



Call for papers for a special thematic issue

Media and “sexist and sexual violence”

A special issue coordinated by :

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Submissions (5,000 signs) must be sent to the coordinators before January 8th, 2024.

This thematic issue on **Media and “sexist and sexual violence”**¹ examines the role news media can play – alongside community groups, institutional or political actors and activists – in naming, preventing, denouncing, but also consolidating gender-based violence. Approaching gender-based violence through focus on the media involves studying media discourse as well as taking into account the (professional, economic, political or social) logics that underlie and shape such discourse. The aim is therefore to analyze the processes by which gender-based violence is made (in)visible in the media and the people involved in such processes. In this perspective, the media are understood to be agents of power promoting (or not) discourse constructing gender-based violence as a public issue (Berns, 2004 ; McDonald and Charlesworth, 2013 ; Neveu, 2015 ; Gayet-Viaud et Dekker, 2021, Buisson, 2022). Scholars in the humanities and social sciences have hitherto paid little attention to the media coverage of gender-based violence. While this has been the subject of research in other countries (Sepulchre, 2019 ; Lalli, 2021) and especially in English-speaking countries (Bullock, 2007 ; Easteal et al., 2015 ; De Benedictis et al., 2019), French-speaking, and in particular French scholars, have not shown the same interest so far, although several doctoral dissertations are currently under way (Beaulieu, Buisson, Itoh, Khemilat, Ruffio, Wetzels²).

¹ This thematic issue is intended to extend the discussions initiated during the conference “Media and sexist and sexual violence : informing, denouncing and raising awareness”, organized on 4 and 5 April, 2023 at the University Paris-Panthéon-Assas by Maëlle Bazin, Charlotte Buisson, Cécile Méadel, Giuseppina Sapiro and Jeanne Wetzels, as part of the ANR research project *Gender Equality Monitor* (ANR-19-CE38-0012).

² BEAULIEU Laure, « *Une rédaction face à #Metoo. Appropriations des idées féministes et évolutions des normes et pratiques journalistiques*

(In progress, under the supervision of Laure Bereni and Claire Blandin), University Paris XIII, PhD. dissertation in communication studies ; ITOH Yukiko, « *Les violences sexuelles à travers les médias au Japon : des problèmes sociaux féministes à la cause publique (1980-aujourd’hui)* (In progress, under the supervision of Isabelle Konuma), Paris INALCO, PhD. dissertation in sociology ; KHEMILAT Warda, « *De #Metoo au Plan d'action national contre les violences sexuelles et sexistes. Analyse localisée d'un phénomène médiatique transnational* (In progress, under the supervision of Marie-Joseph Bertini), University Côte d’Azur, PhD.

Besides, studies on the subject have mainly been devoted to femicide (Guérard et Lavender, 1999 ; Sapiro, 2017, 2019, 2022) and domestic violence³ (Hernández-Orellana, Kunert, 2014 ; Sapiro, 2020 ; Basile-Commaille, Fourquet-Courbet, 2021) and based on analysis of the daily press (Mucchielli, 2005 ; Hernandez Orellana, 2012 ; Sépulchre, 2019 ; Lochon, 2021).

Yet, national and international political institutions have been paying growing attention to the role of the media in raising awareness of and preventing sexual and gender-based violence. When, in 2014, France ratified the Istanbul Convention, whose article 17 explicitly calls for the "Participation of the private sector and the media", it committed to setting "guidelines and self-regulatory standards to prevent violence against women and to enhance respect for their dignity"⁴. In the same year, a report⁵ written by Margaux Collet for the French High Council for Equality between Women and Men set out a number of recommendations for the French media, such as including articles reporting violence against women in the "Politics" section rather than in back-page "local news" or "crime" sections. The report advised against "using the assaulter's words as a headline" or resorting to such expressions as "crime of passion", which is still widespread in local daily newspapers (Houel et al., 2003 ; Sapiro, 2019 ; Bodiou, Chauvaud, 2021). In March 2019, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on preventing and combating sexism, pointing out that "another aggravating factor is where the reach, or potential reach, of the sexist words or acts is extensive, including the means of transmission, use of social or mainstream media and the degree of repetition"⁶.

Given the ongoing conflicts in the definition of gender-based violence (Nugara, 2011, 2014 ; Delage, Lieber, Chetcuti-Osorovitz, 2019 ; Baldeck, 2019), it is necessary to clarify the reasons for using the term "sexist and sexual violence" in the title of this special issue. Since the French expression *violences sexistes et sexuelles* has now become firmly established in media discourse, we find it interesting to explore the media coverage of gender-based violence by paying attention to this significantly widely used expression. An exploratory search on Europresse has revealed about 7,000 occurrences of the expression in the French press between 2010 and 2023, including over 6,500 in articles published after 2017. In other words, while it had been used in the press since the early 2010s, it only became widespread after the Weinstein sexual abuse case sent shock waves around the world, with the emergence of the #MeToo movement and the announcement of a bill to prevent and combat gender-based violence⁷. As a "formula", the expression has "discursive", "social reference" and "polemical" functions (Krieg-Planque, 2009 : 103-104), in that it crystallizes social and political issues. While it does testify to the collective effort by institutions, the media and activist organizations to identify and denounce gender-based violence, we believe it is semantically defective, only

dissertation in communication studies ; RUFFIO Claire, « Briser le silence. Rôle et effets des médias dans la construction du viol comme problème public en France (1971-2015) » [In progress, under the supervision of Frédérique Matonti and Nicolas Hubé], University Paris Panthéon-Sorbonne, PhD. dissertation in political science ; WETZELS Jeanne, « La médiatisation des viols et des violences sexuelles des années 1990 à aujourd'hui : de la Bosnie à la Syrie, analyse dans la presse et à la télévision françaises » [In progress, under the supervision of Arnaud Mercier], University Paris-Panthéon-Assas, PhD. dissertation in communication studies.

