

CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL INTERCONNECTIONS IN COMMUNICATION, JOURNALISM, AND GENDER RELATIONS RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I reflect on the impacts of theoretical and methodological contributions developed in gender relations studies to overcome heuristic limits in communication and journalism research. After analyzing studies on how the media covers physical and symbolic violence against women, events related to homophobia and its consequences, and the first cases of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome made public, I indicate how the social dynamics in gender relations can be potential disruptors of certainties. However, my analysis of these studies revealed that we could find limits and formulaic repetition in gender relations research as well, leading me to a challenge: how can we deal with repetitions that tend to disregard particularities of phenomena in communication, journalism, and gender relations research, also considering the potential interconnections in these fields?

KEYWORDS

communication, journalism, gender relations

INTERCONEXÕES CONCEITUAIS E METODOLÓGICAS EM PESQUISAS SOBRE COMUNICAÇÃO, JORNALISMO E RELAÇÕES DE GÊNERO

RESUMO

Neste artigo, reflito sobre as contribuições de noções teóricas e aportes metodológicos de estudos sobre relações de gênero para a superação de limites heurísticos em pesquisas sobre comunicação e jornalismo. A partir de investigações sobre coberturas noticiosas relativas a violências físicas e simbólicas contra mulheres, a acontecimentos que envolvem a homofobia e suas consequências e aos primeiros casos de síndrome da imunodeficiência adquirida tornados públicos, indico o quanto as dinâmicas sociais das relações de gênero são potencialmente disruptoras de certezas. No entanto, o aprofundamento das pesquisas mostrou limites e repetição de fórmulas também em pesquisas sobre as relações de gênero, levando-me a um desafio: como lidar com repetições que tendem a desconsiderar particularidades dos fenômenos sob investigação nas áreas da comunicação, do jornalismo e das relações de gênero, inclusive em suas possíveis interconexões?

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

comunicação, jornalismo, relações de gênero

1. INTRODUCTION

By analyzing gender relations in communication processes over the last few years, I was able to identify theoretical and methodological limits in some conceptual contributions focused on understanding communication and journalism. For example, I have investigated journalistic coverage of femicides and other forms of physical and symbolic violence against women and also events that have their informational motivation centered on homophobia and its individual and social consequences, including connections made between acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) with homosexualities. I credit the strength of gender relations as inspirational ruptures in how we think about communication and journalism for at least two reasons and their potential developments. First, events related to gender relations can implode biased logic of observation in those fields. On the other hand, concepts employed in gender studies allow us to revisit conceptual clichés and methodological formulas that are applied without considering the analyzed communicational and journalistic phenomena' specificities.

However, as I delved deeper into empirical research and bibliographical reviews on gender relations studies, the same discomfort I felt with conceptual and methodological formulas used in some communication and journalism works arose since I also noticed similar repetitions in gender relations studies. Hence, originating from a double discomfort, this article reflects on what I consider a necessary critique of theorizations in both communication and journalism fields, as in gender relations studies. The care we must take lies in not reproducing theories and methodologies as if they were supposed to have universal applicability as if they were independent of the demands that each research presents in its specificities.

Gender relations imply much more than questioning if biologism and binarism are really founded in physical differences, in genitalia and hormones that would define men and women. But neither are these studies confined to recognizing political, cultural, behavioral, intersectionality, and other dimensions that constitute the advancement of gender comprehension compared to sex and sexuality. Gender relations also imply considering people who claim that sexuality, sexual practices, or both are not pivotal pillars of their existence. Therefore, when dealing with gender relations perspectives, we are faced with the necessary care of decentering and desessentializing all identity claims as innate or obligatory. Moreover, here, I do not take innate as something that corresponds exclusively to physical traits from birth, as I also include features and characteristics that are supposedly considered mandatory for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and asexual people, among others. My objective is to notice, in the scope of gender relations, intricate modalities of approaches and detachments, of convergences and divergences

that, from the start, question any thinking pattern that holds its foundations in opposing man and woman, masculine and feminine, masculinity and femininity.

However, and what I will say certainly represents a most likely insurmountable contradiction, it is not possible or even desirable to refuse identities for political reasons at least. We should refuse identity essentialisms, as, instead of allowing mobilities, they impose characterizations that are often centered on binarisms that should have already been overcome. From this perspective, ideas like identity transit or identities in transit could function as undesired shortcuts that hamper the perception of how people comprehend their own gender, affective, and sexual experiences. Consequently, Zygmunt Bauman (2004/2005) noted, to claim identity is to deal with an ambiguity situated between what allows me to affirm who I am and, simultaneously, what allows me to offer my otherness to those who do not recognize it. It is a process that, at its limits, could even be used to justify my elimination or to undermine me morally and ethically because of my identity characteristics.

