

# Journalistic objectivity and gender perspective: Tensions and displacements

## *Objetividade jornalística e perspectiva de gênero: Tensões e deslocamentos*

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### ABSTRACT

It is sought to understand the construction of a gender perspective in journalism and the implications of feminism related to journalistic objectivity in its practice by the analysis of the work of journalists at Portal Catarinas in the southern region of Brazil. The method involves a case study with participant observation in the production of news at portal and in-depth interviews. Analysis showed the existence of ruptures and tensions in the masculinist logic of journalism. Journalistic objectivity is present in practically all decisions but in constant tension, whether due to the choice of guidelines, the framing of news, the closest relationship with sources, and even the choice not to proceed with an agenda in the face of possible consequences in the lives of those involved. These displacements indicate the possibility of a feminist objectivity in journalism.

**Keywords:** Journalism, feminism, gender studies, journalistic objectivity, Portal Catarinas

### RESUMO

Busca-se compreender a construção de uma perspectiva de gênero no jornalismo e as implicações do feminismo relacionadas à objetividade jornalística na sua prática por meio da análise do trabalho das jornalistas do portal Catarinas, da região Sul do Brasil. O método é o estudo de caso, com observação participante na produção das notícias no portal e a realização de entrevistas em profundidade. A análise demonstrou a existência de rupturas e tensões na lógica masculinista do jornalismo. A objetividade jornalística está presente em praticamente todas as decisões, mas em constante tensão, seja por meio da escolha das pautas, dos enquadramentos das notícias, na relação mais próxima com as fontes e até mesmo na escolha por não prosseguir com uma pauta diante de possíveis consequências na vida das pessoas envolvidas. Esses deslocamentos indicam a possibilidade de existência de uma objetividade feminista no jornalismo.

**Palavras-chave:** Jornalismo, feminismo, estudos de gênero, objetividade jornalística, Portal Catarinas

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WE INVESTIGATED THE CONSTRUCTION of a gender perspective in journalism, inquiring about the implications of the feminist proposal of the journalists of the *Portal Catarinas — Jornalismo com Perspectiva de Gênero* (Catarinas Portal — Journalism with a Gender Perspective), founded in 2016 in Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil, demonstrated through their practices, which enables the problematization of journalistic objectivity. The understanding of these implications emerged by observing the news production routine of the *Portal Catarinas* and the stances of the journalists expressed in the in-depth interviews carried out in February and March 2018 (Costa, 2018)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>This article summarises Jessica Gustafson Costa's dissertation research (2018): "*Jornalismo feminista: estudo de caso sobre a construção da perspectiva de gênero no jornalismo*" (Feminist journalism: a case study on the construction of a gender perspective in journalism), published in a book entitled "*Jornalistas e feministas: a construção da perspectiva de gênero no jornalismo*" (Journalists and feminists: the construction of a gender perspective in journalism) (Gustafson, 2019).

We begin with the assumption that reducing gender inequalities requires changes in the discourses that signify and construct social realities. As a social institution, journalism, alongside school, the church, science and the law, produces repeated discourses on stances of normality and difference, defining the individuals who can be recognised as normal and those who deviate from this standard. Thus, as Guacira Lopes Louro (2008) points out, these instances inscribe on bodies the marks and norms that must be followed.

The discourses of these various institutions not only reflect and represent society but also signify, construct and modify meanings, there being no single order of discourse (Fairclough, 2001). We also consider that journalism uses discursive strategies to (de)construct common sense in order to articulate other ideologies (Moita Lopes, 2006). We have observed that in recent years the press has given prominence to issues concerning gender and sexuality, reflecting a broader mobilisation of society and, above all, of feminist movements.

On the other hand, this punctual attention seems to hide an important premise, which is the fact that journalism speaks about gender and sexuality at all times, in all its articles, since it deals with subjects that have always been gendered, sexualised and racialised, as Judith Butler states (2015). The production of meaning takes place not only in gender-specific news reports but also when politics, economics, health, etc. are covered, even when choosing which reporters will be assigned to each story and the sources to be heard because, to recall Joan Scott (1995), gender is the primary means of signifying power relations. Although this approach to understanding gender and its connection to power refers to a Westernised and localised view, as some decolonial theorists point out, we still consider it to be powerful for understanding the genderification present in the present context.

The production of these senses and meanings that involve journalism and society as a whole has culture, with its system of values, as a common denominator. In this sense, journalism can be understood as "social knowledge that

reproduces itself with a cultural pedagogical function that aims to explain ways of being and existing in the world” (Veiga da Silva, 2014, p. 63).

Veiga da Silva’s (2014) conclusion, when carrying out a newsmaking study in a TV newsroom, that journalism has a gender — the masculine one — is one of the central assumptions of the proposed discussion. According to the author, genderification occurs through the reproduction of gender and power relations that are hegemonically prevalent in culture, both in relations within newsrooms and in the news produced, reflecting hierarchies and inequalities. She further considers that all types of journalistic knowledge are permeated by a rationality constituted predominantly from a modern paradigm and a capitalist, masculinist, racist, heterosexist, Western world system, which establishes the values that legitimise knowledge as truth. The journalistic procedures for obtaining information are the main ways of adding truth value to the news, orientated by the notions of impartiality, balance and objectivity (Veiga da Silva, 2014; 2015).

Journalistic objectivity, as a cornerstone of the profession, is related to values inherent to the practice, such as non-partisanship and balance; to epistemological procedures, such as transparency and rigour; to aesthetic values, such as clarity and conciseness of the text; and ethical values, such as justice (Demeneck, 2009). The cornerstone also suggests that facts can be separated from opinions or value judgements and that journalists have the potential to distance themselves from events through neutral language and news reporting techniques.

This approach, which would result in an impartial view of the facts, is subject to many of the same criticisms that have been levelled against positivism (Hackett, 1999), especially in the field of Science. As Cremilda Medina (2008) emphasises, positive-functionalist principles were methodologically disciplined in communication and scientific practices at the same time. As such, the heritage of modern thought is still present in journalistic practice.

From this positivist perspective, journalists are only seen as objective — and ideally classified as neutral and impartial — when they reproduce the common sense and the hegemonic values of society, romanticising journalistic practice and praising these characteristics in the discourse of editorials, commentaries and so forth. Any attempt at a better-positioned social transformation, based on problematising social hierarchies and inequalities, especially those relating to gender, implies the label of biased journalist (Hackett, 1999).

