to the Manual of Journalism by Vicente Leñero and Carlos Marín (1986).

One of the definitions of gender-based violence is the one proposed by the World Organization of the United Nations (UN) in 1995, which explains that "any act of gender-based violence that results in possible or actual physical, sexual or psychological harm, including threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life, they are acts of gender-based violence."

Due to the importance of language in informative content on transfemicides, a work without contextualization and with a language without a gender perspective on the part of the author and the editor, could contribute to the thinking of Francisca Expósito, who assures that social asymmetry in the relations between women and men favors gender violence (Expósito, 2011), because it magnifies men and diminishes women.

In other words, Rita Laura Segato (2003) describes that even though the number of women murdered with excessive cruelty is growing day by day, both in Mexico and in Brazil, the media and political activists continue to be unable to explain them. Segato mentions that they are violent crimes "with no line of investigation by government officials and the police and linked to trafficking and economic power by public opinion." Due to the type of violence exerted during the murders, the victim is placed in a position where he will only be treated with subordination. (Segato, 2003, p. 5).

A direct nod to what Segato (2003) describes is the lack of contextualization of the causes of crime and the lack of use of inclusive language as a gender language policy (Furtado, 2013). In any case, the work of raising awareness and information about violence and gender-based violence does not only fall on the media, however, it is one of the channels with the largest audience, so its members will need to properly understand the characteristics of gender-based violence.

Although dozens of texts are published every day about women: winners of a sports competition, who triumph on social networks or in the artistic environment, policies that stand out, there is minimal or no exposure of trans women in the media, which is why the question arises: What is published about trans women?



"Trans woman attacked with acid in Guadalajara improves health, after surgery intervention" (*Líder Informativo*, 2021), "Trans woman attacked with acid in Guadalajara; hospital denies her care" (*Animal Político*, 2021), "Trans woman is beheaded in Ensenada" (Cadena Noticias, 2021).

These are some of the headlines that circulate every time a trans woman "makes the news" or, as the *Journalism Manual* puts it, every time "facts of public interest are made known and analyzed" (Leñero and Marín, 1986).

This is where the conception of violence as a collective social construct begins, where every one of the participants in society tries to make a value judgment and with this categorize the facts, according to their little, much or no information on the subject.

Instead of thinking of gender-based violence as an opportunity to show the correct way to handle violent processes such as transfemicide, the information is turned into ephemeral news that could stigmatize and contribute to the power that men maintain over women. However, the subject who commits an act of violence, despite being accused of a criminal act (transfemicide), maintains the position of the male, male and heterosexual ego (Segato, 2003).

Thus, it is proposed that the role of the journalist is to combine what is exposed by the different sources: academic, the State and the agents of violence (Tamayo and Bonilla, 2006, 217). Camilo Tamayo Gómez and Jorge Iván Bonilla Vélez argue in their article "Latin America: A Cartography for Analysis" (2006) that the role of the media goes beyond transmitting information about political violence, since, quoting Peralta (1998), the media are "sounding boards", that is, they are immersed in a complex system of violence and symbolic representations that could distort the discourse (Tamayo and Bonilla, 2006, 217).

Transfemicides in Veracruz are allegedly committed by heterosexual cisgender men, that is, men born with male genitalia, according to reports published by digital news media. It is a chain of acts of violence that is not talked about or kept silent.

Rita Laura Segato wrote in 2006: "Moral reduction is a requirement for domination to be consummated and sexuality, in the world we know, is imbued with morality", she argued that violent acts committed against women are a "bestial right of a feudal and postmodern baron with his group of acolytes". In this way, it is inferred that transfemicides are mostly committed by men who seek to impose their right on the woman's body, whether cisgender or transgender, as well as what in its extension of good or bad for society dictates.

Society, and not only in Mexico, is in constant change, however, trans women in Mexico are immersed in a cycle of violence, discrimination and criminalization that generally begins at a very early age due to the exclusion and violence suffered in their homes, communities and educational centers (Vera, 2020). This is thought to be because it is treated as abnormal from birth.



