

ERROR, DOUBT AND GENDERED JOURNALISM:

a look at the rape coverage in the feature
“A rape on campus”

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ABSTRACT – This paper aims to problematize some foundations of Western journalism in the light of feminist contributions, reflecting about the rape coverage made by dominant press, with the feature “A rape on campus”, published in November 2014 by the American magazine *Rolling Stone*, as case study. We propose to think journalism from four ideas linked to feminist theories: perspective; women’s experience; objective in favor of women; and situated subjects. Besides reflect about a journalism built on feminist foundations, we are going to analyze the ways in which this journalism dialogues, collides, contradicts and challenges the traditional and universal foundations of journalism, especially those related to ethics and production.

Key words: Gendered Journalism. Rape Coverage. Feminism. Ethics.

ERRO, DÚVIDA E JORNALISMO GENERIFICADO: Um olhar sobre a cobertura de estupro a partir da reportagem “A rape on campus”

RESUMO – Este artigo busca problematizar alguns fundamentos do jornalismo ocidental à luz das contribuições feministas, refletindo sobre a cobertura de estupro feita pela imprensa de referência, tendo a reportagem “A rape on campus”, publicada em novembro de 2014 pela revista norte-americana *Rolling Stone*, como estudo de caso. Nos propomos a pensar o jornalismo a partir de quatro proposições ligadas às teorias feministas: perspectiva; experiência das mulheres; objetivo em/a favor das mulheres; e sujeitos situados. Para além de pensar um jornalismo possível a partir de fundamentos feministas, nos dedicamos a cotejar de que maneiras essa potência de jornalismo dialoga, se choca, contradiz e interpela fundamentos tradicionais e universais do jornalismo, sobretudo aqueles relativos à ética e aos processos de apuração.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo Generificado. Cobertura de Estupro. Feminismo. Ética.

ERROR, DUDA Y PERIODISMO GENERIFICADO: una mirada sobre la cobertura de violación a partir del reportaje “A rape on campus”

RESUMEN – Este artículo busca problematizar algunos fundamentos del periodismo occidental a la luz de las contribuciones feministas, pensando sobre la cobertura de violación hecha por la prensa de referencia, teniendo el reportaje “A rape on campus”, publicada en noviembre de 2014 por la revista norteamericana Rolling Stone, como estudio de caso. Nos proponemos pensar el periodismo a partir de cuatro proposiciones ligadas a las teorías feministas: perspectiva; experiencia de las mujeres; objetivo en favor de las mujeres; y sujetos situados. Además de pensar un periodismo posible a partir de fundamentos feministas, nos dedicamos a cotejar de qué maneras esa potencia de periodismo dialoga, choca, contradice e interpela fundamentos tradicionales y universales del periodismo, sobre todo aquellos relativos a la ética y los derechos procesos de escrutinio.

Palabras clave: Periodismo Generificado. Cobertura de Violación. Feminismo. Ética.

1 Presentation

Femicide, domestic violence, rape, *glass ceiling*, sexual and moral harassment, maternity, abortion, reproductive rights, contraceptive methods, gender public policies; these are some of the many items on the feminist agenda that are often addressed by traditional press. Blaming the victim, feminist radicalism, crimes of passion, and naturalization of gender hierarchies are some of the everyday frameworks criticized by feminist movements and in gender studies. Even though it talks about women, this journalistic production does not speak to women because it is not about women, and it is also not expressed through any gendered discourse produced by our experiences or framed by our perspectives. The discourse remains rooted in a masculine journalism.

Initiatives such as journalism production manuals (for example, the NGO *Think Olga* and the Secretariat of Policies for Women in Rio Grande do Sul) and media criticism from formal sources (*Agência Patrícia Galvão*) and informal ones (social networks, websites and blogs) are looking to report on and rethink the way that mainstream media addresses this agenda, which tends to lean towards a gendered coverage of issues relating to gender regimes and, in particular, to women (Connell, 2014). Other initiatives include the creation of independent media vehicles that use journalistic subjects to produce reports that are counter-hegemonic to the traditional framework. Prominent examples in Brazil include *Azmina*, *Catarinas*, *Capitolina*, *Geledés*¹.

