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# OBSERVING “JOURNALISM IN CRISIS” THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS



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**ABSTRACT** – One issue that often goes unaddressed in studies on the “contemporary crisis of journalism”, although fundamental to understanding the problem, is the structural role of gender inequalities. In this article, I propose a reflection on the crisis through the lens of feminist epistemologies. Being essentially anti-capitalist and advocates of situated knowledge, these epistemologies can be powerful tools for interpreting certain transformations to contemporary journalism, particularly in the world of professional journalism. In the first part of the article, I identify and look at feminist authors and their critiques of the hegemonic paradigm of knowledge production and the neoliberal ideology, which is primarily responsible for recent productive restructurings in the labor world overall, and among journalists in particular. I then use these critiques to support a feminist interpretation of the journalism crisis, drawing on findings from two recent studies on the profession in Brazil.

**Keywords:** Structural transformations in journalism. Feminist studies. Journalism governance crisis. Journalism and gender.

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## LENTEs FEMINISTAS PARA OBSERVAR O “JORNALISMO EM CRISE”

**RESUMO** – Há uma questão que é pouco observada nos estudos sobre a “crise contemporânea do jornalismo” e, no entanto, parece fundamental para entender o problema: o papel estruturante das desigualdades de gênero. Neste artigo, proponho uma reflexão sobre a crise a partir das lentes de epistemologias feministas. Essencialmente anticapitalistas e defensoras de saberes situados, essas epistemologias podem ser potentes para interpretar determinadas transformações enfrentadas pelo jornalismo atual, sobretudo no mundo do trabalho de jornalistas. Na primeira parte do artigo, procuro situar algumas autoras feministas nas críticas ao paradigma hegemônico de construção de conhecimento e à ideologia neoliberal, principal responsável pelas recentes reestruturações produtivas observadas no mundo do trabalho em geral, e no dos jornalistas em particular. Na sequência, utilizo tais críticas para subsidiar uma interpretação feminista acerca da crise do jornalismo, mobilizando resultados de duas pesquisas recentes sobre a profissão no Brasil.

**Palavras-chave:** Transformações estruturais do jornalismo. Estudos feministas. Crise de governança do jornalismo. Jornalismo e gênero.

## LENTEs FEMINISTAS PARA OBSERVAR EL “PERIODISMO EN CRISIS”

**RESUMEN** – Hay una cuestión que se observa poco en los estudios sobre la “crisis contemporánea del periodismo” y que, sin embargo, parece fundamental para entender el problema: el papel estructurador de las desigualdades de género. En este artículo, propongo una reflexión sobre la crisis a través de la lente de las epistemologías feministas. Esencialmente anticapitalistas y defensoras del conocimiento situado, estas epistemologías pueden ser poderosas para interpretar ciertas transformaciones a las que se enfrenta el periodismo actual, especialmente en el mundo del trabajo. En la primera parte del artículo, intento situar a algunas autoras feministas en sus críticas al paradigma hegemónico de construcción del conocimiento y a la ideología neoliberal, principal responsable de la reciente reestructuración productiva observada en el mundo del trabajo en general, y en el de los periodistas en particular. A continuación, utilizo estas críticas para apoyar una interpretación feminista de la crisis del periodismo, movilizando los resultados de dos investigaciones recientes sobre la profesión en Brasil.

**Palabras clave:** Transformaciones estructurales del periodismo. Estudios feministas. Crisis de gobernanza del periodismo. Periodismo y género.

## 1 Introduction

Western journalism has experienced profound political, economic, and technological changes over the past two decades, impacting not only the societies it reports on but also its own methods of production. The global financial crisis of 2008<sup>11</sup> led to a restructuring of many labor markets, including newsrooms. Many newspapers went bankrupt, while others reduced staff, which increased the workload for the remaining professionals. In many countries, the crisis of confidence in institutions<sup>22</sup> has led to increased

violence against journalists and decreasing news readership rates, resulting in the public voluntarily distancing itself from the news—one of the biggest challenges publishers around the world have faced (Newman, 2024).

Rapid technological changes (which impact other processes, including the algorithms that fuel political polarization (Cesarino, 2022)), have changed how journalism is produced, circulated and consumed: computers and smartphones have become popularized, the capacity and speed of data transmission via the internet have improved, new multimedia formats have emerged, production processes have been automated, and new habits have been created based on algorithms that decide how, when, and to whom content appears. All of this has drawn attention to the “governance crisis in journalism” (Mick & Tavares, 2017) and created a challenging scenario for many journalism professionals, many of whom are currently composed of young women (Lima et al., 2022).

The above-mentioned changes are not isolated from each other; in fact, they are constituent and typical aspects of the current capitalist system. Western journalism is a product of this world-system; it emerged in the 19th century in a capitalist, patriarchal, masculinist, heterosexist, racist, and Western-centric environment, and from a modern, colonial, and positivist paradigm of knowledge construction (Moraes & Veiga da Silva, 2019). As such, it tends to follow the same logic, thus suffering the consequences of its crises, as can be seen with the decreased revenue of news organizations, the public’s distrust of news content, and the many inequalities that continue to exist in the profession.