Thus, we understand that the values inherent in modern rationality and positivism, reflected in the foundation of journalistic objectivity, need to be scrutinised in the production of news, and our focus in this research is the production of news by feminist journalists. We have drawn on the contributions of US biologist and feminist Donna Haraway (1995), who has focussed



on a common foundation in science and journalism: objectivity. In her view, academic feminist research has repeatedly tried to respond to what was meant by the term, intending to unmask the doctrines of objectivity because they threatened a growing sense of subjectivity and collective historical action.

Considering the slippery ambiguities of the word ‘objectivity’, what the researcher proposes is not to dismiss it, but to re-signify it based on the idea of embodied objectivity. For Haraway, this means localised knowledge, from a partial perspective of limited location, which makes us responsible for what we learn to see:

...objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision (Haraway, 1995, p. 21).

The author’s wording provides a framework for thinking that the inclusion of women in different fields of knowledge and professionals alone is not alone enough to reduce gender inequalities. It is necessary to reflect on both working techniques as well as the concepts that guide practices. Questioning the already questioned cornerstones of journalism from a gender perspective means the possibility of changing the way one perceives the profession and redefining its techniques and objectives.

We think the same about embodied objectivity, as we believe it is a way of displacing the concept of the positivist paradigm. Similarly, we agree with what Fabiana Moraes (2022) proposes when reflecting on a journalism of subjectivity. According to her, the subjective is part of what affects us and marks what we deliver as a journalistic product. However, subjectivity is not only related to the individual but also to the relationship between this “I” and the community, social relations and culture.

We consider the hypothesis that the journalists from *Portal Catarinas* do not completely break with journalistic objectivity but re-signify it from their activist perspectives. We also assume that their perspective dialogues with Donna Haraway’s (1995) concept of embodied objectivity. As the analysis will demonstrate, the hypotheses raised were confirmed.

The *Portal Catarinas* has attracted the attention of researchers analysing feminist journalism and the gender perspective. Francielli Esmitiz da Silva (2019) approaches the vehicle’s production and the circulation of journalistic content based on its communication practices on the *Portal’s* website and social media. She considers that the work of journalists acquires a role in the democratisation of communication by circulating information related to women’s rights. It broadens

the dialogue with other sources and thus encourages the participation of more social agents in the circulation of information.

Clarissa do Nascimento Peixoto (2019) categorises the *Portal* as a “novel type” of journalism due to its engagement outside the hegemonic media, aligning itself with other outlets in the search for alternative ways of news production and dissemination. Among her considerations is the fact that *Catarinas* has been able to fill a gap when it comes to gender approaches in journalism, but still faces the challenge of maintaining the periodicity with which news is produced. The lack of a sustainable funding model impacts on the difficulties of maintaining regular work and even the possibility of reaching more readers.

Isabella Bergo Costa (2022), in a comparative study of two feminist portals, *Catarinas* and *Feminacida*, from Argentina, analysed the actions of the collectives on Instagram to understand the subversions of hegemonic communication practices and the relationship between the content published and the proposals of decolonial feminism. The researcher believes that the possibility of communicating beyond the Eurocentric matrix of power and intelligibility on a platform like Instagram is a movement of resistance and insistence on a more just communication practice.

As for Barbara Maria Popadiuk and Karina Janz Woitowicz (2021), they researched feminist activities in the media outlets *Gênero e Número*, *Portal Catarinas* and *Revista Azmina*, intending to understand how gender issues are mobilised in journalistic production, considering that there are singularities in the construction of a gender perspective in journalism. Among the findings of the authors are the prominence of women in the news produced and the use of testimonial sources. Specifically concerning the *Portal Catarinas*, they recognised its proximity to the social and feminist movement, demonstrating a more activist and engaged profile.

Influenced by feminist criticism and believing in the transformative possibilities of building a feminist epistemology, we propose, in a different way to the studies presented previously, a reflection on journalism and the foundations that support its conduct, especially the foundation of objectivity, by accompanying the production routine of the *Portal Catarinas*.

Therefore, *Portal* was chosen because of its uniqueness and geographical proximity. Many feminist collectives in Brazil work on the production of journalistic content, but less regularly and mainly aimed at critiquing the traditional media or expressing opinion. The outlet’s regular production and the quality of the stories, which are well contextualised and feature a wide variety of sources, demonstrate that the journalists are attentive to the techniques of the profession, distinguishing them from other feminist websites that produce content.



As it is a study of journalistic practices that sought to find out about the choices and motivations of journalists during the construction of news, the research is part of newsmaking studies (Travancas, 1992; Tuchman, 1999; Veiga da Silva, 2014; Wolf, 1994); with a focus on production routines. The methodology is qualitative research, with the execution of a case study, a method that favours the particularities of phenomena in their complex contexts (Yin, 2005). Among the specificities of the *Portal* is the proposal to work with the construction of news, the core product of journalism. We opted for participant observation techniques (Peruzzo, 2015) for specific topics, in which meetings were scheduled via WhatsApp. The in-depth interview method and techniques were also adopted (Duarte, 2015).

The presentation of the results of the data analysis based on participant observation (Peruzzo, 2015) and in-depth interviews (Duarte, 2015), articulated with the chosen theoretical framework, was organised into six categories: 1) Objectivity embodied in the construction of a gender perspective in journalism; 2) Objectivity embodied in the subversion of the logic of sources - women as privileged sources; 3) Objectivity embodied in the relation with the social movement - the demarcation of journalistic autonomy; 4) Objectivity embodied in the care journalists take with sources; 5) Objectivity embodied in the collective construction of stories — exercise and necessity; 6) Journalistic objectivity embodied — reaffirmation and questioning. By interpreting the responses provided by the journalists and their motivations for decisions regarding journalistic practices reflected in these six categories, we can perceive the existence of ruptures and tensions in the masculinist logic of journalism (Veiga da Silva, 2014), as well as the maintenance of certain crystallised practices in the field and ideals related to the sharing of a professional culture. By valuing the existing displacements, we propose the existence of a feminist objectivity in journalism.