The deconstruction of sexism in the language of journalism which – as in all languages – is produced from a universally male point of view (Nye, 1995) is essential to the fourth wave of feminism². But are they sufficient to adequately respond to the need for a journalism that represents our current times and the voices and experiences that have been covered for so many years from the point of view of men? These questions are expressed in an interview with Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda for the *Suplemento Pernambuco*:

The academic format, for example, is white and masculine. It is not that women are different from men, but their experience is different. Look what happened to my doctoral thesis. I wrote 'I still remember the sixties' and the examination board stopped there. The thesis failed on the first line. But why? It is because the board wanted to analyze my thesis in accordance with a male's experience; and I wanted to tell my experience as a woman. And you cannot. (Carpegiani, 2017)

In this paper we seek to problematize some foundations of Western journalism in light of feminist contributions, reflecting on media coverage of rape by using an article from the November 2014 edition of American magazine *Rolling Stone* called "A *rape on campus*" as our case study. It is not a matter of correcting or adapting journalism to a world that demands new answers (and proposes new questions); it is an indispensable element for social justice, according to Nancy Fraser (2013). This is because journalism integrates the redistribution-representation-recognition tripod that needs to be transformed to ensure equal access to citizenship for women. Journalistic practices are one of the cultural elements of recognition that need, in this context, to adequately recognize female subjects in their coverage, in what it makes visible (Fraser, 2013).

Thus, we propose to think of journalism based on four propositions of feminist theories: perspective; the experience of women; a goal in favor of women; and the concept of situated subjects – which, in turn, is connected to the concept of perspective. In addition to thinking about a possible journalism based on feminist foundations, we compare the ways in which this strength of journalism dialogues, collides, contradicts and challenges the traditional and universal foundations of journalism (in the West), especially those related to ethics and reporting processes.

Journalism is not only a profession for generating products that have an impact on everyday life, but one that also instinctively interferes in the cultural system that defines it. Therefore, journalistic

materials help in building interpretations of reality since, as Robert Park has pointed out, “to the extent that they (events) have been reported by the newspapers in which we reflect on them, they tend to assume a new and ideal meaning” (Park, 1976, p.180).

2 From objectivism to gendered journalism

The association between objectivity and masculinity crosses the line of historical constitution and institutionalization of knowledge. According to Angela Maria Freire de Lima e Souza, this association and the one between the masculine and the scientific had never been questioned or even taken seriously in the academic environment (2011) before feminist studies started to do so. However, the field still seeks recognition and legitimacy – and there is still a large amount of resistance (from epistemological to institutional instances) towards recognizing that these articulations between masculinity and science exist.

The fact that feminist scientific production has “declared itself to be committed, both socially and politically, and is also ‘good science’ even though it defies or intervenes with established methods and techniques of Modern Science” (Souza, 2011, p. 24) has been questioned. Objectivity in journalism, as constituted over the last two centuries, has not yet had a possible or ratified alternative (Ward, 2015). It is one of the traditional foundations that has been constituted and made effective from a masculine perspective. Luis Felipe Miguel and Flávia Biroli demonstrate how modern liberal journalism is based on values such as impartiality and objectivity, and how this same impartiality contributes towards maintaining the hegemonic structures of power:

the ideals of impartiality and objectivity remain central to journalists’ self-image, to the constitution of practical schemes for the attribution of value to their work, to the defense of this work in the face of internal and external pressures in the journalistic field and in the construction of an ethical framework shared by the journalists themselves (Miguel & Biroli, 2010, p. 59).

Drawing from feminist theorists Nancy Fraser and Iris Mary Young, they argue that in liberalism there is a normative formalization of equalities while effective inequalities remain. According to these authors, forms of exclusion and oppression are reproduced in the

daily life of contemporary capitalist societies. Although the formal conditions of liberalism guarantee (on paper) conditions of equality, these same conditions do not account for a daily life that oppresses and excludes women from egalitarian citizen participation in formally inclusive spheres.

In this context, impartiality “reinforces oppression by transforming the vantage point of privileged groups into a universal position” through “differentiated visibility in the media” which silences certain perspectives and reproduces stereotypes; it naturalizes judgments about men and women, rich and poor, and about the ability of certain groups to speak in the public sphere. It is in this context that Young, as Miguel and Biroli point out, shifts the sense of impartiality to a value that “serves precise ideological functions” by transforming privileged particulars into a universal position (Miguel & Biroli, 2010, p. 66).