The word transgender or trans has its origins in a medical category that runs through concepts of bioethics. It is a gender dysphoria inspired by a humanist ethic, which, according to Patricia Soley-Beltrán, seeks to alleviate the suffering of patients who declare to feel a painful disagreement in their identity – male or female – and their physical morphology (2014, pp. 21-39).

To talk about violence in the LGBT+ community, especially in the life of a transgender person, is to understand that, just like cisgender women, they are victims of domination and control, to attack or hurt someone else. (Morales, 2020)

Ari Vera Morales, in her article "Transfemicides: Mexico Case 2019" (2020), addresses the issue as a serious problem faced by all types of women, which diminishes the daily lives of many. Vera Morales defines transfemicide as the murder of trans women, committed with an aggravating circumstance of hatred, for the simple fact of being trans women (Morales, 2020, 75).

Even though there is no general concept to refer to this type of crime, the system regulates public and private social relations, in which heterosexuality is almost obligatory, so that other identities – such as transgender – are punished, annulled or annihilated (Morales, 2020, p. 76).

3 INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND VIOLENCE IN THE MEDIA

In Spanish there are many variants that could significantly modify the meaning of a sentence or an event, so using correct language in the treatment of information related to the LGBT+ community, especially trans people, is essential. When searching for "Inclusive language" on the website of the Royal Spanish Academy, the following legend appears: "Warning: The word inclusive language is not in the dictionary"; This is explained by the fact that the Royal Academy gives meanings by words. In this case, language is the "ability of human beings to express themselves and communicate with others through articulate sound or other sign systems" (RAE, version 23). On the other hand, inclusive is that "which includes or has virtue and capacity to include" (RAE, version 23). For the Royal Spanish Academy, inclusive language is the ability to communicate in an inclusive way in which everyone can take part, attributing to the media an arduous work of social value.

Victoria Furtado in her article "Inclusive language as a gender language policy" (2013) states that inclusive language is that which is identified as non-sexist and seeks to make gender policies visible in the community (Furtado, 2013). In this way, inclusive language must be differentiated from the standard language used in any public sphere, mainly because its protagonists want it to be so, since non-inclusive language uses a system of mostly sexist codes.

One of the non-sexist proposals defended by Victoria Furtado (2002) is that of Calero, which seeks to address social acts carried out by women with respect. Furtado's idea of inclusive language is contrasted by Álex Grijelmo in his book *Propuesta de acuerdo sobre el lenguaje inclusiva*, una



argumentación documented para acercar positions muy dispara (2019), where he tries to dismantle the multiple myths that exist around the origin of inclusive language.

Grijelmo argues that, although academies do not address inclusive language as a new form of appropriation, "most Western languages today come from Indo-European, and more than half of the inhabitants of the earth currently speak a language that has its origin in it" (Grijelmo, 2019).

What Grijelmo exposes is a global term in terms of referring to people, as he assures that our ancestors used the term for men and women. The journalist argues that "masculine doesn't really exist" and ending a word in what is known as masculine is not, since, in the origins of the language, the masculine "does not exist" (Grijelmo, 2019).

In this way, the theory of journalists Sonia Santoro and Sandra Chaher is confirmed in their book *Words Have Sex: Tools for Gender Journalism*, in which they claim that the media do address issues related to gender, but completely linked to the dysfunctional. "Why crimes of passion when it comes to gender violence, why do they see a criminal in a boy who is homeless, why do they viciously put the camera in front of girls or women in prostitution, why do they insist on the objectivity of journalism as an excuse to make "all voices" speak on issues that put women's lives at stake. What is not usually talked about is the training received by journalists and comunicador@s who will fill the pages we will read daily, edit the newscasts that will construct our images of reality and put ideas into circulation on the radio" (Chaher and Santoro (2007).

Chaher and Santoro use these concepts to highlight the importance of training communicators with a gender perspective, but they also state that gender issues need to be treated with respect and ethics, since, as Chaher and Santoro (2007) explain, gender issues continue to be treated as societal and general information issues and not as issues that have a profound impact.

Chaher and Santoro propose to identify any gender issue from three angles: the subjects involved, citizenship and politics (2007). In order to considerably stop the aftershocks of violence emitted by the media.