Reflecting on gender relations demands a sensibility to recognize that it is not possible to research gender without facing the cruelest and most sophisticated forms of physical and symbolic violence and intense power struggles. On the other hand, it also means realizing that numerous actions, strategies, and confrontation tactics are performed by people who do not admit social control mechanisms, who do not admit hierarchies that promote dehumanization or any kind of prejudice, abuse, or offense, and diminishing. Communication and journalism research, including their related processes and products, requires attention and care to avoid the dualism found in one-sided influence processes and the need to consider intricate power struggles, controversies over meanings, ambiguities, and contradictions. What gender relations, communication, and journalism have in common are human realities shrouded in polemics, fractured before any consensual possibility. They are research fields that present their own challenges when approached individually, though considering their possible interconnections increases their complexities.

This article aims to reflect on, as it seems to me, a moment of theoretical and methodological sedimentation in gender relations, journalism, and communication research, despite the fairly recent potential interconnections between these fields. If I am not mistaken, the repetition of explanatory schemes and methodological strategies has been overlapping the inquiry on what is the true heuristic potential of the concepts used in these fields and a much-needed methodological renewal that takes specific contexts and demands into consideration. As Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018) suggests, we must avoid using “magical words”, which she understands as concepts that, when mentioned, appear to hold only proper meanings that would not deserve criticism or revision, for example, the idea of social movements that she criticizes in her text. Because they are alluring and capable of creating “an effect of fascination and collective hypnosis” (Cusicanqui, 2018, p. 95), magical words hinder the search for multiple, sometimes dissimulated, meanings. They also represent ways of intellectual colonization, either when we accept

imported concepts without considering our particular contexts or when they become explanations that the academic world imposes on groups that are deliberately excluded from the formal instances of knowledge production. Such is the case of transgender people, which still represent a small share of the university bodies, to mention only one group of the LGBTIQAP+ universe (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual, pansexual, and other non-heteronormative people). These people are the main targets of diminishing hierarchies, prejudice, and violence that feed the logic of gender relations.

Overcoming the limitations that magical words impose on us is a long-term challenge that I could not try to solve in this article completely. What I will do is indicate some works in which I could identify fractures and incompletenesses — in some cases, severe heuristic deficiencies — related to the concepts in question. Furthermore, I will refer to some widely used concepts whose acritical repetition often leads to works reaching conclusions before conducting their analyses, methodologically forcing the examined reality to submit to the concepts. These concepts should be reappraised in light of the specificities of what is in research, combined with a simultaneous attempt to renew the chosen methodologies. In other words, it is imperative to question concepts and methodologies whose starting points are also their finishing lines.

2. IDENTIFYING MAGICAL WORDS IN COMMUNICATION AND JOURNALISM

My first research in the intersection between communication, journalism, and gender relations analyzed the first AIDS news published by Brazilian newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, when AIDS publicization was still in its beginnings, wrongly classified as an epidemic affecting “risk groups” (Carvalho, 2009). Although my master’s thesis received another title, my initial thought was to name it “a faggots, whores and junkies’ disease? AIDS understandings from risk groups to risk behaviors”. Even without this title, the work preserved the perspective of addressing socially controversial and disruptive events, identifying prejudice against *faggots*, whores, and intravenous drug users as components of the analyzed news. In the early 1980s, there was an emphasis on accusations that pointed homosexual males (*faggots*) as HIV’s main targets, which resulted in atrocious headlines like “gay plague”, “pink cancer”, and others, though I must disclaim that I did not find this kind of headline on *Folha de S. Paulo*.

In that work, I ended up not dwelling on specific concepts such as homophobia or gender relations, but when we look back at it in retrospect, we can identify traces of their presence, noticing a recrudescence of prejudice against homosexual males that came in the wake of AIDS. This recrudescence appeared in religious discourses that charged the syndrome as a punishment inflicted upon sinful homosexual people, in medical discourses that suggested that gay men’s sexual promiscuity was responsible for spreading HIV infections, among many other displays of prejudice, where boundaries between religious, medical, scientific, cultural, and behavioral motivations were difficult to identify (Carvalho, 2009).