Instead of impartiality, the authors propose perspective as the foundation of journalism, which serves as a parameter for evaluating journalistic work and exposing the dynamics of oppression instead of hiding them. For these theorists, any discourse based on the feminist notion of situated knowledge, including journalism, is situated and “marked by a complex network of relationships” – including those that are socially legitimated and defended as not situated. These are journalistic practices that place conflicts at the heart of politics and fail to neutralize “voices that explain fractures and conflicts” (Miguel & Biroli, 2010, p. 74). The perspective, then, ceases to be based on a monophony (that of the author) to actually reveal the voices that seek for a speech.

The notion of perspective addressed here aligns with the one put by Marcia Benetti Machado, where the subject that enunciates has its statement conformed “also by cultural, social and historical inscriptions” (Machado, 2006, p.8). It is a question of accepting not the source’s “point of view”, but of fostering the discursive existence of the source as an element beyond what the journalist had intended it for. The source becomes an enunciator who presents the events – while the journalist narrates them.

This concept seeks to demonstrate that the experiences of all subjects have value, that conflicts must be made explicit, and that the knowledge of social relations becomes more comprehensive precisely because this knowledge is based on the interaction between different perspectives. Miguel and Biroli stress the need to rethink the

idea of “two sides” because these sides are defined from a “non-side” – a point of Archimedes (Flax, 1991) that does not exist and cannot be a neutral or external point of view.

As Young argues, the negotiation between distinct perspectives promotes an objective view of social relations by incorporating conflict, debate and diversity, and by including oppressed subjects in the debate. It is a new understanding of objectivity that distances itself from what Miguel and Biroli call the Olympian position of journalistic discourse, which presents its situated knowledge as impartial and its objectivity as the product of discursive strategies. In an unbiased and objective journalistic “truth” one does not think about which aspects of reality deserve to gain public attention and what aspects deserve to emerge.

According to Miguel and Biroli, the adoption of perspective as a journalistic basis changes the contemporary situation where “journalism presents itself as the inspector of an order that it does not challenge” (Miguel & Biroli, 2010, p. 72) for a new model of professional standard of journalism and patterns of hierarchical expression, especially in political discourses. This would allow for different points of view to express different trajectories and social positions, contributing to less homogenization in the journalistic field.

The defense of a journalism based on perspective and a new understanding of objectivity based on feminist studies, is similar to how Sandra Harding (1987) understands the knowledge produced within feminism. For Harding, feminist research (and we understand that journalistic production can also be based on these propositions – or provocations) gets its origin from a few principles. One such principle is that the research is conducted through the perspective of women’s experiences so they can understand themselves and the world, merging together other “inferior” approaches and placing the researcher on the same level as the research object. “The class, race, culture and gender presuppositions, beliefs and behaviors of the researcher must be placed within the frame of the picture that he or she is attempting to paint” (Harding, 1987, p. 9).

To situate the journalist means bringing the conflict to the center of the debate and replacing the falsely transparent voice of authority with that of a “real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests” (Idem). Instead of an objectivist position – or traditional objectivity – one can imagine a journalism that reveals the cultural beliefs and practices of the information

producer as well as their unique experiences. Harding argues that the inclusion of the subjective contributes to lessening objectivism and to making the objectivity of social reality explicit, as Miguel and Biroli stress. The reflexivity movement in journalistic practices is therefore capable of including subaltern voices and revealing how the values of impartiality and objectivity – which we consider here as objectivism – conceal these diverse voices and the conflicts they carry with them, thus, perpetuating hegemonic discourses in the media field.

Objectivity is no longer marked by a well-defined topos; it is constructed as the possibility of a discourse of voices that enunciate it and crosses and erodes the canon that erases the traces of subjective. In this proposal, it becomes the index of a chronotope (as taken up by Bakhtin in literary texts), which forms a new subject from each time and space, and one that is continually unfinished and open yet remains itself.

Gendered journalism, besides being perspective and situated, is in favor of women. According to Harding, it must “provide women with explanations of social phenomena that they want and need” (Harding, 1987, p. 8). It is therefore necessary to reschedule the coverage of women since the questions are asked – and answered – by men and often arise “from the desires to pacify, control, exploit, or manipulate women” (Idem). Thus, the objectives of a gendered journalistic production are inseparable from the social problems that give rise to such pieces.