Yet there is a slight contradiction here because journalism is a product of this capitalist-patriarchal world-system, created with the intent to serve the interests of the dominant classes and reproduce their hegemony, but it is also a phenomenon which can transcend the ideological contours of its bourgeois genesis; it is a social form of knowledge that, like science and the arts, is vital for recognizing and changing the reality in which we live (Genro Filho, 2012). The value-in-use of journalism lies in its ability to destabilize consensus and demystify verified reality in order to overcome it; it reaches its maximum potential only when it actually questions the assumptions of the world-system that originated it (Souza, 2018). This involves recognizing and deciding which bodies will produce this journalism and under what conditions, among other things.

In this article, I examine some of the recent transformations in journalism through a feminist lens, particularly the changes that have affected professional journalists<sup>33</sup>. I posit the following epistemological observation: gender inequalities are not just another obstacle to be overcome in the crisis; they are actually much more structural and rooted in the other problems that journalism is facing. The feminist lenses I refer to consist of a theoretical and political choice that understands capitalism (at any stage) as a gender system in which the appropriation of female (or feminized) bodies, the exploitation of reproductive labor, and sexual and racial hierarchy are pillars that the system is built on.

To do this, I use the first part of this text to present some of the feminist critiques of neoliberal ideology, which is primarily responsible for the recent productive restructurings in the labor world in general, and among journalists in particular. I then follow this up by briefly describing the current changing landscape of journalism.

Lastly, I use partial results from two recent studies on changes in the labor world: the *Profile of Brazilian Journalists* (Lima et al., 2022) and the *Professional Trajectories of Journalists* (2012-2017). These are quantitative studies in which I participated as a member of the research teams. The data for these studies were collected from surveys conducted with journalists to help understand the current state of job insecurity and inequality in the profession. The findings from these studies support the idea that creating solutions to the crisis in journalism involves the difficult task of abolishing the gender (as well as racial and class) inequalities ingrained in the profession.

## **2 Women are the main victims of inequality in the neoliberal workplace**

The modern paradigm, which guides science and journalism, is characterized by the concept of universality and its subject, the “universal subject”. This defines the core of how true and credible knowledge is organized, and outlines the conditions of knowledge and power relations in society. This subject is viewed as masculine, white, Western, heterosexual, and bourgeois due to its colonialist and masculinist order of thought (Moraes & Maia, 2021, p. 279). Just as seeing is always conditioned by a possibility of seeing, this dominant perspective is limited as the “universal subject” ends up ignoring

other existing points of view: those of women, Black and Indigenous people, LGBTQIA+ people, the Global South, and the peripheries.

Feminist epistemologies make a significant contribution here as they see knowledge as being situated or “embodied” (Haraway, 1995), meaning it is affected by the bodies that produce it. These bodies are defined by gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, age, and geographic location, all of which influence the subjects’ social experiences, interests, affections, and worldviews.

This exposes another side of social stratification and hierarchy, one that challenges universality and highlights the complexity of individuals involved in knowledge production, including knowledge produced by journalism. Plural in their propositional aspects and methodological alternatives, feminist theories are primarily focused on gender as a relational category of power. It is not about putting forth a competing interpretation of typical questions in the field of epistemology, but rather of questioning the very ways of knowing; in other words, they have a “meta-philosophical” nature to them (Sattler, forthcoming).

One of the sets of epistemologies that study gender hierarchies and interests in the production of knowledge is *feminist standpoint theory*, which argues that how bodies and knowledge are situated both limit and enable what can be known (Garcez & Silveirinha, 2020). It argues that women have a privileged insight into unmasking sexist, classist, and capitalist theories and conjectures (Hartsock, 1987; Harding, 1993; Sattler, forthcoming). It is not about trying to conform to a single viewpoint about women (Harding (1993) (in fact, it criticizes any uncritical celebrations of supposedly feminine forms of knowledge), but rather about the perception that thinking about knowledge production from the perspective of marginalized groups helps to critically question reality, thus producing more useful knowledge overall (Garcez & Silveirinha, 2020), which is a powerful tool for reflecting on the productive reshaping of journalism.

The *feminist standpoint theory* is relevant when attempting to rethink the classical notions of work and employment (particularly wage labor) because they were built on androcentric standpoints, that is, from the perspective of male work and employment. “This androcentrism explains why women and other groups of workers with social characteristics that do not correspond to hegemonic masculinity – young people, black people, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals – are seen as marginal or deficient versions of the model” (Sosa, 2019, p. 343<sup>44</sup>).

When considering work from a feminist economics perspective, one must take into account the entire daily work experience (which includes domestic responsibilities and caregiving for both children and the elderly, not just what occurs during standard working hours). Concealing reproduction as a key to valorization processes in capitalism is central to understanding how hierarchies function at the workplace:

If Marx had recognized that capitalism depends both on an immense amount of unpaid domestic labor for the reproduction of labor power and on the devaluation of these reproductive activities to reduce labor costs, he might have been less inclined to consider capitalist development as inevitable and progressive. (Federici, 2019, p. 195).

In Brazil, women shoulder almost twice the amount of unpaid domestic and caregiving work than men do. In 2022, women spent 21 hours and 36 minutes per week carrying out these activities, while men spent 11 hours and 48 minutes (IPEA, 2024). This challenges the notion about what “free time” or “rest time” actually is.