### **PORTAL CATARINAS: JOURNALISM WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

The *Catarinas Portal* is defined within its editorial guidelines as a media outlet specializing in gender journalism. However, as we will see in the following, the journalists' understanding of their own work varies and goes beyond this definition. It was founded in 2016 in the southern region of Brazil as part of a crowdfunding campaign. Its proposal reflects on journalism as a right and human rights as a basic premise for journalistic production. It defines itself as “The journalism-law is reinforced to the detriment of the journalism-product, demonstrating that its exercise must be attracted by the will to count the present

time from the most diverse voices, from the most diverse points of encounter and mismatch, from the most diverse perspectives”. (Portal Catarinas, 2016, online<sup>2</sup>).

Journalist Raquel<sup>3</sup>, one of the founders of the Portal, says that the proposal was put together with Patrícia, a former colleague from journalism college, and Luíza, an activist who is no longer with the collective. They had long been in contact, as a result of their work in the social and feminist movements. Raquel and Patrícia were already “hanging” stories on another independent journalism platform, but felt the need to invest in a portal with a gender perspective. The Feminist Spring movement<sup>4</sup>, in 2015, The Feminist Spring movement in 2015 was the moment when the two journalists met once again and realised that they shared the same ambition to build a platform linked to gender issues. They then decided to present the idea to Luíza, who was considered a major contribution from both feminist activism and academia.

After a few meetings between the three, the proposal was defined to develop a portal that could be an umbrella encompassing the production of content, the curation of information and the observation of public debates on the subject, especially those triggered by the traditional media. In order to materialise their productions, the three women created an executive team and invited other women to take part in the venture, creating an Editorial Board to support the production and dissemination of content. At this stage, Glória, a journalist who was also active in the feminist movement, joined the collective. The four of them then formed the core of *Portal Catarinas*.

The contributions of Glória to the consolidation of the Portal, with her practice in producing journalistic content, are also related to her previous experience in discussions about the media and feminism, when she took part in the construction of some of the *Mulher e Mídia* (Women and the Media) seminars that take place nationally, promoted by the Patrícia Galvão Institute, in partnership with other organisations. As a result of her interaction with feminist movements in other states, she came to know about the feminist newspapers that were being distributed and wanted to do something similar in the south of the country.

Some of the obstacles she highlighted that prevented initiatives from being consolidated are very interesting for reflecting on the context in which the Catarinas Portal emerged and consolidated itself. For Glória, in previous years, within a collective that was made up of activists, it was very difficult to attract journalists. She attributes this difficulty to her journalistic education, which has always been geared towards distancing oneself from political movements, not building a militant connection, “*this defence of such a journalistic impartiality, you need to be a neutral person*” (Glória).

<sup>2</sup> Available in <https://catarinas.info/jornalismo-catarinas-reportar-para-desconstruir/> Access on 06 mar. 2024.

<sup>3</sup> The names of the journalists were not disclosed in this research and fictitious names were used in an attempt to guarantee their anonymity.

<sup>4</sup> The so-called ‘Spring of Women’ or ‘Feminist Spring’ marked the year 2015 and signified a moment when feminism gained ground and political strength through large-scale marches against setbacks in women’s rights. ‘In 2015, women rapidly assumed a remarkable role in reacting to the setback represented by the approval of the bill (PL) 5069/2013, presented by Eduardo Cunha, aimed at impeding victims of rape from accessing essential medical care’ (Bogado, 2018, p. 29).



With the expansion of feminist debates in society in the following years, the proposal to involve journalists in the production of news with a gender perspective was put into practice, with the establishment of a team of professionals engaged in this articulation. In addition to Raquel, Patrícia and Glória, the *Portal's* core team is made up of journalist Ângela and photographer and columnist Vivian, as well as the contributions of video maker Laura, who produced the video for the launch of the initiative and is still active in the collective. Other journalists also collaborate, but on a more occasional scale, at specific events.

The website also includes the contribution of 22 columnists and an Editorial Board made up of six women, professionals from different areas of expertise. It is in this composition of the group of columnists and the board that we see greater diversity among the members, especially in terms of race, with the participation of black women, as well as lesbian women and a transgender woman<sup>5</sup>. Among the interviewees, responsible for the core of journalistic production during the research, all are cis and white women. With regard to sexuality, most of them identify with sexual experiences that extend beyond heterosexuality.

<sup>5</sup> In 2018, the Portal welcomed an indigenous woman to its board.

### **BUILDING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN JOURNALISM**

In its editorial guidelines, *Portal Catarinas* states that it intends to dialogue with various theoretical lines of feminism, mediating their perspectives on reality, and that it is the first news portal in Brazil to focus on gender, feminism and human rights. Based on this information, we were interested in learning how the journalists define the journalism they practice and how they understand doing journalism from a gender perspective. By addressing this issue, we were also able to discern how some of them interpret the role of journalism in society and, consequently, the negative practices that exist within the field. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that the framework for their practices is also permeated by opposition to the practices of the traditional media, considered negative by the journalists. Or, returning to Stuart Hall(2000), their identity as journalists and feminists is constructed by differentiating what they are not - the difference from hegemonic journalism.

The idea of framing the Portal as journalism with a gender perspective came from Patrícia in an attempt to broaden the approaches and not restrict them and was widely discussed with the other members, considering that the borders between academia and the social movement are porous, of dialogue and exchange. Thus, the motivation was to work on the gender approach in journalistic stories: *Everything related to gender is bad for conservatives, when you talk about gender a whole stigma is created, so we wanted to work on it, reframing it for society [...]* (Patrícia).



By bringing the word “gender” into the portal’s definition, a term that is currently in dispute and has been constantly attacked by conservative sectors of society, they demonstrate the political bias of the endeavour and their commitment to disseminating the meaning that has been defended for decades by the feminist movement. For Patrícia, the demarcation of the perspective is also related to a critique of the shortcomings of the field of journalism detected by them, considering that journalism itself should have a gender perspective, without the necessity of being specialised: “*But then we put it in the slogan to say: we’ve got it, OK?*” (Patrícia).