Lastly, there is a journalistic praxis anchored in the experience of women: questions about the events of the world must be asked from the perspective of feminine experience. Feminist journalism builds its agenda and schedules its themes within the framework of how women live. The experience of women must be brought to light and given importance because it “represents a movement from silence to words” from a group that has been left out of the conversation – out of history, discourse, event; relegated to obscurity of reproduction “outside of time” (Perrot, 2007, pp. 14-17). Women’s experiences are to a large extent what Kolodny (1980) calls “kitchen things” and Alexiévitich (2016) calls “trivial”; and are also the result of domestic violence, femicide, abortion, double shifts, childcare, low wages, degrading work, sexual harassment, caring for the elderly, aging, and maternity. Such experiences are crossed by the achievements of women

who are guaranteed a space – subaltern and timid – in the public sphere and also expose them to new challenges such as political participation, militancy, contraceptive technologies, parenting policies, *gender gap*, and the glass ceiling.

The voices collected by Svetlana Alexiévitch in *The Unwomanly Face of War* are inserted within the scope of a feminist project of journalism based on this generalized experience and an actively defined perspective. In an attempt to relate the Soviet history of World War II through the voice of women combatants, the author states that “The female accounts are others and speak of other things. The ‘feminine’ war has its own colors, smells, its own enlightenment and its sentimental space. It has its own words” (Alexiévitch, 2016, p. 12).

It is also within this scope that Ana Paula Bandeira conceptualizes feminist journalism as being “concerned with power relations, with oppression, with the political, economic and social protagonism of women.” Since its beginning in the country, this journalism has been characterized by the “dissemination of ideas, intellectual actions and activities” (Bandeira, 2015, p. 195). It has a progressive framework of rights and, according to Buitoni, it deals with “the feminine condition” (Buitoni, 1981, p. 121). The American magazine *Ms.*, a pioneer in contemporary feminist press, emerged in the 1970s and explained its feminist exercise in journalism:

Most women's magazines were limited to advice about saving marriages, raising babies, or using the right cosmetics. When *Ms.* released its first issue containing articles on subjects such as the housewife's moment of truth, “de-sexing” the English language, and abortion, the syndicated columnist James J. Kilpatrick jeered that it was a “C-sharp on a detuned piano,” a note “of petulance, of bitchiness, or nervous fingernails screeching across a blackboard.” (MS, 2017)

It is important to remember that feminist press searches for rights and guidelines that deal with the lives of women. Yet a feminist journalism project does not necessarily coincide with, or restrict itself to, feminist press and, similarly, its guidelines may also be approached from an androcentric, patriarchal, misogynist or sexist point of view if they are not affiliated with a feminist journalism project. The principles can be embodied in any press vehicle. What are at stake then are the foundations of this enterprise.

3 The conciliatory difficulties in covering rape

The difficulties faced by a feminist journalism project are many, particularly those of an ethical, deontological and technical-expressive nature. One of the recent cases that best and most thoroughly demonstrated these crossroads is the feature “A Rape on Campus”, published by the American magazine *Rolling Stone (RS)* in 2014. The report was based on a gang rape that allegedly occurred at a fraternity party on the University of Virginia campus (UVA) and was written in order to address the problem of rape and violence against women on college campuses in the United States, something the US press had already addressed.

The magazine hit newsstands at the end of November. At first, the article by Sabrina Rubin Erdely was met with enthusiasm and vigor and received well by the press, but a few days later many journalists started questioning the veracity of the article and of the allegations of gang rape. The report was put to the test on several fronts: there were gaping holes in the investigation that, had they been properly investigated, might have brought more facts to light; the credibility of the main source, Jackie, was put in doubt; and issues of editing, editorial oversights and checking left gaping holes in the story. *Rolling Stone* and the reporter initially stood by their source and the article they published; however, they began to question that source’s information and Erdely’s investigation. On December 5th, the magazine published the story. A few months later, the report was retracted³.

In April 2015, *Rolling Stone* published a report on its website and in its magazine called *Anatomy of a Journalistic Failure* by the editors of the Columbia Journalism Review (CJR) in which they criticized the media about the errors contained in the article, “A Rape on Campus”. Written by Sheila Coronel, Steve Coll and Derek Kravitz, the CJR piece highlights what they considered to be the major errors in the production process of the report and points out possible practices that could later be adopted. One of the errors, or shortcomings, the authors described was “confirmation bias”: “the tendency of people to be trapped by pre-existing assumptions and to select facts that support their own views while overlooking contradictory ones” (Coronel, Coll, Kravitz & 2015). For these authors, the confirmation bias is applicable to the case under study.