The sexual division of labor, that is, the segregation and valuation of activities based on gender, is also in effect outside the home, as it exists in several professions and occupations. In journalism, for instance, women are generally assigned topics that are considered to be “lighter” (soft news: usually cultural issues and aspects of the “femininity” stereotype, such as entertainment, fashion, beauty, conduct), while the more in-depth and impactful stories on public opinion (hard news) are often allocated to their male colleagues (Veiga da Silva, 2014). This kind of segregation clearly helps to keep the power structures, salaries, and career advancement opportunities as they are.

The categories of the sexual division of labor, productive and reproductive work (paid and unpaid), domestic work, gender violence, and the use of time as a factor of inequality (Sosa, 2019) are a product of feminist epistemologies and political keys to exposing and changing the domination and alienation of journalists within the context of neoliberal hegemony.

Neoliberalism was established in Latin America during the military dictatorships and consolidated in the following decades through major structural reforms, in accordance with the logic of adjusting global policies (Gago, 2018, p. 15). In Brazil, the consolidation of media outlets as businesses and the professionalization of

newsrooms occurred during the redemocratization period and the rise of neoliberalism as the hegemonic ideology (Nunes, 2020). The professionalization of journalism was also synonymous with its feminization (quantitative increase in the number of female employees) as it coincided with an increase in educated women in Brazil, allowing them to begin careers that required qualifications and were previously dominated by men. Understanding the dynamics of this new world order (Dardot & Laval, 2016) is an important step in explaining the crisis in journalism and in contextualizing feminist critiques of this system.

Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 377) define the following four elements that characterize neoliberal reasoning: a) the state needs to actively intervene in the market (which is not a natural given, but a constructed reality) as well as establish a specific legal system; b) competition is established as the general norm of economic practices; c) the State is not only a “vigilant guardian” of this framework, but also conforms to the norms of competition as it is a company (it builds the market while also building itself according to the norms of that market); and d) the competitive dynamic also affects individuals and their relationships with themselves: “each individual is a company that must be managed and capital that must be made fruitful” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 378).

Gago (2018) believes that the great innovation of neoliberalism is its form of governing by promoting freedoms. While this may seem contradictory at first glance, a closer look shows “a sophisticated, innovative, and complex way of articulating (personally and institutionally) a series of procedures and affections that encourage free enterprise, self-entrepreneurship and self-management, as well as responsibility for oneself” (Gago, 2018, p. 16). Neoliberal reasoning is thus constituted by many ways of doing, feeling, and thinking to organize work, affections, and other aspects of social life.

From the late 20th century to the early 21st century, the wage-earning society, characterized by the pursuit of progressive improvements in protection and quality of life for workers (Castel, 1998), was replaced by a neoliberal rationale. This dynamic intensified from 2008 onwards, with the most recent crisis of capitalism accelerating privatization, reducing social safeguards and labor flexibilization, especially in emerging economies such as Brazil's where politicians supported these changes in the 2017 labor

reform. While their rights were being taken away, workers were also increasingly forced to consider whether to seek formal employment or start their own business, where they could plan out their own courses, strategies, and professional goals – the feeling of freedom.

Capitalism appropriates this impression of autonomy generated by companies or self-employment (Mick & Nogueira, 2023) to institute the “entrepreneurial solution”, which is even legitimized by the hegemonic media discourse and its inclination to tell stories about “winners”. For Casaqui (2018), entrepreneurship takes on a palatable narrative interface where inspiration plays a key role, removing the political nature of this societal project in favor of maintaining meritocratic and flexible work logics typical in neoliberalism.

Moving away from the explicit ambition of the “wild” capitalist, the purpose-driven entrepreneur, grounded in their beliefs, renews the rhetoric of capitalism and offers an aura of authenticity to the system, making it capable of engaging new groups (...). A world based on networking, on the productivity of relationships, on the profusion of single thought – the entrepreneurial monoculture, which aspires to universalize itself, just as the bourgeois ethos has universalized itself. (Casaqui, 2018, p. 64).

Capitalism creates crises and then profits from them. Besides being political, this artifice is also a way to subjectify the patriarchal order (Gago, 2020) as it disregards the markers of gender, race, and class in the “success” or “failure” narrative, and ignores the roles of women, especially black and poor women, in reproductive labor. Basically, if we look at the general exploitation of workers (like the one we are currently experiencing), we can see a distinction between men and women, and this distinction starts with reproductive work, which is “invisible and, at the same time, constitutive of contemporary social production” (Gago, 2020, p. 145). Women are at an obvious disadvantage in the competitive and individualistic dynamics of neoliberal society, and the removal of any political nature to this exclusion by the entrepreneurial narrative makes it difficult to see the problem as a collective and structural issue.

For Fraser (2009), neoliberalism and the “new spirit” of post-Fordist capitalism were also quick to co-opt some of the gender politics that emerged during the second wave of feminism (starting in the 1960s in the US and then worldwide) and use them to their advantage, which further complicates this issue. Many feminist critiques at that



time of state-organized capitalism (economism, androcentrism, statism, and Westphalianism) ended up being instrumentalized in neoliberalism and used “to legitimize a structural transformation of a capitalist society in direct opposition to feminist visions of a fair society” (Fraser, 2009, p. 14). For example, opposition to the family income (where the man is the “head of the family” and the main provider) and to the demand for more women being included in the (paid) labor market led to a strange outcome: they intensified the valuation of paid employment. The dream of the emancipation of women became diminished under capitalist accumulation.