We discussed this matter with Raquel and she spoke about the need to consider reformulating the *Portal’s* proposal. Treating the gender perspective as a specialisation of journalism is not clearly delineated the distinction between them and the so-called feminine journalism, a form of journalistic specialisation mainly in the realm of magazines and historically targeted at women, without very demarcated political positions. In Raquel’s view, the journalism they practice goes beyond the idea of speciality. When she talks about overcoming the story and the source, we understand that Raquel realises that the journalism they are doing is not limited to covering only the issues of the feminist movement, but also about matters that have always been made invisible in general and that are not present in the hegemonic media. Furthermore, even the most common stories in traditional journalism can be seen on the *Portal*, but from a different perspective.

The definition of which topics should be covered by feminist journalism is complex, since all the subjects that circulate in society have an impact on women’s lives and, therefore, are topics that deserve to be covered or would be relevant to women’s interests. Similarly, topics related to gender should not be seen as subjects aimed solely at women, but rather at society in a broader sense, being directed, at least intentionally, at a more varied audience.

It should also be noted that in conventional media, social issues are addressed from a masculinist perspective (Veiga da Silva, 2014). The gender perspective, then, can be included in any news story in order to overcome this tendency. Approaching social phenomena without a gender perspective results in the turning invisible of the specific and differential impacts on the lives of women. This is what Argentinian researcher Sandra Chaer (2007) calls the transversality of the gender perspective. It is this perspective that Raquel is trying to demarcate when she states that journalism with a gender perspective goes beyond the source, the story and the idea of speciality, becoming a transversal perspective.

The transversality that Raquel addresses is also related to the possibility of it being a space for narratives constructed by women, who have historically been a minority in the recording of history and the present day. This perspective,



which differs from the masculinist one, although it is not journalism specialising in women, seems to indicate an attempt to add other points of view to the construction of reality, based on different journalistic practices. *“Because if we believe that we are in patriarchy, if we believe that women are educated in one way and men in another, it’s obvious that we’re going to have a different practice. [...] Which is not from the perspective of the masculine, but which also surpasses this current perspective of the feminine”* (Raquel).

Raquel does not argue that they are practising a journalism that could be called feminine, although she recognises the possibilities of building new narratives from this perspective. We asked photojournalist Vivian if the gender perspective influences the way she photographs. She replied that it doesn’t change much, as the themes are already geared towards feminism, but that there is a “feminine gaze” in the search for stories.

We note that the two statements present different understandings, however, they are permeated by an idea that directly associates the feminine with women, which can lead to a disregard for the fact that women often have masculinist practices. The inclusion of women in journalism, which now accounts for 64 per cent of the newsrooms in the country (Bergamo; Mick; Lima, 2012), has not had a direct impact on journalistic practices, and the perpetuation of a normative approach to gender issues continues in the content published by the press.

If there is no reflection on the asymmetries and unequal power relations between the masculine and feminine, women and men tend to reproduce the values that circulate in society. What we have observed in the practices and content of the Portal Catarinas is not just a feminine gaze, but a feminist gaze that perceives the gender inequalities and power relations implied in the devaluation of women in all spheres and seeks ways to overcome it.

Considering the journalism they practice as a project under construction, journalist Glória affirms that it is a daily experimentation exercise and highlights the merit of the Portal’s proposal to be a space for the exercise of journalistic practice so that they can all mature together. As some of the journalists have never worked in a newspaper office before, she adds that the Portal is also a space for learning, for collective construction, even for students who are collaborating.

Glória explains that when the initiative was launched, a backlog of diverse content reached them, requiring them to *“have experienced the gender perspective in handling”*<sup>6</sup>. As a result, some more profound stories end up being somewhat delayed by the news. From the moment they had contact with the multiplicity and quantity of stories, several questions emerged: *“Okay, in a political story, how are we going to handle it? What journalistic canons are we going to maintain in the processes of sourcing, selecting information and editing? And what are we not going to keep?”* (Glória).

<sup>6</sup> Interview granted on 22/02/2018.

Concerning the daily dilemmas, Glória explains that she wonders to what extent they are maintaining the structures of the story, the sources and the text. Raquel adds that her choices are very intuitive, not related to theories, and that she sought out the Master's degree to try to understand theoretically what they are doing, she asks herself: *“have we really caused a rupture?”*. This is an important reflection for the members, considering that their practices are constantly under construction.

On the other hand, we also observed that there are values that they see in journalism that are quite dear to them and even somewhat idealised, as can be seen in the expression “journalism from the roots”, used by Raquel and echoed by Ângela, when demarcating their position in the construction of the news, unlike the hegemonic media that tries to camouflage its positions, there is the human gaze that directs the stories:

*There's a difference in this journalism... it's a journalism of respect, a humane journalism, ...that we don't hide, we don't need to convey a tone of neutrality... We take a stance and it doesn't have to come across so blatantly, with catchphrases that we don't even use in the trade union movement, with jargon, but in the very construction of the article, you realise that it was built stemming from the perspective that we have.... We want to say that we are on one side, but that doesn't stop us from practising journalism at its roots (Ângela).*

The choice of the specificity of news in the definition of the Portal is also permeated by this ideal of journalism from the roots, as in Raquel's response on the subject: *“... We're very much a fireball, if you allow us, just by talking about it I get goosebumps, we do it all day long”*. The adrenaline rush that journalistic work generates is one of the components shared by the professional community, as is the ability to recognise the obscure faces within a situation, the famous “nose” that refers to news acumen, as Tuchman (1999) points out, and which is present in one of Ângela's speeches when she is investigating a story: *“I'll try to talk to the lawyer off the record and see if my nose is right”* (Field journal).

This strong professional identification, on the other hand, seems to lead to a quest to understand what the best practices of the field are, situated in opposition to commercial journalism, which are scarcely addressed both inside and outside academia. Raquel frequently states that she wants to understand what good journalism is, and what “cool journalism” is because she doesn't know yet. Eduardo Meditsch's (2001) query about how to diagnose an organism if it is not clear how it should work is pertinent in order to reflect on the new journalistic initiatives. As can be seen in the statements made by the Portal journalists,



the Chair still defends an idealised proposal for journalism, also shared by the professionals, playing a role related to shaping public opinion, serving the public interest and monitoring the powers. The discourse of self-legitimation of journalism, as Wilson Gomes (2009) points out, in addition to shaping the identity of the corporation, has the task of convincing society that its existence is essential for democratic societies “because it is capable of serving the public interest” (Gomes, 2009, p. 70). In practice, commercial journalism operates much like any other capitalist company, but the discourse on the function of the field remains the same, it is a “strange and disturbing discursive inertia” (Gomes, 2009, p. 76).