Erdely believed the university was obstructing justice. She felt she had been blocked. Like many other universities, UVA had a flawed record of managing sexual assault cases. Jackie's experience seemed to confirm this larger pattern. Her story seemed well established on campus, it was repeated and accepted. (Coronel, Coll & Kravitz, 2015)

The first question that we propose is: to what extent does the idea of perspective differ from what Coronel, Coll, and Kravitz classify as confirmation bias in the coverage of rape cases? The *CJR* itself points out that between 2% to 8% of rape allegations are made up; in other words, there was a credible situation that did occur for the information provided by the source, perhaps acting in consonance with a confirmation bias. The reporter acknowledges in the *CJR* report that she, and her editors, felt Jackie's story was real. Does this sentiment stem from Sabrina's desire to confirm what she would like to confirm (her agenda) or is it just a feminist's perspective on the subject? The confrontation between perspective and the journalistic basis of impartiality is in play here precisely because it gets caught up with trying to confirm a bias, thereby making it confusing.

The second question we propose concerns the narratives of victims. Not only are a shocking number of rape allegations true, but studies on rape coverage and victims of sexual violence show there is a need for a particular position while verifying facts that favors doubt which challenges another founding element of journalism; accuracy.

Jackie's testimony was contradictory. She refused to provide certain information and could not even spell the name of her alleged rapist. According to the *CJR*, the report was "precise and horrifying"; yet afterward it was described as vivacious. Some information left Sabrina Erdely "a bit incredulous" (Coronel, Coll & Kravitz, 2015). Jackie's account was also assessed as being too detailed (how did she remember the broken glass from the little table?) and having too many gaping holes in it (how did she not know the name of the man who raped her?).

However, traumatic testimony does not usually equate into complete, intelligible, and logical narratives. The publication *Reporting on Rape and Sexual Violence* from the Chicago Task Force on Violence Against Girls and Young Women corroborates the nature of this traumatic report in order to guide journalists while conducting interviews with victims of sexual violence:

Don't be surprised if accounts only make partial sense. Frequently, survivors of sexual violence "shut down" emotionally: their memory may become fragmentary, and in some cases they may even block out an event entirely. Incomplete and contradictory accounts are not *prima facie* evidence of deception, but rather of the struggle interviewees may experience in making sense of what happened to them. (Garcia-Rojas, 2012, p.9)

The editors and the *RS* reporter consider that the most serious mistake made during the investigation was being 'too supportive of Jackie because she described herself as the survivor of a terrible sexual assault', following precisely what social scientists, psychologists and trauma specialists who support victims of rape describe. The "reception" perspective appears, then, with its coating and padding of affection, in an improper way to what one expects from the journalist's practice, which must not be affected nor affect the one he or she reports on, establishing a relationship in which the impact of the other, whomever it may be, should be purged, even if the trauma becomes a continuous nuisance. Neutralizing artificiality seems to solve a series of ethical dilemmas since these only appear, according to Umberto Eco, when the other enters the scene – but, in fact, can present several new ones. Moreover, eliminating artificiality leads us to a non-existent possibility in the human, as Spinoza warned:

Those who write about the affections and way of life of men seem, for the most part, to have dealt not with natural things, which follow the ordinary laws of nature, but of things outside of it. Rather, they seem to conceive man in nature as an empire in the empire. For they believe that, instead of following the order of nature, man disturbs it, that he has an absolute power over its own actions, and that he is not determined by anything else but himself (Spinoza, 2010, p. 161)

According to the *CJR* report, social actors who deal more directly with trauma issues "have stressed upon journalists the need to respect the autonomy of victims, to avoid re-traumatizing them and to understand that rape survivors are as reliable in their testimony as other crime victims" (Coronel, Coll & Kravitz, 2015). They continue to explain that reporters need to keep in mind that trauma can compromise the memories of victims, and can eventually lead to "fragmentary and contradictory" accounts where every case of rape has multiple narratives.