From a communication theory point of view, the analysis of journalistic narratives and studies on homosexuality and AIDS relations made me realize deep fractures and inconsistencies in the relational perspective, presented in the late 1990s as a theoretical contribution that could overcome the limits of understanding communication as manipulatory processes (França, 1999). This perspective was theoretically correct in indicating more complex processes that suggested interpersonal communication dynamics mediated by socio-technical apparatus in a contextual condition. However, two problems remained.

The first one consists in relegating power struggles and the inevitable asymmetries in all communication relations to a less favored position, assenting to a principle that assumes that the related symbolic interactions would lead to mutual agreement. Furthermore, this perspective does not explain potential disagreements or the impossibility of consensus in some communicational exchanges that are mediated or not by socio-technical apparatus. Gender relations show us that the relational aspect is not immune to fissures, fractures, and permanent negotiations defined by intense power struggles, helping us notice similar communicational processes and product dynamics. The relational perspective must consider thus the economic and sociocultural inequalities that guarantee that the individuals involved in communication dynamics do not share the same conditions to establish dialogue and symbolic interaction. More significantly, communicational processes do not always result in a consensus or a possibility of mutual agreement and may even result in irreconcilable disagreements or in situations where it is impossible to establish a dialogue that overcomes the differences at stake in those communicative exchanges.

The second problem concerning the relational paradigm in communication studies is the risk of becoming a formula with a static set of conceptual and methodological postulates that could be applied to everything. In fact, even though the relational perspective focused on embracing the principles I briefly mentioned above, it also proved to be poorly aware of a contextuality that represents one of its own essential bases for explaining communicational products and processes. As I dug deeper into the issues surrounding AIDS and HIV, including what the journalistic narratives I analyzed made visible or kept hidden, there was no doubt that there were failures resulting from adopting theoretical and methodological standards used by medicine and science for fighting other diseases. Like never before, epidemiology faced the urgency of finding ways that could consider with greater efficacy the numerous social, cultural, and economic variables that influence the infection dynamics, and that is just a single example of the challenges that caused the collapse of the certainties acquired from the simple application of research formulas. The unique conditions of the AIDS and HIV epidemic in Brazil (Daniel, 2018; Daniel & Parker, 2018) exposed certain limits in medical-scientific theories and methodologies, particularly in epidemiology, because of very specific sexual arrangements among Brazilian men and how transgender people were vulnerable, for example.

An inexact science by nature, communication is not suited for methodological formulas, which is even more perceptible when we approach it to epidemiology and other

medical sciences. However, the nature of science, which is formed from numerous interpretations, is not the sole element that questions allegedly universal heuristic applications. The relational perspective claims that it is essential to consider the contextuality of communicational processes, but it very often neglects the materialities implied in these dynamics. The result is a tendency to neglect, theoretically and methodologically, distinct technical, aesthetic, cultural, behavioral, political, and ideological aspects of journalistic narratives, talk shows, soap operas, radio news, films, documentaries, YouTube videos, WhatsApp messaging, and interactions on social media. In addition to every other communication product and process, which also raise some ethical issues that challenge us. Following this, several settings found in socio-technical apparatus enabling the creation and circulation of many products and processes are frequently relegated to a less favored position, even though their material, cultural, political, ideological, aesthetic, and ethical characteristics make them ultimately relevant.

When the time came to review journalism theory, the formulas collapsed just the same. One of the questions I made aimed to discover the reasons for AIDS's recurrency in news coverage, following numbers that only grew as the syndrome spread throughout the Brazilian territory. When I was studying events as a concept, I found Adriano Duarte Rodrigues' (1993) proposal to consider the rareness of the event one of the main values for newsworthiness. According to this mathematical perspective, the rarer the event, the more newsworthy it would be, while the contrary results in less newsworthiness, something that is the exact opposite of what I encountered in the first years of AIDS coverage in *Folha de S. Paulo*. This inversion shows the fallaciousness of the theoretical and methodological formulas so widely used in journalism studies and how they fail to produce careful critical analyses of the researched phenomena. What became evident is that complex social realities are not susceptible to mathematical principles and their statistical logics since multiple actors and actresses were disputing medical, cultural, behavioral, moral, ethical, and many other meanings that were emergent in that context, inspiring articles that took the syndrome's social implications as an inexhaustible range for journalistic narratives.