This paradox complicates the search for definitions of how this other type of counter-hegemonic, openly positioned journalism should function, although it does not behave like a social movement press office and does not fit into the logic of the news market. As Glória states, these uncertainties “*force us to carry out this daily exercise of delineating what journalism is all about, what are the stories we publish, what are the actual procedures for constructing the stories*” (Glória).

The premise of journalism as a right, provided for in the profession’s codes based on the fundamental right of citizens to information, has a direct impact on the funding of the Portal and on the understanding that the content published will not be restricted to subscribers only. In addition, it reflects on producing stories that bring important information to women and that are socially silenced. The subject of abortion is very illustrative of this, as Patrícia explains: “*With regard to abortion provided for by law, the Ministry of Health doesn’t publicise where this service is available, or how many services there are in Brazil. And they don’t publicise it because if they do, women will have access to their rights*”. The failure on the part of the State to inform is related to a “fear” that women who don’t qualify for legal abortion in Brazil will lie in order to undergo the procedure, which deprives access for all. “*It’s a genuine violation of women’s rights and this needs to be spoken about*” (Patrícia).

Another violation not covered by the press and which is not widely disseminated in society is that of medical confidentiality in complaints from women who arrive at hospitals after having an abortion. “*Because when a physician informs on a woman, he puts other lives at risk. And there is an omission by the Brazilian State in relation to the agreements to which it is a signatory, various international agreements that emphasize the need for countries to reconsider their restrictive legislations*” (Patrícia). As a result, the international consensus that abortion up to three months is a woman’s right is not being honoured in Brazil, nor are women’s human rights and the constitutional right to confidential care in hospitals.

In opposing mainstream media practices that are considered negative, journalists face the great challenge of feminist critique, as Sardenberg (2001) points out. Such a challenge refers to the need to build other principles and practices in order to meet the social, political and cognitive interests of historically subordinated groups, including women, because a feminism that destroys all can be dangerous (Alcoff, 1994).

### WOMEN AS FAVOURED SOURCES

In an attempt to build not only other journalistic precepts but also other frameworks and relationships, Portal Catarinas favours women as sources. The proposal to bring in voices that are not usually used as sources in the traditional media is one of the great features of this journalism, intending to break with the hegemonic frameworks brought about by the voice of the powerful, understood as primary definers by Stuart Hall et al. (1999). However, it is necessary to emphasise that even within independent journalism, women's sources are still not the preferred sources, perpetuating the asymmetries of the traditional media, according to Vinhote et al. (2016).

Angela explains that since she joined the Portal, she has been recommended by other journalists to seek out female experts, "*who understand the subject and who are often not given the space*" (Ângela). From this perspective, we tried to understand which women are contemplated in their stories and whether there is any attention to diversity. The proposal to reach unheard voices is not a simple task to accomplish, as it involves leaving the known zone and seeking out women who are not directly part of the social movement they are close to.

Glória adds that there is a search for this broader perspective, which is also very much guided by the social movement, and that it is necessary to reach out to other women, both in activism and in journalism. The proposal "*forces you out of your comfort zone and journalism today is very much in the air conditioning, in this situation, right?*" (Glória). The journalist provides an example of this situation with a story she worked on about breastfeeding, starting with the question of how significant it is in women's lives. "*This is a story that puts you at several crossroads*" (Glória). The dilemmas reported by her refer to the contact she has had with women who advocate for uninterrupted breastfeeding until their child reaches two years of age, leading to their absence from work during this period, a significant privilege that the majority of women cannot enjoy.

The movement in favour of breastfeeding, the starting point for the story, does not take into account the specificities and needs of many Brazilian women. As a result, the journalist realised how difficult it would be to get the focus she



wanted, opting to do a series of four stories and explore the issue as much as possible in different contexts. She reports that it was only in the last text that she managed to get closer to the focus she was aiming for, by bringing up the situation of women who have no one to leave their children with because they can't find a daycare centre nearby their workplace, or are unable to breastfeed their children twice a day until they are six months old, as required by law: *"A woman who is a housemaid and who is not allowed by her employer to take her child to work, or who takes her child to work and breastfeeds under these conditions, and this is a favour they are doing for her."* (Glória).

The consideration that motherhood impacts women's lives in different aspects is described by Glória, who also emphasises the importance of breaking away from a utilitarian view of sources through what she calls "journalistic canons": *"A perspective that you won't get by calling the town hall to find out, oh the town hall, how many day-care spots do you have? OK, that's information, it's important, but we need to delve deeper than that"* (Glória). On the other hand, these attempts sometimes fail to materialise due to a lack of structure and people available to dedicate themselves to the stories, this being a proposal that Gloria considers to be challenging.

While there is a motivation to bring a more diverse perspective on women, it was possible to observe other interesting outlines about the sources, such as the connection with women who do not engage with the feminist perspective. During the open agenda meeting, in the initial contact with the journalists from *Portal Catarinas*, the subject arose of the only councilwoman elected after eight years in the City Council who doesn't work under a feminist banner, but rather advocates for animal rights, and whether this would generate a story. In an interview with Ângela, she brought up the subject again and said that the councilwoman's situation brought her a lot of discomfort and that she felt it was necessary to do a story about her political agendas. *"My first thought was to be impulsive and talk about this woman"* (Ângela).

In conversation with the other journalists, she realised that even though she talks about animals, the councillor is a woman who occupies an important political position that has historically been occupied by men. Her presence there is representative, even if it does not fulfil the ideals expected by feminism. *"That's where I grow in the portal, because of the experience the girls have"* (Ângela).

The conversation between the professionals from a feminist perspective means that even if they don't engage with the perspectives developed by the Portal, and consequently aren't favoured voices in the news stories, these women won't a priori be targets of criticism for not taking a stand in relation to the struggles for gender inequality. This reflection is in the discussions within activism that

women are already sufficiently blamed by society for their actions and men, when in similar situations, are exempt from any responsibility. *“Even the conservatives, the anti-feminists, we are careful how we expose them. We’re not going to disqualify them because we’re in this together, even if they don’t know about it”* (Ângela).