Nevertheless, it is important that professionals seek other ways of corroborating the reports of victims, reinforcing the foundation of accuracy and the vision of journalism as a logical narrative. Many

cases of sexual violence, however, have little or no corroborative evidence; many of them take place at parties and campus events or do not have any witnesses, the consequences of which can range from a victim's inability to have access to adequate justice and public health services, and all this can lead to the victim being blamed and the credibility of a woman's word being challenged.

Thus, in a journalistic feminist praxis favoring women, the centrality of experience and the recognition of journalists and journalism constantly contradict what the basis of liberal journalism is. In fact, it defies these assumptions in the same degree that it is called into question by seeking to materialize. One of the problems pointed out in Erdely's report is what is often called "the other side", which the *CJR's* media critics define as: "Journalistic practice and basic fairness state that if a reporter intends to publish defamatory information about anyone, he or she should get that person's side of the story" (Coronel, Coll & Kravitz, 2015)⁴. Erdely did not get the rapist's story because she did not interview him – either because Jackie did not give her adequate information or because she did not investigate the bits of information the source had given her. In this case, however, it is questionable whether the rapist's version of the story is something that interests journalism and if we listen to it and put it side by side with its victim, as if both corresponded to weights on a scale, it is absolutely necessary to have a balanced ideal. Isn't the experience itself already confusing enough? What would be versions of a rape?

The investigation on rape coverage becomes an inextricable network of deontological non-knowledge (the above questions are evidence of this), the resolutions of which will depend mainly on the journalist who does not have a manual or even an established routine on what should be done.

The *Reporting on rape and sexual violence* guide underscores the difficult balance between the ethical precepts of journalism, the approach to rape in the media, and the defense of liberal values of traditional journalism, such as neutrality.

However, as this research points out, keeping a balanced viewpoint remains a challenge. Though we agree that fairness and accuracy are ethical considerations that journalists need to maintain we also strongly believe that neutrality is a goal that can never be fully achieved; it is an ideal we aim towards. This is evidenced by the high percentage of articles written on rape and sexual violence that focus their inquiries and investigations on the victims, without asking critical questions or further investigating the

perpetrator. Similarly, these articles help perpetuate rape myths by incorporating superfluous descriptions that are dependent upon victim-blaming language. (García-Rojas, 2012, p.5)

The “commandment” we hear in both versions is challenged by projects like those from Svetlana Alexiévitch. She sets out to write “the history of this war. The history of women” (Alexiévitch, 2016, p.13) and ignores the other side; she does not want to hear it, nor does she need to, because this side, heard *ad eternum* and hegemonic in the construction of the Soviet narratives on the war does not interest her. She is interested in “absolutely new texts” that women have to tell; the little history. Frequently, the use of the other side – which is articulated with the idea of “impartial” journalism – as a mechanized technique in the routine of news production processes reinforces the hierarchy of discourses in journalism, since this supposedly neutral side has more space, more of a voice, more credibility and more support. This often occurs by incorporating the traditional institutional voice or the voice of authority (male) and strengthens the hierarchies of social actors in the public sphere. In fact, language is “populated by the interests of others”, “the masters”, as Teresa de Lauretis calls them (Lauretis, 1984, p. 3). But as she also points out, language need not be thought of as “belonging” to anyone; whoever defines the code and the context has the control of the language and can therefore subvert it, contradict its terms, “formulate questions that will redefine the context, displace the terms of metaphors and produce new ones” (Idem).

The conciliation between the propositions of a journalism that challenges notions like impartiality and objectivity and a journalistic praxis that is still anchored in other ethical precepts and technical foundations such as listening to both sides of a story and accuracy do not seem to go hand in hand. This might be the case in the *Rolling Stone* report: a story with gaping holes in its information and that reads partly untrue⁵. The effects of *A Rape on Campus* were devastating to Sabrina Erdely, to the magazine and to activism against rape. The magazine, the last major US independent magazine, was up for sale in 2017. It is speculated that RS’s credibility was irreparably damaged by the case, which was widely covered and resulted in million-dollar lawsuits which resulted in RS and Erdely having to pay moral damages or settle.