My expectations were also frustrated by how AIDS was reported by what is generally named science journalism, as I assumed that medicine and science would have more to say about the syndrome, especially considering that in the 1980s, everybody was still seeking better comprehension of the infection mechanisms, of the HIV's characteristics and other technical parameters. However, the research revealed that the predominance of news stories mostly focused on behavioral and political aspects. They unveiled fights for the right to have dignified and universal medical assistance, fights against the prejudice suffered by infected people, pejoratively called "aidetic" at the time, and strategies that tried to evade the hegemony of medicine discourse about AIDS, as it could lead to HIV-positive bodies being put under control without taking into consideration the autonomy of those diagnosed people. In this case, as well, gender relations prompted changes in the informative strategies for AIDS and HIV journalistic coverage. Once

again, journalism research that adopts theoretical and methodological principles that were supposed to be really well-established because of their reoccurrence and, therefore, supposedly capable of guaranteeing satisfactory results was questioned. Such is the case of repeatedly resorting to “journalistic genres”, something that science journalism does, and to a myriad of taxonomies, each with its own theoretical and methodological principles and its own pretensions of universal legitimacy.

Some 10 years after this research about the initial AIDS coverage by *Folha de S. Paulo*, in my doctoral research, I studied news coverage of homophobia and its consequences with a corpus composed of narratives published by *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Globo* (Carvalho, 2012). Among other conceptual aspects, I was interested in understanding how the journalism practiced by those newspapers dealt with a subject that, since the 2000s, had become controversial in traditional and mediatic public spaces. The reports of physical and symbolic violence motivated by homophobic hatred — and many ruthless murders of LGBTIQAP+ people every year — the demands for legal assurances for marriages involving people who share the same gender, the fight for criminalizing homophobia, and many other factors. By refusing the perspective of journalism as a “mirror of reality” (Wolf, 1985/1994), my interpretation of the narratives and their agents and characters allowed me to understand journalism as a social actor in intense disputes of meaning and power struggles with other social actors and actresses that were engaged in debates regarding homophobia and its consequences.

One of my conclusions was that, instead of simply reflecting society as if they were its mirror, *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Globo* proved to be decisive, interested agents in the public discussions regarding homophobia, despite all journalism’s typical contradictions. So, while both newspapers demanded the criminalization of homophobia in their pages, they also presented an inability to overcome stereotypical biases regarding the LGBTIQAP+ population in some news and articles, which presented marks of LGBTIQAP+phobic rancor. As a result, the newspapers portrayed transexual people predominantly through the lens of violence and prostitution, associated homosexual men with hedonistic lifestyles, and treated lesbians as women predisposed to alcohol abuse.

On the other hand, in the analyzed narratives, both newspapers often stood against social actors and actresses historically identified with LGBTIQAP+phobic positions, especially religious groups and conservative politicians (Carvalho, 2012). To some extent, *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Globo*, despite the contradictions found in the research, sometimes assumed stances against the ones perpetrated by Brazil’s conservatives about homophobia and LGBTIQAP+ people’s rights. As in the research on the first news stories about AIDS and HIV, the research on how news coverage dealt with homophobia, developed in a gender relations framework, was successful in identifying heuristic limits in theories and methodologies that try to understand journalism based on ready-to-apply packages, ignoring nuances of the investigated realities.

The next research was developed as part of my postdoctoral training at the University of Minho, under the guidance of Moisés Lemos Martins, when I studied physical and

symbolic violence against women in gender relations, comparing Brazilian website Uol and Portuguese website *Público*. The results indicated limitations for two conceptual perspectives on journalism studies often repeated thoughtlessly. The first refers to newsworthiness (Wolf, 1985/1994), and the second to the assumption that journalism is a form of knowledge (Genro Filho, 1987; Meditsch, 1998). Although I identified different approaches in the journalistic narratives published by both sites when addressing violence against women, related to each country's cultural particularities, I could also identify critical issues shared by the two conceptual perspectives I mentioned above.

According to the newsworthiness perspective, news media adopt criteria for selecting what is newsworthy from parameters and values that tend to become universal. These include the importance of the people involved, the event's geographical proximity to the target audience, the degree of violence in certain events, and a list that can be extended to infinity, as one can see in many studies that approach this subject. Even if these works consider that there is a criteria variability that depends on the studied media, the conceptual and methodological principles remain unchanged: just applying them is sufficient for us to reach a list of news values that, despite the events in question, would resolve the research proposal, dedicating little thought to other implied dynamics encountered in strategies that define if an event is newsworthy or not.