Victoria Furtado in her article "Inclusive language as a gender language policy" stressed the importance of a specific language policy in the media and public entities, as they help to promote them and eradicate disinformation (Furtado, 2018).

Inclusive language is a term that causes and will continue to cause controversy. Technically, it refers to a way of dealing with social problems through language, using words with a masculine connotation that do not represent women (Moretti, 2018).

Julia Moretti (2018) states that it is very common to find headlines in the news that boast about the achievements of a group of academics with a "researchers find", leaving aside the fact that there are women in the group.



Moretti argues that the masculine generic language represents the oppression that women experienced and continue to experience, since "There is an indissoluble relationship between the imposition of the generic masculine as a linguistic norm and the male domination that reproduces the power relations between genders at the social, cultural, economic and political levels" (2018).

The fact that institutions such as the Royal Spanish Academy reject the use of gendered idioms, such as "las y los", describing them as "artificial and unnecessary from a linguistic point of view", causes the educational and journalistic sectors to continue using "ellos", in a group with a majority of women. (Moretti, 2018).

For journalism, it is a major challenge due to its apparent complexity and disruption in what is known as "normal", in addition to the lack of style manuals that address new proposals with a gender perspective.

In one of the few manuals on headlines in Latin America, written by Dr. María de Jesús Rojas Espinosa, called *Manual for Writing Headlines*, published in 2003 and republished in 2006, the title or headline is addressed as "an important element within the techniques of modern journalism and typography."

Rojas Espinosa states that the title must be clear, precise, attractive and summarized, because the most important of the material that is presented, in addition, must answer one of the main questions of journalism: what happened? (Rojas, 2003).

Among the recommendations given in the manual is the use of the verb in the present tense and not in the past tense, as well as not exceeding the number of characters. However, in chapter 14, in the AIDA Model applied to digital headlines, exactly in the subtopic of wording and types of headlines, the academic also assures that the headline should be informative, without sensationalism.

This is because the author assures that for a person to read a news story it is not necessary to be sensationalist with headlines such as: "gay man", "man dressed as a woman" and "dressed".

4 DIGITAL JOURNALISM

Digital journalism is not a new way of doing journalism (Sánchez, 2007), but it is a new way of transcending information hand in hand with new technologies, since media that do not evolve to networks can stagnate, and even disappear. However, journalism that "reports on shocking or attention-grabbing matters rather than relevant or important issues" (Bertir, 2010) becomes sensationalist and therefore completely neglects the journalist's objective.

The messages conveyed in the digital media are very complex, so not only veracity but also the contrast of data between official sources and those involved must predominate (Reyes, 1996, p.115).

In the particular case of news coverage of violent events, the periodicity of the events must be taken into account, since in recent years murders have increased considerably.



Digital journalism is more complex than it seems. Diego Alonso Sánchez Sánchez explains it directly as "network journalism" (2007), arguing that the only journalism that can be completely digital is the one that effectively uses Hypertext, "that is, the link that allows the reader to navigate through different corners of the page, and even through multiple pages".

On transfemicides—not only in Veracruz—there are no contextual works that seek to explain to society what happened to them and the constant violence that exists in their murders. Anabel Hernández, a Mexican journalist, mentions in her book *Emma and the Other Narco Ladies*, published in 2021, "the criminal system that exists in Mexico has a masculine face not only because, for the most part, the members of the leadership and those who make decisions are men: politicians, public officials, religious hierarchs, businessmen and drug traffickers, in others; but because it is a patriarchal system where arrogance over the most fragile, discrimination, superiority complex, narcissism, the use of force and violence as a mechanism of control and contempt for the existence and rights of others are the norm."

In this way, he introduces his most recent book, in which he addresses how man, sheathed in his role as dominant, murders, complexes, attacks and weaves systems that victimize, criminalize and, above all, end the lives of innocent people.

All stages of journalism are fundamental so that now of "liberating" the news, readers can dissolve all their doubts. In digital journalism, on web pages it is considered that the premise remains the same, to inform with collated data for an understanding of the prosumer, in this case.