4 Journalism or agenda?

A recurring argument for discrediting feminist journalism initiatives (or other situated journalism initiatives) is that they are advocacy and militancy, and not journalism. The criticism of the coverage of rape is about whether a rape culture exists or not, which there is no consensus on in feminist theories. One of the catalysts for this type of journalism would be the sliding and shallow debate on the subject. There is also the difficulty of proving that the accusations made by women are true, which hinders the practice of traditional journalism inasmuch as victims must be confronted with other narratives (who often blame them). These arguments reinsert the debate in the terms criticized by Miguel and Birolí: an Olympian journalism, above and beyond daily conflicts, as “privileged” and “mere” rapporteur of such conflicts, in which journalism is not included in or affected by, being on another level. Does this journalism exist? Except as a possibility, a goal, and a proposal that obliterates and subsumes the counter-hegemonic parts of the conflict in supposedly neutral and impartial but charged accounts of the erasure of all hegemonic discourses?

In the same way, what are the material conditions for the exercise of a journalism based on other grounds? What is it that produces and promotes other approaches and questions precepts? Is this kind of journalism possible? The *Rolling Stone* story was never explicitly portrayed as feminist, but the reporter’s personal concerns as a feminist made up her agenda; the problems of the text go much further than what we have pointed out here (according to the *CJR* report). However, we can trace such problems to Sabrina Rubin Erdely’s primary desire to report “what it’s like to be on campus now... where not only is rape so prevalent but also that there’s this pervasive culture of sexual harassment/rape culture” she told a source (Coronel, Coll & Kravitz, 2015).

Therefore, the issues we bring here do not reconcile seemingly contradictory positions. But they raise questions and contradictions, and within the feminist project (Lauretis, 1984) one must question this journalism, as a method, as a movement, and as a displacement.

* Translated by Pedro Ivo Rocha de Macedo, revised by Lee Sharp

NOTES

- 1 Four digital platforms for journalistic production. Azmina (<http://azmina.com.br/>) is defined as “independent and feminist media”. Catarinas (<http://catarinas.info/>) admits to practicing “journalism with a gender perspective” and is based in Santa Catarina. Capitolina (<http://www.revistacapitolina.com.br/>) is an independent online magazine for teenage girls. Geledés (<https://www.geledes.org.br/>) is a think tank dedicated to women of color, with communication as one of its areas of activity.
- 2 There is no consensus on the classification of feminisms in “waves”. We borrow from Carla Rodrigues when she says that “waves are a useful metaphor for denouncing the bias of oppression” (Rodrigues, 2016, p. 67). “Feminist waves are like that, invested by women over prohibitions, like a sea that hits rocks until they change their profile. [...] The history of feminist politics breathes by these waves that rise, accumulate, break and sweep” (Rodrigues, 2016, p. 83). We rely on authors such as Nancy Fraser (2013), who operates conceptually with the waves – especially the second wave, which, for this same author, coincides with the expansion of post-industrial capitalist practices. Nicola Rivers (2017) defines the fourth wave as “fractured and complex”, capable of reinforcing individual advances over collective guidelines and centered on “seductive notions of ‘choice’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘agency’” (Rivers, 2017, p. 24). Rivers highlights the strong link with pop culture, represented by such figures as Beyoncé. This configuration, she points out, “navigates a complicated pathway between post feminism(s), relying on promoting the achievements (and frequently the lifestyle) of successful women” – a successful capitalist and neoliberal view that women are encouraged to emulate (Rivers, 2017, p. 25).
- 3 The original report can still be found at the following online address: goo.gl/QXoAac.
- 4 Erdely did contact the fraternity where the abuse supposedly occurred, but CJR also stated that if Erdely had mentioned the dates of the alleged rape, the students would have said that there was no party that day. The journalistic strategy of “holding cards” to the person(s) accused of writing derogatory information is not rare; and even though it goes against ethical principles, it is a widespread practice in newsrooms (sometimes encouraged), especially in political coverage.

- 5 The CJR report states that the police investigation into Jackie's story concluded that the events she described had not occurred; however, the police say that, in light of the evidence, they cannot deny that something terrible might have happened to her that night. In October 2016, Jackie testified before a judge in one of the trials against RS. She said she had problems remembering things and that she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. She said: "I stand by the account I gave to Rolling Stone. I believed it to be true at the time". In her statement, Jackie also said that she didn't know the exact content of the story, that she had no idea she would be the focus of the piece. She said one of her friends told Erdely of her discomfort and that she never had the chance to withdraw any of the events described. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/dR7PXk>.

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