When we look closely at journalistic narratives that reported physical and symbolic violence against women within gender relations, it is possible to understand that adopting the newsworthiness perspective would mean neglecting the very problem implied in these types of violence. In other words, limiting a news value to the "degree of violence" to the very own value that transforms one particular aggression against women into news means that the complex power struggles and disputes of meaning underlying gender motivations were not examined. What is left out is precisely what matters most, the news media's ability to present physical and symbolic crimes not as another generic data that counts deaths and violence but as an agent in the dynamics that transcend other acts of daily violence. Therefore, what physical and symbolic violence against women in gender relations unveils is the newsworthiness perspective heuristic impossibility to reach beyond the surface of certain media's alleged motivations for choosing an event as newsworthy or not. Moreover, gender relations, because of their vast presence in society, allow the perception of another heuristic frailty of newsworthiness: the premise that news values are fundamentally a result of journalism's internal dynamics; that they are dictated by journalism's numerous agents, who make decisions primarily considering internal arrangements, such as a professional culture; temporal constraints that affect the news-making process, among many other variables, which, in this perspective, are not influenced by disputes of meaning and power struggles involving social actors and actresses outside journalism domains.

Journalism as a form of knowledge premise presents greater theoretical sophistication than the infinite set of possible criteria for newsworthiness, but it did not remain unscathed when I researched crimes against women motivated by gender relations. Authors

such as Adelmo Genro Filho (1987) and Eduardo Meditsch (1998) defend that journalism is one of the modern ways of knowing reality. Not only because we become aware of events through multiple informative media, whether they are near or distant from us, but also because of our systemic exposure to news, for example, about economy and politics, that would allow us to progressively comprehend these topics, and even get to notice their contradictions and rifts. In synthesis, although it establishes a knowledge distinct from sociological or philosophical knowledge, journalism, especially in Genro Filho's (1987) proposal, possesses the potential to unveil social reality based on the reported events' singularities. The analysis of narratives published on Uol and *Público* revealed a much different reality, in which these singularities, with rare exceptions, were restricted to a few informational aspects about the crimes and did not mention gender motivations. Also, the narratives generally portrayed a partial description of the scenarios and established causal relations mostly in agreement with police discourse. In fact, police officers were recurrently the only people listened to in the narratives, often speaking "on behalf of" both victims and aggressors.

Instead of considering the possibility that journalism is a form of knowledge, it seems more prudent to me, based on journalistic narratives that imply gender relations, to think of journalism in the logic of precarious intelligibility. Far from allowing the knowledge of social reality as a whole or singular social phenomenon, journalism offers partial explicative frameworks. Even considering how often we are exposed to multiple informative media, those would hardly let us transform what journalism offers as a set of individual data into a satisfactory collection of events. That could provide more sophisticated comprehensions within the scope of both particular and universal knowledge, resorting once again to the categories proposed by Genro Filho (1987).

Namely, most of the narratives I encountered in my postdoctoral research did not allude to gender relations at all when addressing crimes against women, and even when they did, they were defined just as "crimes of passion" or domestic violence. When these narratives treat physical and symbolic violence against women as common crimes or regular murders, they risk suggesting or insinuating that the victims were to blame for the aggression they suffered. I identified a between-the-lines logic in which gender relations appear without a proper explanation of their dynamics, that is, suggesting that those women died or were victims of some other crime, in synthesis, because they were not being and behaving as women in the allegedly correct way, and that, in addition, points to journalism's own ways of exercising gender violence.

Concepts like femicide (Pasinato, 2011) are absent in both sites' narratives on murders of women, although it is important to note that the concept is little used in Portugal. The only exception was a news article published in Uol about the sanctioning of the Femicide Law by President Dilma Rousseff, but the text did not explain the concept in detail, something that could contribute to a better understanding of the importance of the law. I also found a few exceptions that referenced gender relations directly, but only in narratives that focused on strategies for fighting femicide, not in the articles that reported

each crime. Thus, I believe that the precarious intelligibility perspective leads to a better understanding of journalism limitations when approaching this kind of event, compared to the pretentious claim that it would constitute a form of knowledge.