It doesn't matter that the reality underlying the new ideal is decreasing wage levels, diminishing job security, declining living standards, a sharp increase in the number of hours worked in exchange for wages per family, exacerbation of double shifts – now often triple or quadruple shifts – and an increase in female-headed households. Disorganized capitalism is selling a pig in a poke by crafting a new narrative of female advancement and gender justice. (Fraser, 2009, p. 25).

As we shall see, female journalists are directly impacted by the sexual division of labor, the concealment of reproduction, and the neoliberal entrepreneurial dynamic that lies at the heart of the structural transformations of journalism and the profession. In the next section, I will briefly discuss this changing landscape and then take a more thorough look at the precarious working conditions resulting from this crisis, particularly as it pertains to female journalists.

### **3 Metamorphoses and crises: what is journalism turning into?**

Many authors have described the changes that have occurred to journalism throughout the 21st century as post-industrial journalism (Anderson et al., 2013), structural changes (Pereira & Adghirni, 2011), “beta phase” journalism (Deuze & Witschge, 2016), metamorphoses/paradigm shifts (Charron & De Bonville, 2016), and governance crisis (Mick & Tavares, 2017; Christofoletti, 2019).

In this text, I argue that the contemporary crisis in journalism goes beyond itself; it is a result of the structural crisis of capital, which destabilizes the institutions in the system. “One cannot think of journalism in crisis outside of this system, otherwise both its limitations and its potential for the full realization of human

sociability would remain misunderstood” (Souza, 2018, p. 57). The crisis of capitalism increases labor in the prevailing system of social metabolism through technological and managerial innovations, similar to what occurs in journalism, as the hypothesis of hypercompetition can attest to (Charron & De Bonville, 2016).

“Hypercompetition” is a term borrowed from the “new economy” and refers to competitive play based on growth and innovation strategies; this is common within industrial sectors supported by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). When applied to journalism, this means that media outlets and journalists, to adapt to the unstable conditions of the environment, end up abandoning the pursuit of stability and long-term planning for living in the uncertainty of permanent innovation as they compete simultaneously in several of the following interdependent markets: advertisers, sources, financial, and professional (associated with the search for peer recognition, prestige, and reputation) aspects (Charron & De Bonville, 2016). Although it is an ideal, and not a depiction of an observed reality, hypercompetition seems to have enough capacity to characterize the current scenario, and demonstrates how professionals adapt to neoliberal logic in order to survive in their profession.

Deuze and Witschge (2016) describe trends in recent journalism that point to changes in its conception as a stable and consensual field, and to a more individual, instead of institutional, idea of the journalist; that is, their reputation and professional experience are less dependent on or tied to a newsroom than before. These trends are:

1. The reorganization of work environments, where journalists are increasingly called upon to “embrace the entrepreneurial mindset”. Transforming themselves into “businesses” (freelancers) can deprive them of a professional identity built collectively and within a journalistic organization.
2. The fragmentation of newsrooms (facilitated by outsourcing, subcontracting, and reallocating people to other sectors in order to reduce expenses) generates functional flexibility as it divides the workforce into an elite, multi-skilled core and a “large perimeter” of subcontractors (temporary workers, freelancers), who are also qualified but not necessarily recognized.
3. The emergence of a “newsroom society”

where all employees must be able to perform editorial duties and are not considered to belong to a single professional class.

4. The ubiquitous role of media technologies means multi-tasking professionals are more in demand – these professionals are now also required to perform the role of designer, social media manager, marketer, advertiser, etc., and end up creating a kind of de-specialization of journalist work.

Each of these levels of change leads to more layoffs and job insecurity, and in some cases, makes people leave the profession altogether. Now more than ever, these trends highlight the importance of understanding who is working in journalism and under what circumstances the work is done. According to Deuze and Witschge (2016, p. 17), this process mirrors the “revolving door” effect, which primarily affects women and ethnic minorities in professions dominated by white men, raising the question “what types of people can thrive beyond that door?” in terms of demographics, socioeconomic level, personality type, and social privileges.

In Brazil, in addition to these trends, the low level of unionization among professionals is another factor that directly reflects this neoliberal transformation: in 2021, only 31.4% of Brazilian journalists were unionized (Lima et al., 2022), highlighting a class that has difficulty seeing itself as a category of workers. This individualized way of thinking may be a result of competition among colleagues for job positions and the “entrepreneurial” discourse disseminated in courses and lectures by media companies in the face of the crisis (Lelo, 2019). Another explanation could be that journalists either do not feel represented by the unions that should be defending them (a large number of professionals are young women, while union leaders are mostly middle-aged men) or feel that the unions do not respond to specific demands from their fields of work (Lima et al., 2022).

Lastly, policies that weaken workers’ unions and strengthen companies have left professionals more vulnerable and unprotected, as exemplified by Law No. 13,467 of 2017, which amended the Consolidation of Labor Laws (Brazil, 2017). This law, also known as the “Labor Reform Law”, made employment contracts more flexible with hour bank systems, negotiations that did not comply with labor laws, and removed unions from contract termination approval processes (Mick & Kikuti, 2020).