The discussion presented about the councilwoman and her agendas is also related to the space for adversary debate, “hearing both sides”, a practice that is also related to the search for journalistic objectivity. Many times, the space for adversarial debate is offered without much thought on the part of journalists, assuming that a guarantee of impartiality in the approach and not favouring just one side is provided as if there were only two sides to everyday situations. On the contrary, it is known that the approach is crossed by professional direction, as in all journalistic choices.

The practice, classified by Tuchman (1999) as a strategic ritual - a routine procedure that has little relevance to the end sought, which is ultimately journalistic objectivity - was discussed with the research interlocutors and appeared frequently in the conversations we had. Firstly, we perceive an understanding of the space for adversary debate as a basic premise for the practice of journalism, as opposed to the pamphleteering discourse characteristic of the social movement. The question first emerged during participant observation with Ângela when she spoke about the need to bring the adversary debate into the agenda, emphasising the difference between the work she does at the Portal and the work she does in trade union journalism:

*In college, we’re told to be impartial. At the union we are only given one side, saying that in a meeting with 10 people, there are 50. At the Portal, we think about the other side and the best way to deal with the situation. I think that’s journalism... [Ângela] Pondering the adversarial, reflecting on the consequences of this other side, is understood as the way to do journalism (Field Journal).*

Ângela also spoke about the fact that they have a stance, which is not hidden in the content, and does not prevent us from hearing this other side, which she calls «different». The motivation is to show the divisions that exist on the subject being discussed. We understand that addressing the antagonisms and disputes of meaning that exist in society causes the supposed social stability often constructed by the press to be shaken. On the other hand, we question whether the search for this contradiction exists only to fulfil what has become conventionalised as a duty of journalism and whether the existence of the *Portal* no longer figures as a contradiction in the disputes over the meanings of the subjects they cover.



In the following statements, we will understand other motivations of the journalists and we will realise that the bias defended by them is still present when addressing divergent voices. *“Even the questions we formulate for this other side are full of our context, of what we think, and what we believe. And we don’t hide that at any point, I think”* (Ângela).

For Raquel, the practice is permeated by a very well-defined ethical issue that is recommended to other journalists. The adversary defended by the professional does not refer to the search for divergent opinions on issues, which could, for example, mean the search for conservative sectors to deal with feminist agendas. We understand that the intention is related to guaranteeing the right of those directly involved in the story to have a space for their versions, especially in news stories with a higher level of complaint.

The perspective of the journalists, while bringing them closer to certain groups, makes contact with more institutional sources difficult. Ângela reports that in some stories there is a search for official sources involved in the news, but some choose not to talk to the professionals of the Portal due to the view they have of their work, as happened with the ostensive Police in a story about aggression against women journalists. *“We contacted the police, asking for information, and the next day we asked again and they didn’t get back to us. Because there’s also that, where you’re talking from, who you’re talking to”* (Ângela).

In cases where the people involved in the story consent to the interview, we notice that the practice of listening to the other side is not so much related to a strategic ritual linked to objectivity, but rather to a strategy to point out the inconsistencies in the discourses being delivered. In the stories in which Patrícia works on the subject of abortion, it is also possible to observe this movement. The journalist ponders that there are cases and cases and that the adversary can be understood in the articulation between feminism and journalism. *“I don’t put a priest on my story, so if it’s a court hearing, I’ll put a statement he made at the hearing, but I’m not going to call a priest to talk about the right to life”* (Patrícia). For Patrícia, women activists for the legalisation of abortion already talk about the right to life, and the words of a priest would be pointless: *“The adversary is that we bring in these women who aren’t being talked about in the mainstream media”*.

This journalistic practice described by Patrícia indicates a broader view that certain discourses already circulate hegemonically in society and that it would not be their job to ratify these ways of understanding the subject. In this sense, the gender perspective would be present in journalistic practice in the selection of sources, demarcating who has the legitimacy to speak.



*...I delegitimise the words of a priest as adversary speech. For me, he doesn't have the same legitimacy that he has in the traditional media and I think that's where the gender perspective comes in, that's the gender perspective, it's you delegitimising certain sources that are very important to the traditional media... In an eventuality, perhaps it's important to put it out there to bring out the contradictions in that speech, right? As a church that defends life in certain circumstances, some lives, not all (Patrícia).*

Regarding women as favoured sources, it was possible to perceive the search for diversity, in an attempt to surpass the circle of activism, but also the difficulties of this proposal. Committing to other approaches means giving up a certain “comfort” related to sources that dialogue with journalists in their activist practices and are consequently more available for interviews. By proposing to broaden perspectives and voices, the potential of feminist journalism is valued, demonstrating that the issues raised have an impact on the lives of different women in various ways.

Another perception that indicates a subversion of traditional journalistic logic was the care taken by journalists with their sources. An essential element of journalism, “the scoop” can be considered one of the myths most shared by journalistic culture. The scoop as something to be won is a factor related both to the competition between journalists and media outlets and to the mythology of the journalist as a great “hunter” (Traquina, 2008). On the other hand, if we analyse it from a gender perspective, as highlighted by Veiga da Silva (2014), the valorisation of this practice is also linked to its attribution to masculine characteristics, alongside others such as impact, complaint and strength, in which the journalist is the “scooper”, the “hunter”, the “investigator”, of a masculinist norm of dispute, competitiveness, proactivity, authority-authoritarianism and domination: “These values affect power relations and the hierarchy of newsrooms, since the professionals who fulfil the attributes conventionally recognised as masculine are closer to power and prestige...” (Veiga da Silva & Marroco, 2018, p. 35).

From this point on, we realised from our first contact with the journalists at Portal Catarinas that the pursuit of the scoop is something that is undervalued among them and does not figure as a goal. This position is influenced by the structure they have to carry out their stories, accepting that they wouldn't be able to compete with other outlets with a greater number of professionals and resources. In addition, and above all, care with sources is another value that is defended and that implies the position of not pursuing the scoop.