3. MAGICAL WORDS IN GENDER RELATIONS STUDIES

Still working with Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's (2018) reflections on magical words as a metaphor for criticizing the heuristic limits of concepts that we sometimes use intuitively, I extend my discomfort to encompass some recurrent concepts in gender relations studies. As I pointed out, if, at first, gender relations theories and methodologies were fruitful for better understanding the limits in some approaches towards communication and journalism, as my research advanced, it also revealed heuristic limitations concerning gender relations, a vital area to my analyses and my proposals of new approaches. So, I have been progressively identifying concepts that, even when correct, lose power when used as clichés and toolboxes in some sort of exhaustive repetition that does not favor the particularities found in gender relations.

In the research on the first news about AIDS and HIV published by *Folha de S. Paulo* (Carvalho, 2009), I did not reflect on the concept of homophobia. However, the perspective of the resurgence of historical prejudice against homosexual people, prostitutes, and intravenous drug users was not enough to address the complexities that can be overlooked when cultural, racist, behavioral, economic, and other aspects are also at stake. Referring to homosexual people and AIDS generically, for example, proved to be incapable of encompassing particularities of sexual exchanges between men in Brazil (Daniel, 2018; Daniel & Parker, 2018; Green, 2000; Parker, 2002; Perlongher, 1987). Gay men's promiscuity was used as a moralizing strategy to "explain" why these people were "preferred" by the virus, which also applies to the prostitutes. However, this same promiscuity was not even cogitated as a characteristic of the supposedly heterosexual men who resorted to the prostitutes' sexual services. On the other hand, although included in the flawed "risk groups" list, hemophiliacs were not counted among the HIV-positive people who deserved ethical or moral sanctions, indicating not only a prejudice selectivity but also a distinction between victims that were innocent because they needed the hemoderivative transfusions that were unfortunately contaminated by the virus and the promiscuous tormentors that spread evil. In these cases, sexuality could remain in brackets, appearing at the most as a suspicion that some hemophiliac did not assume their homosexuality.

When we bring homophobia as a concept, the limits around some theoretical propositions in gender relations seem to be more profound. Even if we choose as a reference the proposal that homophobia is the individual or social repulsion to homosexual or presumed homosexual people, as sustained by Daniel Borrillo (2001), or if we choose Didier Eribon's (1999/2008) perspective of the logics of insult against homosexual people, there are still large gaps to overcome. If we look at the suffix "phobia", there is a suggestion that will probably associate the term with "disease", even if we take it as

a metaphorical social construct. This suggestion can fallaciously lead us to an idea of a “cure”, most importantly, erasing complex relations between religious, pedagogical, legal, philosophical, and medical discourses, among others, which have all historically sustained the hate practices identified with homophobia, even if, paradoxically, they can also contribute to denounce and overcome it (Carvalho, 2012; Junqueira, 2007). More seriously, the multiple physical and symbolic violations — that often result in cruel murders — can become obscured by the perspective of homophobia as a disease, or they can be justified and even lead to a judicial acquittal by the allegation that since it is a disease, the responsibility of those who committed homophobic hate crime can be mitigated (Carrara & Vianna, 2004).

The polysemy of the term “homophobia” poses a theoretical challenge when we observe the numerous ways prejudice, rejection, and downgrading hierarchies are directed against people included in the broad spectrum sustained by the acronym LGBTIQAP+. Beyond the commonest critique that homophobia is a concept initially applied only to homosexual males, from which derives the proposition of concepts that could encompass each specific prejudice, like lesbophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and, more recently, LGBTIQAP+phobia (Green et al., 2018), we have particular features that aggravate the intensity of hatred in sexuality rejection depending on which LGBTIQAP+ population is attacked. We must also consider intersectionality issues when evaluating different levels of violence that are generically attributed to homophobic motivations. Thus, non-negligible differences that make transexual people more vulnerable to violence than, for example, gays and lesbians, become more visible. So does the comprehension that racism is a component that strengthens rejection motivated by sexuality, also evoking vulnerabilities associated with income and economic power.

The demystification of the polysemy around the term homophobia leads to the recognition of downgrading hierarchies from inside the LGBTIQAP+ groups, showing prejudices that include racism, disdain for those who have lower economic status, and something that, in theory, should not occur: prejudice related to sexuality. Consequently, we find gays who demean other gays because they are black, poor, or live in places they consider inferior; those who reject the peers they consider effeminate. There are also lesbians denouncing the prejudice of gays against them, and vice-versa. Cross-dressers and transgender people as targets of gay, lesbian, and bisexual rejections. Some transgender people refuse to form any solidary bond with homosexuals because they want to identify with a particular gender from binary criteria and many other forms of violence among LGBTIQAP+. Rather than being polysemic, the concept of homophobia remains ambiguous, slippery, and even contradictory.