These neoliberal trends also reinforce the multidimensional, or systemic, nature of the current crisis in journalism. As Christofoletti (2019, p. 18) states:

The crisis is financial, but it is also political and existential, a crisis of ethics and credibility, of governance and management. The deterioration of accounting metrics is worrying, but there are other reasons to lose sleep: the reduced interest in news, the migration of audiences, the increased distrust in the media, the growing distancing of the public, and the search for alternatives in the consumption of information and entertainment, among others.

For Mick and Tavares (2017), the crisis stems from the erosion of social relations between news companies and their many audiences. They propose using the concept of governance (the set of legal, institutional, and cultural arrangements that establish what organizations can do, who controls them, how that control is exercised, and how the risks and returns of their activities are distributed) to better understand its dimensions and any possible solutions. These dimensions are sustainability and financing, editorial, circulation and engagement, and management.

Sustainability involves raising enough financial resources so that the news organization can continue running. This is one of the biggest challenges facing contemporary news organizations, especially local ones, due to their audiences and reach being smaller, having been severely affected by changes to the business models.

Editorial involves the professional knowledge of journalists, in all aspects – recognition, procedure, and narration (Traquina, 2005). Editorial decisions build trust with audiences who, in turn, have their own demands on what the agendas should be, the diversity of reporting, the style, and the nature of the stories (Mick & Tavares, 2017). When there is a disparity between the public's expectations and the quality/variety of what journalism produces, it erodes credibility, which over time turns into a moral crisis (after all, why would people trust sources and news they don't see, and whose reports don't reflect their realities?).

Circulation and engagement relate to content distribution and audience involvement. People tend to interact more with the news as it increases their sense of belonging to a particular place or community (Wenzel & Crittenden, 2021).

Management, on the other hand, relates to the types of institutional structures that news organizations adopt. Most of the journalism we know today is managed by the corporate model (following the trends of the 20th century, but nowadays includes features such as the increased number of freelance professionals and their use of the term “self-employed entrepreneur”), which relegates journalism to the logic of a commodity. A large part of the crisis is due to this contradictory situation where a central institution of democracies is largely funded by private interests (Waisbord, 2017).

The governments’ lack of regulation and control of media institutions further leads to media ownership being concentrated in the hands of a few groups, which is the case in Brazil. The relationship between media and power in this country is a strong one. According to the *Media Ownership Monitor* survey (Intervozes, 2017), five families control half of the 50 largest media outlets in terms of audience in Brazil. These five families are the Marinho family (Globo), the Saad family (Bandeirantes), the Macedo family (Record), the Sirotsky family (RBS), and the Frias family (Folha). They have connections in agribusiness, the pharmaceutical industry, churches, and others.

The media structure, in addition to being family-based and financialized, is deeply patriarchal, keeping the power in the hands of male heirs (Nunes, 2020). When the decision-makers in news organizations are white men with ties to capital, it is easy to understand why the values of the journalism these companies produce continue to be capitalist and masculinized. Feminizing (qualitative transformation) the workplace by including more women in the profession has not yet triggered any structural changes. As Veiga da Silva explains in an interview with Moraes and Maia (2021, pp. 275–276):

In the masculinist logic of journalism, practices are guided by values such as “extracting” information, “scooping” colleagues, taking risks, having courage, being a hero, being impartial, truthful, objective, and concise (...) The idea of credibility is related to the universal subject (man, white, heterosexual, bourgeois) to instances considered to have greater power, and to certain types of knowledge.

The discussion around the governance of journalism during this current crisis of capitalism is further complicated by the enormous expansion of big tech companies and their content platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp (Meta), YouTube (Alphabet), and X/Twitter (X Corp.), especially since 2020<sup>55</sup>. These companies (whose owners are also white men, billionaires, some of whom are known to be masculinists, such as Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk<sup>66</sup>) control the flow of information on their platforms through opaque algorithms, deciding what type of content will appear to whom and how often in their feeds and search engines. The processes of information circulation and consumption have become platformized<sup>77</sup> (Bell et al., 2017), as have engagement and social interactions around this content. Thus, the selection and dissemination of what constitutes news (previously entrusted to the media) is now shared with a new generation of gatekeepers who operate outside the newsroom (Ferreira, 2018), including these aforementioned technology companies and their audiences (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The effects of this disintermediation and resulting re-intermediation of social practices facilitated by these new algorithm-based mediators open up space for anti-systemic movements fueled by polarized audiences who trust more in immediate experience, in the certainty of the senses, and in individual opinions as pathways to reality (“me-pistemology”) than in the traditional mediators of the expert system (including science and journalism) (Cesarino, 2022). Network infrastructures also subject audiences to algorithmic segmentation, which aggregates profiles with “similar” behaviors (echo chambers) and forms new individual and collective subjectivities and limiting dialogue between dissonant thoughts, potentially privileging extreme behaviors – as evidenced by the growth of violence against journalists, especially female ones (Fenaj, 2024), and the misogynistic “red pill” community<sup>88</sup>.

Although it facilitates communication processes and forming online communities that can be useful for democratic social organizations, the platforms’ infrastructure and their management methods privilege the anti-systemic audiences of the far right (Cesarino, 2022), and are capable of adding to the gender violence already perpetuated by the patriarchal system’s media. At this point, I look to Federici (2017, p. 17), who said: “each phase of capitalist globalization, including the current one, is followed by a return to the most violent aspects of primitive accumulation and

shows that the degradation of women, among other aspects, is a necessary condition for capitalism to exist in any era". It is still too early to know whether the oligopolies of media organizations will continue to exist or whether they will be replaced by oligopolies of big tech companies. But what seems evident is that, in either case, if the dynamics of the capitalist-patriarchal world system continue, the journalistic ecosystem will continue to be underpinned by gender violence.