Ângela says that one of the first things she learnt when she joined the Portal was that there is no quest for the journalistic scoop, because “*we as journalists are very impulsive in wanting to know the details of things and wanting to know the information first hand so that we can pass it on to everyone*” (Ângela). For her, the action that should be pursued is the construction of well-founded news that brings a plurality of ideas and as much detail as possible. Glória also believes that competition is something very strong in the culture of journalism and that it is not easy to renounce it. “*The Diário will drop their story, ours is another story, our sources, our depth, our perspective, it’s another story. So we’re not competing with them*” (Glória).

The specificity of the practice that results in differentiated content is clear in the journalists’ conception of their own work; their experiences within the feminist movement are imbricated in the ethical reflection on journalism, especially concerning their sources. We recognise this when Raquel says that one has to have the sensitivity not to exploit the pain that people are going through in some delicate situations and that the journalist who exploits this is compared to a “vulture”, an animal that feeds on carrion.

The stance of not being a vulture journalist and not having the scoop as a value is reflected in an ethical stance, which is to be careful with sources. We consider this to be an important concern, in the sense of not overlapping journalistic interests with their responsibility for the possible consequences of this interview. The protection they advocate leads them to seek resources to minimise exposure, in line with their activist stance: “*This perspective of looking at things from an activist perspective also appears in situations of trying to understand and seek the protection of the source in certain situations*”. (Glória).

Other scenarios seem to be illustrative for journalists when it comes to dealing with people involved in situations that would be of interest to the Portal’s coverage. In these cases, journalistic interest was not the prioritised value, which consequently led to the story being dropped so as not to harm those involved, although these are painful decisions. “*We have already worked a lot on the story and there comes a time when we realise that this is not the case, that this story is going to have an effect and this effect on this person’s life is not going to help change the situation...*” (Glória).

The humane approach defended by the journalist indicates, in addition to caring for the person, the consideration that when people are under strong emotion, they are unable to properly formulate their responses. Glória explains this when she comments: “*We’re going to take it down even if she only talks to us, she’s not in any psychological condition, the person has already been bombarded by the press and on social media ...*”. This action often goes beyond the simple

relationship between journalist and source, which we also consider to be a mark of the intertwining of journalism and activist practices in the feminist movement.

The proximity of many of the stories they cover to specific gender issues, as we have argued, does not jeopardise their assessments of the cases, but it does enhance them. By not prioritising the news scoop but caring for sources, we can also see that there is an appreciation of attributes linked to the feminine, such as care and protection. This opposition to the more traditional masculinist values of journalism, Veiga da Silva and Beatriz Marroco (2018) call a subversion of the modern-positivist-masculinist logic of journalism.

### **ACTIVISTS AND JOURNALISTS: THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT AND JOURNALISTIC OBJECTIVITY**

The relationship between journalism and other social fields has always been ambiguous. The raw material for news production is found in institutions, organisations and social groups, and it is essential for journalism to maintain relationships of trust with these groups in order to access the information necessary for its practice. On the other hand, the field is also inserted in an arena of disputes over visibility, requiring constant negotiations between journalistic interests and those of the sources. These relationships imply the functioning of the journalistic field and the condition of operating under constant pressure from various fields of forces (McQuail, 2012).

In traditional journalism, the main influences of power are the social institutions that hold the greatest social power, such as the government, businessmen and members of the parliament and the judiciary, who are usually the main advertisers of the media outlets. The specificity of the *Portal Catarinas*, since it was born out of the social movement and does not have advertising, and is “*the movement itself in some way*” (Raquel), does not make it immune to pressures and influences, however, their origin is distinguished, being exerted mainly by the social movement itself. The demarcation of their autonomy as journalists can be considered one of the main challenges faced, as we will demonstrate below.

In addition to their activist work in the feminist movement, which represents the basis for their journalistic construction, the sources of this same movement are the favoured voices, providing not only information but also acting as consultants, advising on how to approach certain issues. In this aspect, close contact is considered positive, as it facilitates access to information, often first-hand, although it demands a series of responsibilities.

Patrícia believes that there is a greater demand for this journalistic distancing in relation to the Portal or other outlets that are close to social movements,



permeated by the matter of journalistic objectivity, but normally this same type of questioning is not asked of the hegemonic media, which is also very close to its sources. *“Globo is also an activist. It has a relationship with business groups, a strong relationship with these people, nevertheless activism is seen as something for those who do not have money.”* (Patrícia). She ponders on the discourse of impartiality defended by the major media outlets.

We noticed that the positions of the Portal journalists are more transparent to the public, as they recognise that proximity to certain social actors is part of the profession, but that there is a movement of approximation and distancing. Therefore, their work does not involve acting as a press office for specific groups, although the issues brought forth by them are of significant importance for the maintenance of the journalistic initiative.

Glória also emphasises the importance of acting pedagogically to enhance the understanding of journalism among other actors in activism. *“We keep trying to maintain that distance, that sometimes you help, you lend a helping hand, oh mate let’s go, and sometimes we distance ourselves to say that we’re here to do journalism”* (Glória).

One of the alternatives in the quest to separate activism and journalistic work was the creation of an association, which, in addition to them, is composed of other women who work on projects that go beyond the scope of journalism, such as building mobilisations within the social movement and in administrative and bureaucratic matters. In addition to the maintenance issues of the *Portal*, the association was founded with the purpose of delineating journalistic autonomy, to highlight that, even though certain issues align with the scope worked on in the *Portal*, the framing will be determined based on ethical precepts and professional practices valued by them, not necessarily aligning with those advocated by the movement.

In numerous instances, journalistic objectivity spontaneously emerged as a topic addressed by the members of the Portal during the course of the conversations we held. It is necessary to emphasise that although we only inquired about the foundation in two questions during the in-depth interview stage, the journalists were aware of the theme of this research and so we attribute that, even without being directly questioned on the subject, they directed their discourse to contribute to the preparation of the work. At the same time, we considered that by articulating the research problem inquiries, we prompted a certain level of reflection among the journalists regarding the work they have been undertaking. This is exemplified in Raquel’s earlier highlighted query, wherein she questioned whether they truly effectuate a rupture in relation to journalistic canons and practices.