However, the different shades of prejudice and the impossibility of one single term to contemplate all the forms of physical and symbolic violence should not lead to dismissing the concept of homophobia, starting with the fact that it has a wide social circulation. Recognizing homophobia as a serious social problem is undeniably associated with the term itself, including the demands for criminalization, a decision that in Brazil has been historically postponed by the legislative power, who should be the one responsible for taking

the initiative forward. Nonetheless, the judiciary ultimately decided to put homophobia on par with racism as a serious crime. To the main objectives of this article, highlighting the misleading polysemy of homophobia as a concept must begin by recognizing it as a magical word that should be questioned if its inherent theoretical and methodological assumptions are pertinent. Therefore, dealing with repulsion against LGBTIQAP+ people requires evaluating the multiplicity of variables that must be considered to understand better hate and violence dynamics that happen both internally and externally to these populations. By doing so, we can prevent a generic usage of the term homophobia, which would lead us to the risk of neglecting intersectionalities, such as racism, economic issues, and many others that each particular research must be alert to detect.

The research on physical and symbolic violence against women in gender relations prompted me to identify more magical words whose seduction could be hiding heuristic weaknesses. Firstly, it was theoretically and methodologically important to establish procedures that would guide the corpus construction, and I already knew beforehand that direct references to gender relations would be scarce. In fact, the search for keywords “gender”, “gender relations”, “physical violence”, and “symbolic violence”, whether accompanied or not by the words “woman” or “women”, led to identifying virtually no journalistic narratives in the websites. The alternative was to adopt, from a previous theoretical set, the method of reading, during the same period, all the news in Uol and *Público* to compose the corpus and to complement this methodology with a thorough review of the chosen theories to verify their relevance regarding the particulars of what was under analysis, including cultural, behavioral, social, economic, and legal differences between Brazil and Portugal.

A recurrent concept in feminist and homosexuality studies, compulsory heteronormativity (Butler, 2007, 1990/2008; Louro, 2004, 2007, 2009) was one of the magical words that challenged me in understanding the specific dynamics of physical and symbolic violence against women in a gender relations context from the corpus of my analyzed journalistic narratives. If we comprehend the concept, *roughly speaking*, as the imposition of emotional and sexual relationship models between people of different genders, preferably for procreation, where there is no doubt about the obligatory roles for men and women, we face the problem of reaching the results of the investigation before the journey even begins. In other words, the premises impose the conclusions, regardless of how the research is developed, and this will tend to submit the investigated reality to theoretical and methodological principles of alleged universal heuristic power.

The perspective of compulsory heteronormativity can help — a lot — in analyzing the motivations of physical and symbolic violence against women in a gender relations context, including identifying the journalistic media as part of these entanglements. However, it should be adopted as a possible starting point, making sure not to neglect the specificities underlying such dynamics, but not as a final destination. Besides the mentioned limits, we risk adopting manichean views with little attention to rifts and contradictions where complex conditions of intersectionality, referring to the ones we have been insisting on here, might be completely relegated to the sidelines, not to mention the reification of binary divisions.

Although not incorrect either, the idea of patriarchy, especially relevant in some recent feminist studies, posed some difficulties to the research on physical and symbolic violence against women in a gender relations context. The first question to emerge: would the concept present the same heuristic power to comprehend the researched dynamics of violence in journalistic narratives reporting on occurrences in Brazil and Portugal, each with its distinct cultural configurations? This first doubt raised another similar one: being the Portuguese society identified as the colonizer and the Brazilian society as the colonized one, should we have expected some kind of gender solidarity through the dynamics of patriarchy that could have made us different from Portugal in what concerns patriarchy? Or even: could Brazilian patriarchy be a direct inheritance from the Portuguese patriarchy? The challenges imposed by these questions and other doubts derived from them made me consider it more prudent to not deal with the concept of patriarchy, thus avoiding using a theory whose fractures were evident.