Based on this brief overview of the contemporary mutations of journalism, heavily influenced by the phases and crises of capitalism, I find it worthwhile to revisit Deuze and Witschge's (2016) example about abandoning very solid and stable notions of what journalism "is" in order to understand it from its permanent state of flux, encouraging less normative, more historicized perspectives. Looking back at the question "what is journalism becoming?", one relevant answer based on the discussions presented here is that it is becoming an increasingly challenging profession for its workers, especially for female journalists.

Female journalists suffer more from the crises due to the inherent work overload resulting from the sexual division of labor in domestic and caregiving activities, which directly impacts their professional lives. In general, they are more susceptible to hyper-competition, to the instability of flexible contracts, to the work overload caused by multi-functionality, they have more difficulty reaching prestigious positions in the workplace, and are also more likely to be laid off during times of crisis (Kikuti et al., 2022), especially in environments that adhere to a patriarchal structure.

Despite the progress made by journalist collectives, organizations, and representative entities that pursue gender equality, these movements are still unable to fully influence the necessary structural changes in this direction. In the next section, I will attempt to demonstrate, through recent empirical studies in the field of journalism in Brazil, how the problem presented here manifests in journalism, endorsing the need to consider these gender inequalities in the revision and/or conception of new theories on the profession.

#### 4 Working conditions of female journalists in Brazil

I shall present partial results from two recent empirical studies on journalism in Brazil, which help support the finding that gender inequalities are structural to the crisis: *Profile of the Brazilian Journalist (PJB)* and *Research on the Professional Trajectories of Journalists* (2012-2017). Although limited to national data, the findings show a direct link to global trends, as demonstrated in studies that focus on the problem of horizontal and vertical segregation in the professional pyramid (Damian-Gaillard et al., 2009, 2010), on the effects of feminization in journalism in France (Damian-Gaillard & Saitta, 2016) and Belgium (Le Cam et al., 2021), and on gender as a factor that makes many female journalists in South Korea leave the profession (Lee & Kim, 2022). They also reinforce findings from other Brazilian studies (with a qualitative approach) that sought to understand the effects of gender inequality in journalism, some of which are: Rocha (2004, 2019), Leite (2017), Bandeira (2019), Fígaro (2018), Nunes (2020), Veiga da Silva (2014) and Lima Souza et al. (2021).

The first study (PJB) was chosen because it is the main representative sociodemographic survey on journalism in Brazil<sup>99</sup>, and provides morphological characteristics of the category. The data presented below was taken from the second edition of the online survey, conducted in 2021, which examined issues of employability, working hours, type of employment contract, field of work, political stance, working conditions, health, and safety. The sampling plan consisted of 3.100 valid responses, respecting the regional distribution of journalists.

The second study was selected because it was the first statistical investigation into the professional trajectories of journalists in Brazil<sup>100</sup> – a group of researchers applied a new online survey to respondents from the first PJB edition, from 2012. This new survey contained the same questions as the original one in order to find out what these journalists' lives were like five years later. The study received 1.233 responses. This research, which I participated in as part of the team that collected and analyzed the data<sup>101</sup>, provides support for a range of interpretations about the current state of journalism.

The PJB indicates that, in 2021, the majority of journalism professionals in the country were young, single, white, highly educated women (Lima et al., 2022). In terms of percentages, 57.8% of journalism professionals in the sector were women, while 48.9%



were men. Even still, the profession continues to be associated with masculinized values: tasks are distributed according to gender (Veiga da Silva, 2014), women earn less for doing the same work and also face many obstacles when trying to reach leadership positions – the so-called glass ceilings and doors (Steiner, 2017; Moura, 2022) – although in recent years there has been a greater number of women in middle management positions at a high cost to the lives of these professionals (Bandeira, 2019).

The PJB collected unpublished data on job insecurities of the working person (Nicoletti, 2019). This data is separated into the following three main categories: employability (type of employment, salary/remuneration, and ability to pay living expenses with monthly income, and working hours), health (work-related stress, mental health diagnosis, RSI/WRULD disorders), and exposure to risks (violence in the workplace and external violence related to work).

When broken down by gender, it is clear that women are disproportionately affected by all aspects of precarious employment. The following data was analyzed and published by Nicoletti et al. (2023) and is reproduced to illustrate the problem of inequality in journalism.

In terms of employability, women's salaries are lower: only 37.4% of women had salaries higher than R\$5.500 in 2021 compared to 45.5% of men. Thus, the majority of journalists who claimed they were able to pay their basic expenses were men: 46.4% of men said they were able to pay their bills with a journalist's salary, while only 36.2% of women could claim to do the same.

Leadership positions were also more common among males in 2021. Among media workers, 16.4% of men held positions of editor-in-chief, coordinator, and director, while another 31.2% held positions with some influence in decision-making (editor, editorial writer, anchor, columnist). Among women, these percentages were 11.9% and 25.5%, respectively. The remainder were on the "factory floor" of the newsroom in roles such as reporting, social media management, and production, where they represent the majority.