Although in some of the circumstances described above there are idealised considerations about journalism, in reality, their view does not seem to be naïve, especially when they assert that listening to the “other side” is often positive in order to reinforce the perspective advocated by the journalists themselves. This understanding seems to acknowledge that the orientations and interpretations of professionals are constantly present in journalistic practice, and the resource also serves to demonstrate the incongruity of opposing discourses.

From what we understand, the *Portal's* credibility with its audience is permeated by adherence to the more canonical rules of the profession or what they perceive to be journalistic ethics, related both to the quality of the investigation and in-depth study of the stories and to the ensure that the people involved in the news have the space to present their perspectives. By valuing this journalistic ethic, the *Portal's* autonomy must be maintained, as was well illustrated by the tensions with the social movement.

The open stance of journalist Patrícia, concerning the legitimisation of certain voices and the delegitimisation of others, as exemplified in the decision not to approach a priest to discuss the right to life in the context of abortion. This is because the ideology defended by part of the Church in criminalising abortion leads to the deaths of women, is considered concrete, objective, replete with statistics and expert opinions, and diverges from most of the approaches taken by traditional journalism. What is objective for the journalist is not objective for much of the traditional media, demonstrating that objectivity is always contextual and situational. It is based on this data and concrete cases that the *Portal's* coverage of the subject is established, favouring both investigation and interpretation.

Another understanding is brought up by Glória, who considers that in a capitalist context, what has become a journalistic agenda is very much shackled to maintaining the status quo and that objectivity is related to what has been conventionally considered important to be covered. Thus, they try to build alternatives, even without predefined models. “*And it's healthy not to have models*” (Glória).

*When dealing with topics that haven't been experienced, we confront nuances that aren't immediately apparent, and therefore, we need to experiment... That's why I say, it's the laboratory itself, it's the exercise. So, I think we have this challenge and this shaking of structures from the choice of stories to production....* (Glória)

The journalist considers that there is a movement of subversion on the part of the *Portal* in all stages of journalistic work, although it is still an exercise, mainly due to the nuances that arise in the stories and that do not usually appear in traditional approaches. She adds that she is very averse to the concept of



objectivity. *“If we have to preserve certain canons to fit into this narrow box of journalism, I think we will prefer others”* (Glória). She emphasises which other goals she favours: *“I believe that we will prefer the multiplicity of sources, which is also a challenge, we will prefer to narrate the story as faithfully as we possibly can, with the elements we have available.* A minimal objectivity, however, is necessary so that the written text is comprehensible and can be understood by individuals outside their occupied space, who may not necessarily share the same values, as a guarantee of effective communication. Finally, she emphasises the importance of subjectivity: *“It is precisely in these subjective nuances that we seek our topics. These are the stories that are not explicitly presented there and in the approaches that are not necessarily taken, they are born out of subjectivity, I would say [...]”* (Glória).

When analysing the responses, we consider that there are movements of subversion, particularly in the relationships they establish with the sources, as well as in the appreciation of subjective nuances and the commitment to approaches and framings that differ from the traditional ones, or the “dominant interpretative framework” (Ponte, 2009, p. 209), which are not crystallised and much less related to the reproduction of common sense. Objectivity, advocated by some of them and problematised by others, does not seem to be understood as a method to ensure the impartiality and neutrality of news, because the journalism they practice is openly biased.

It is in adhering to the techniques of the profession, especially in the standard of the text, such as the construction of the lead, the use of inverted commas in the interviewees’ statements, as well as referential, concise and clear language, that one can ascertain, based on their responses, the greater framing. In the selection and approach of the stories, a specific framing is evident, based on interpretative matrices that are different from those of the hegemonic media. We observe that adherence to established practices in the field is related to both the sharing of a professional culture, derived from both education and professional experience and a legitimization of the work they perform.

When dealing with topics that are often in dispute in society, they believe it is necessary to justify their choices primarily on the basis of what they refer to as “concrete data”. It is worth noting that the values already crystallised in society do not need to be constantly justified, as they are considered “the truth”. Thus, the commitment to constructing objectivity may indicate an attempt to validate the alternative discourses that they endeavour to circulate through the journalism they practice.

**FINAL REMARKS: A FEMINIST OBJECTIVITY IN JOURNALISM**

Based on the considerations brought forth in the research categories discussed in this article, we contend that the positioning of professionals as journalists and feminists enables them to present other versions of reality with a heightened sense of responsibility towards the topics they engage with. For Haraway (1995), it is our duty as feminists to insist on a better, more fitting, richer explanation of the world, allowing for a better living within it. On the other hand, the construction of an identity as journalists and feminists does not proceed in a stable and coherent way, showing contradictory, fragmented and displaced aspects (Hall, 2000). After all, subject positions are never fixed, they are variable, multiple, in constant tension and subject to revision.

This continuous movement can be perceived in the reaffirmation of certain models understood as indispensable to journalism, in consensus with a journalistic identity shared within the professional culture. At the same time, they subject these same practices to critiques and resignifications, motivated by their feminist perspectives and in opposition to the way in which the hegemonic media operates.

Throughout the research field, there were numerous instances in which we observed negotiations and renegotiations and we highlight some of them in the course of this paper, which revealed a journalistic practice that was moving towards the construction of feminist journalistic objectivity, always provisional and subject to constant debate and reflection. In reflecting on the canons defended or contested, on the limits of their work and on the impact of the news they publish on the lives of their sources, the journalists from the Portal demonstrate that they do not intend to reach definitive answers, but rather to value ongoing and collective construction.

The possibility of the existence of feminist objectivity in journalism, based on the analysis conducted, indicates provisional directions, stemming from the exercise of constant reflection on both the framing of the news and the relationship with sources. The accountability for the impact of their work also became evident, thus indicating the limits and potential of journalism to grasp social complexity. The objectivity that permeates the Portal's journalistic practice does not disregard subjectivity, but rather values it by investing in the subjective nuances that are inherent to their work. As the journalists rightly emphasise, the stance they express in their approaches is explicit, with no intention of camouflaging the perspective they are defending. Feminist practice in journalism has been demonstrated to be permeated by the commitment to connection among women with different positions, both in relation to the sources and among the journalists themselves, but who share the same transformative



purpose. Objectivity, then, is about engagement, embracing the risks of each choice. After all, as Haraway (1995) asserts, we are imperfect and (thank the goddesses) we are not in control of the world. ■

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