The most seductive magical word that I came across while researching journalistic narratives of the Brazilian and Portuguese sites was the notion of hegemonic masculinities, widely used in research on homophobia, violence against women, and other studies that have gender relations as their focus. Inspired by Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Raewyn Connell (1995) proposed this idea to understand the masculine domination strategies based on studies conducted in Australia that exposed how masculinities are constructed in school and union contexts, giving particular attention to body modulations and the attainment of privilege. The success of this theory led not only to its extensive use worldwide but also to several critiques, ranging from the potential impertinence in its correlation with the Gramscian concept of hegemony to risks such as reification of the concept and inadequacy in different contexts, besides the status of ready-made formula in its theoretical and methodological configurations.

The author has published a well-argued paper, co-written with James W. Messerschmidt (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2013), recognizing some limits of the hegemonic masculinities perspective and refuting some other criticisms. Still, I do not believe that the fundamental problem has been resolved. This perspective is still used to apply theoretical and methodological principles that ignore descriptions of each investigated reality's specificities and maintain theoretical and methodological assumptions leading to conclusions that preserve a taxonomy that is more efficient in naming variations than conceptual innovation. As a result, even though some studies recall the opposition of female researchers to hegemonic masculinities or incorporate notions such as subordinate or complicit masculinities, the taxonomic list is preserved, with potential analogies to the lists of newsworthiness criteria I criticized in the previous topic. In this sense, the researcher's creativity can lead to an infinite list of masculinities taxonomy, always showing internal cohesion, but carries a low potential to break from reified principles, no matter how sincere Connell's and Messerschmidt's arguments have been in affirming the opposite.

Prudence once again led me to not use the concept of hegemonic masculinities in the research on physical and symbolic violence against women in a gender relations

context, preventing me thus from resorting to a notion more because of its widespread use than by its heuristic power. As such, using concepts and methodologies with reservations about their problems and acknowledging their limits would amount to a double mistake. The first is turning to schemes that impose the results before the analytical path, as I indicated in other theorizations and methodological contributions in communication, journalism, and gender relations fields. The second is that recognizing the limits becomes a mere formality devoid of practical meaning because when one repeats what was supposed to be under criticism, the capitulation evidenced by the repetition eliminates the criticism's legitimacy or sincerity.

4. CONCLUSION

As I affirmed in the introduction, my objective in this paper is not to offer alternatives to the theoretical and methodological principles that have caused me discomfort from the perspective of magical words, a concept borrowed from Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2018). In each new research, my efforts — not always successful, I should emphasize — have been directed to the search for analytical perspectives that escape easy schemes, with a vigilant eye on the particularities of each research. In this sense, theoretical and methodological contributions in gender relations studies have been crucial for my proposals for new approaches to how we understand communication and journalism. However, the inverse path has yet to be walked.

Nevertheless, I believe some reflections I have been developing in the last 2 decades of research can at least suggest some leads to follow. The fallacy of applying falsifiability principles in gender relations, communication, and journalism studies should be avoided, just as some sciences do in their processes of scientific verification. For this reason, I have always been careful to indicate heuristic limits and the ready-made character of some theoretical and methodological formulas and not simply disqualify them as unscientific. They are limited, and we must overcome their limitations by recognizing that claiming a universality for our assumptions is impertinent because it ignores the specific conditions of what we are researching.

The temptation to transform the repetition of theoretical and conceptual models into proof of scientific validity, or at least capable of constituting universally accepted analytical procedures, is another risk to be avoided. It is always important to remember that, in the universe of communication, journalism and gender relations studies, we are dealing with the imprecision, with human processes at their highest levels of disputes of meaning and intense power struggles. They are susceptible to change, and they can even be changed by research results that inspire and are inspired by political actions aimed at overcoming the problems indicated here as connected to gender relations and the struggles that take communication and journalism fields as being strategic for fighting those problems, with no Manichaeism or reductionism of any kind. It is very important

to highlight that the media has been a recurrent promoter of gender violence, for example, when it reaffirms LGBTIQAP+ people stereotypes in informative and entertainment products and processes, in sensationalist news coverage of physical and symbolic violence against women and LGBTIQAP+ people, among many others.

In my opinion, there is an urgent need for adopting a more collectivized rewriting of gender relations texts, one that effectively incorporates the multiplicity of people concerned and their own ways of comprehending the challenges they face every single day. That means, for example, effectively granting transgender people that their locus of speech is accompanied by locus of power the same way feminists, lesbians, and gays have been gradually achieving, even with all the setbacks. Academic research is not immune from repeating stereotypes and prejudices, and this, at least in part, is a consequence of the problems that I tried to expose in this work.

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