The indicators of mental or physical illness all projected worse for women: 69.8% of female journalists feel stressed in the workplace (compared to 61.8% of male journalists); almost one quarter (24.8%) of female journalists reported having been diagnosed with mental health problems related to their work (while 13.6% of men reported the same issue); and 8.7% of female journalists have already taken

leave from work due to RSI/WRULD (for men, this figure was 5.7%).

With regards to violence, the numbers are quite high for all genders, but the type of violence each gender is subjected to differs. Women are harassed more in the workplace with 17.4% having reported cases of sexual harassment (compared to 2.8% of men), 45.8% reported having suffered some type of embarrassment from managers or superiors (compared to 39.3% of men), and they were also the majority among those who reported having suffered verbal abuse and digital surveillance and/or monitoring by their bosses.

Men, on the other hand, are more subject to external work-related violence; for example, more men reported that they had to stop doing a particular activity for fear of retaliation, had suffered online attacks or threats, had worked under duress, and had suffered physical aggression at work or as a result of it.

In sum, the data shows that women are proportionally subject to more violations in the profession, struggling to pay all their bills with their salaries and being victims of physical and mental illness, which includes many forms of harassment and abuse from managers or superiors at work on a day-to-day basis. The challenge of affording basic expenses impacts their ability to invest in education, leisure, health, free time, and also increases the risk that women will remain in abusive relationships due to their unfavorable financial situation (Nicoletti et al., 2023).

This hostile environment causes them to leave the profession more often than their male colleagues, either on their own accord or due to layoffs. Research on the *Professional Trajectories of Brazilian Journalists*, which compares data from the 2012 PJB (Mick & Lima, 2013) with responses from 1,233 of the participating journalists five years later (in 2017), shows existing correlations between the transformation and precariousness of journalism, and its feminization and subsequent de-feminization in a crisis context (Kikuti et al., 2022), something that is often ignored by studies in the field. “The first result of the precariousness of the labor market is an increase in female employment, and in a world with increasingly poor job quality and lack of job openings, it is women who are more vulnerable” (Nunes, 2020, p. 33).

Less than half of the 280 women who were employed in the media in 2012 remained in the industry five years later (118 or 42%), indicating the “expulsion” of women from the profession. The number of male respondents who continued working in the media five years

later was higher, both in quantity and proportion: 138 (58.2%) out of 237 respondents. With regards to management positions, there was a 42.4% decrease among female editors and a 33.3% decrease among men, and for reporters, 66.9% of women and 51% of men left, all during these five years (Kikuti et al., 2022).

The crisis management approach of encouraging competition and “doing more with less” makes female journalists more vulnerable, especially for mothers and expectant mothers, or elderly caregivers. For example, temporary contracts do not provide parental leave, and most of them offer little flexibility in balancing professional work (paid) and caregiving work (unpaid). Many women, therefore, feel they must choose between having a marital relationship and being a journalist, or between having children and advancing in their careers; however, these are not choices that their male colleagues have to deal with. The high rates of physical and mental illness among these women, and the increased number of them leaving the profession, are predictable consequences of this context.

## **5 Final considerations**

In this most recent phase of capitalism, even with the many social changes that have been taken, the biggest difference between male and female workers continues to be reproductive labor, which is often ignored and yet constitutes contemporary social production (Gago, 2020, p. 145). Even at a time with widespread worker exploitation, such as the one we are currently experiencing, women are placed at a greater disadvantage in the competitive and individualistic dynamics of neoliberal society.

The studies cited above in this article/essay demonstrate that it is more difficult for women to obtain positions of power, they have to leave the profession or are laid off from their jobs more frequently than men (Kikuti et al., 2022), and they face a greater impact from the precariousness of journalistic work, evidenced by the inability to pay their own expenses with their salary, greater physical and mental illness, and exposure to different degrees of risk, including cases of harassment at work (Nicoletti et al., 2023). These studies corroborate the need for an epistemological shift, one that abandons androcentric views on “what it means to be a journalist” and sees the reality of the profession.

What I sought to demonstrate is that gender inequalities are a structural part of the “crisis in journalism”, and not merely a subtle variation of it. As such, it should be extended into discussions within the field and contribute toward developing theories with greater explanatory power about contemporary society. Despite the progress we have made, what happens in our field is that gender studies are still rarely discussed in conjunction with epistemology studies, as is evident in the distribution of working groups at Journalism conferences in the country, for example<sup>1212</sup>.

The gender inequalities we observe in 21st-century career paths are explained by the historical foundations of journalism since its origin, and maintaining these values, in addition to causing suffering for most people who work within it, also directly interferes with the lack of diversity in news and its approaches. Subjectivities shaped by gender, race, class, and territory are present in interpersonal relationships among journalism producers and affect the selection processes and newsworthiness: “the position of subjects, the worldviews, and the cultural values of journalists are unconsciously activated in their professional performance, and as such, permeate the news construction process” (Veiga da Silva, 2014, p. 199).