The messages conveyed in the digital media are very complex, so not only veracity must predominate, but also the contrast of data between official sources and those involved (Reyes, 1996, p.115). In the case of news coverage of violent events, the periodicity of the events must be considered, since in recent years murders have increased considerably.

In this way, news coverage should contribute substantially to the public perception (Barrios, 2017) of violence in Veracruz. Following the same author, Barrios (2017), one of the main challenges of journalism will be to expand its agenda with long-term issues, which go beyond the official source and do not contribute anything to society.

In the case of transfemicides, journalism faces another challenge that leads it to have to highlight even more the viciousness with which these crimes are committed: the absence of informative notes, because without published information, the fact remains invisible. As Lozano (2016) points out, there is an absence of precedents in the national history of print and electronic journalism in the coverage of this type of phenomenon.

To analyze the way in which content is addressed in digital media in Veracruz, the measurement instrument Content Analysis was used for this work. Ten days of sample were taken, obtaining eleven pieces of information related to this topic, where the variants of presence, frequency, weighted



frequency, intensity, direction, order and contingency proposed by Jaime Andréu Abela (2002, p. 14) were analyzed.

The contents that were collected during the analysis are related to the transfemicides of Nelly García, a transsexual woman murdered in Poza Rica. Denisse Torres, a transsexual woman stabbed in Minatitlán, Brandy Cortez, a transsexual murdered along with her mother in Puente Nacional, Ana Karen, a transsexual murdered in the port of Veracruz and Anel, a transsexual woman murdered in Fortín, all occurred in the state of Veracruz, Mexico.

It is specified that with regard to the weighted frequency variant, the most used words in the information will be identified, as they will show that they are of greater importance to the journalist and therefore be able to analyze if they work with inclusive language. To measure the intensity of the information, the tense of the verb (past, present, future), qualifying adjectives and their degree of intensity (+ for those of greater intensity and – for those of lower intensity) will be identified. In the case of management, headlines and information that use language with a gender perspective will be identified as positive, and negative will be identified as those that are identified with an incorrect use of inclusive language with a gender perspective. To analyze the order, a record will be kept of the follow-up that was given to the news in the three digital media. For the contingency, the context of the information will be recognized: political, social, cultural or economic. Finally, for observation, the presence of information on the five cases of transfemicide in other digital media in the state of Veracruz is reviewed: *Presente*, *Vanguardia*, *Sol de México*, *Observador Veracruzano*, *SDP Noticias*, *ULISEX*, in order to confirm that transfemicide was part of the agendas of other news outlets.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Journalism is and will be one of the most professional ways to inform the population about current affairs, whether online or printed. The agenda of any media outlet—small or large—is very important for the day-to-day political, economic, and social life of a country, in this case Mexico, specifically, Veracruz.

The way in which the issues are handled could modify the way, partially or completely, in which an important event for a given population is treated. It is true that issues of violence are always on the agenda, but not if they are dissident or vulnerable communities such as women and all those who belong to the LGBT+ community.

Regardless of the number of cases that are registered every day, the impunity with which the cases are treated by the authorities and the viciousness with which they are committed, the media that have the largest audiences in the state prefer to ignore and continue with their usual programming: news of the day that are not from the community, contracts with municipalities and governments, stories of "strange" animals and murders of well-known characters.



With the analysis carried out in this text we can corroborate that during 2020 there was an increase in cases of hate crimes in Veracruz, but what stands out the most is the null contribution of the media, who only published 11 notes of the cases; none of them were published by the *XEU*. In the case of *Al Calor Político*, it handled information with more context, however, the contents refer only to the statement given by some activists, but among its reporters there are no articles with a gender perspective, unlike *La Silla Rota Veracruz*, which showed openness on issues about transfemicides. However, it did not publish some of these transfemicides reviewed in this research.

What emerges is that each media outlet decides what to handle in its content and the journalistic criteria that govern them do not fully adjust to the value of the news, since some publish one transfemicide and then ignore two that occur later.

Digital media in Veracruz had very little use of language with a gender perspective. Although there are some sporadic cases with interviews and contextualization, this has not yet been systematized among journalism professionals in the state of Veracruz, as it continues to be their own initiative.



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