In this sense, examining the structural transformations of journalism and its crises through feminist lenses can contribute to a much deeper understanding of the problems at various levels of its governance, and to searching for better solutions. Future research toward solutions to the crises in journalism from the perspective presented in this paper could further or focus on: a) establishing policies on mental health, harassment prevention, and care support for professionals such as journalists, and that focus on intersectional diversities; b) seeking solutions, within news organizations, to improve the conditions that allow people to remain in the profession, especially women journalists and other marginalized groups; c) understanding the potential impacts of greater diversity in newsrooms (gender, race, class, territory) on editorial agendas, source selection, and other aspects of editorial governance; d) producing correlations between diversity in newsrooms and participation/engagement with audiences, especially those neglected by commercial journalism, such as social minorities; e) highlighting the limitations of seeking said solutions in for-profit organizations, since the capitalist logic does subject female, black, etc. bodies to greater exploitation; f) discovering and testing institutional models that enable decent work

and more equitable ways of working in the profession; and g) re-examining existing journalism theories to determine which forms of gender differences have not yet been considered.

The dialogue between feminist studies and journalism is not a fluid one, but it is a necessary one in order for us to confront the issues that plague this field of knowledge and the profession head-on. As Moraes and Maia (2021, p. 278) state, “if we do not break from the dominant knowledge, which includes how we name, classify, and value things in the world based on gender, we will continue to fuel the naturalization of a type of power that results in violence”.

## NOTES

- 1 The financial collapse was caused by the loss of value of real estate assets in the US – banks lent money to buy properties at very high interest rates to those who couldn’t afford to pay (“subprime loans”), and sold packages of these debts to investors around the world (when people paid, the interest would go to the investors). Once the debts could not be repaid, the bubble burst, and the crisis even swept throughout Europe and the world, triggering a global recession in 2009. Many businesses were forced to close, and one of the social costs of this crisis was unemployment, which skyrocketed, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). In Brazil, the crisis was not so severe despite the high political cost, but it did lead to a restructuring of the labor market and jobs. Available at: [www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-55966588](http://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-55966588). Access on 12/11/2025.
- 2 See Edelman Trust Barometer. Available at [https://sl1nk.com/XUCNX\\_](https://sl1nk.com/XUCNX_) Access on 11/12/2025.
- 3 I took this reflection from a chapter in my doctoral thesis (Kikutidancosky, 2023), but it brings unprecedented insights and data from other studies to the discussion.
- 4 Original: “This androcentrism explains why women and other groups of workers with social characteristics that do not correspond to hegemonic masculinity – young people, black people, ethnic minorities, and homosexuals – are seen as marginal or as deficient versions of the model”.
- 5 When social isolation and remote work resulting from the cov-

id-19 pandemic accelerated the digitization of activities and services.

- 6 This issue is discussed in writer Bruna Maia's column in the *Folha de S.Paulo* newspaper, available at <https://f5.folha.uol.com.br/colunistas/x-de-sexo/2025/01/o-nazismo-de-elon-musk-a-energia-masculina-de-zuckerberg-e-o-que-isso-significa-para-o-sexo.shtml>. Access on 11/12/2025.
- 7 Platformization also steals a large portion of the advertising revenue that previously sustained news companies, and forces journalists to understand its mechanisms and adapt to its formatting and circulation logics, such as writing modulated by search engines (SEOs), multiplatform production, and mixing news with sponsored content, resulting in socio-technical changes in the division of labor, job insecurity, and financial insecurity for professionals in the sector.
- 8 A survey conducted by UOL in 2024 indicates that the 11 main channels in this YouTube segment have a combined total of over 4 million followers, and their videos have over 1 billion views. Available at <https://archive.is/CkrUy#selection-5777.11-5777.145>. Access on 11/12/2025.
- 9 The size and morphology of Brazilian journalists can only be measured by researchers as there is no council or body responsible for monitoring this professional activity or its self-regulation. The professional registrations with the Ministry of Labor serve as a guideline, but a number of workers are not registered, and their registration is not cancelled if they resign or leave the profession altogether. Public listing of registered professionals is also prohibited by data protection laws, which do not allow sample surveys. Data from systems like Rais/Caged are inaccurate because they only reflect workers with formal employment contracts. Lastly, counting the number of journalism graduates is an insufficient parameter because it does not consider the percentage of graduates in the field who do not work as professional journalists (Mick & Kikuti, 2020).
- 10 In Brazil, most of the research on career paths follows an interactionist approach and is qualitative in nature, using interviews as the primary methodology. There are only two quantitative studies, the aforementioned one and my doctoral thesis, which observe career movements based on the resumes of 3.000 journalists on LinkedIn (Kikuti, 2023).

- 11 For the PJB, I helped analyze the specific gender-based data from 2021 on trajectories. In addition to analyzing this specific data, I was also part of the team that prepared the study and collected the data.
- 12 Briefly reviewing the National Meeting of Journalism Researchers (SBPJor) proceedings from the last five years (2020 to 2024), and the free and coordinated sessions on Theoretical Foundations of Journalism (which focuses on a significant part of the discussions on the epistemology of the field), I have not found any work with gender as a central element of discussion. I searched for keywords such as “gender”, “feminine”, “feminist”, “masculine”, “man/men”, “woman/women”. In parallel, the coordinated session on Journalism, Gender, and Ethnic Sessions was created in 2021, and the Antonietas research network was later created in 2025, confirming the segregation between research on epistemology/theories and gender/feminisms. Similarly, an analysis of the Compós proceedings from the last six years (2020 to 2025) in the Journalism Studies Working Group uncovered only four papers on the topic (one per year in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024).

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