³ These studies have mainly been focused on institutional communication.

⁴ <https://www.coe.int/fr/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention>.

⁵ Ministère des Droits des Femmes, Margaux Collet (Assemblée des femmes), « Le traitement médiatique des violences faites aux femmes », 25 November 2014 : <https://haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/violences-faites-aux-femmes/actualites/article/publication-de-l-avis-pour-une-1137>.

⁶ Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism, 2019, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/recommendation-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-prevention-et-luttre-contre-le-sexisme/168094d895>.

⁷ The law, known as the "Schiappa Act", came into force in 2018.

adding to the definitional fog that surrounds this type of violence. As Pauline Delage⁸ has also pointed out, the coordinating conjunction “and” draws a distinction between “sexist” and “sexual” violence, calling into question the continuum of gender-based violence. The use of quotation marks therefore materializes our critical view of this formula, which will be further explained in the introduction of this special issue.

This special issue draws inspiration from the work of English-speaking and French-speaking feminist scholars (Pizzey, 1975 ; Russell, 1975 ; Kelly, 1988 ; Connell, 2002 ; Fougeyrollas and Jaspard, 2003 ; Revillard et al., 2009 ; Debauche, Hamel, 2013), who, since the 1970s, have linked together gender and interpersonal violence, viewing violence as a means for men to impose social control over women (Hammer, 1977), and over minority and minoritized subjects (Crenshaw, 2005 ; Lejbowicz, Trachman, 2022 ; Visage, 2022⁹). In this perspective, Rita Laura Segato has introduced the notion of a “masculine mandate” (2021) and analyzed men’s violence against women as acts of communication addressed vertically to the victims and horizontally to men, whose domination is bolstered by such violence. We find the idea of violence having a communicational function particularly helpful in exploring the news stories about gender-based violence. The narratives spread in the media are not only informative but also performative: they produce meanings and are aimed at both victims and perpetrators. They crystallize and convey certain conceptions of gender relations. This thematic issue thus seeks to examine the contexts, actors and logics in the media responsible for politically significant discourse on the continuum of gender-based violence, including sexist insults, sexual assaults and violence, domestic violence, marital rape, obstetric and gynaecological violence, paedocriminality and femicide (including forced suicide). The physical, psychological, administrative, economic and social dimensions of gender-based violence are central aspects in our reflection.

Submissions may choose one of the two following approaches, or situate themselves at their intersection: (1) media discourse on “sexist and sexual violence” and its reception; (2) “sexist and sexual violence” as seen from the newsrooms. The first approach explores the specificities of media discourse on “sexist and sexual violence” based on the study of corpora¹⁰ (from the press, television, the radio, native internet media and social media) and its reception. The second approach is interested in the professional logics working to make “sexist and sexual violence” visible or invisible within the media industries.

1. Media discourse on “sexist and sexual violence” and its reception

Media discourse, which is “socially constitutive” and “socially constituted” (Fairclough, Wodak, 1997), does not merely serve as an illustration of the society in which it is produced but has the capacity to consolidate and transform it. In other words, since news stories and reports are “social facts” (Neveu, 2013 : 64), they can bolster sexist stereotypes, fuel violence and shape – by helping to naturalize – simplistic images of victims and perpetrators. The media can then become a sounding board for hate speech, i.e. “any discursive or semiotic

⁸ In the introductory lecture she gave during the symposium *Nommer les violences conjugales* (“Naming domestic violence”) held in Brest on 25 and 26 May 2023.

⁹ VISAGE, symposium « Violences faites aux populations minoritaires et minorisées », 6 December 2022 and 16 June 2023.

¹⁰ We want to focus on other media than social networks, as work already exists on the subject, particularly on the circulation of online testimonies (Cavalin et al., 2022).

manifestation that incites hatred, whether for reasons of ethnic origin, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation" (Baider et Constantinou, 2019 : 10). Hate speech can be expressed through violent terms (from insults to other forms of verbal violence) or be "hidden" and work in more insidious ways. Taking into account the contributions of feminist activists who have advocated taking a critical view of the media coverage of "sexist and sexual violence" (Ruffio, 2019 ; Lamy, 2021 ; Noetzel et al., 2022 ; Cavalin et al., 2022), we call for analyses of news stories that pay close attention to the way the people involved (including victims, perpetrators of violence, witnesses, experts, politicians or activists) are portrayed, to the sources (police, legal or community sources) used by the journalists, to the visual and audio elements added and to the rhetorical devices employed resulting in sensationalistic effects, shaming the victims or minimizing, sometimes even trivializing, gender-based violence (Burt, 1980 ; Benedict, 1992). We also welcome papers that establish a dialogue between corpus analyses and reception surveys.

2. Gender-based violence from the newsrooms

The second approach has to do with the way professional logics work to make "sexist and sexual violence" visible or invisible within the media industries and in the discourse they produce. In the wake of studies conducted at the intersection of the sociology of journalism and gender studies (Neveu, 2000 ; Damian-Gaillard, Frisque and Saitta, 2009 ; Beaulieu, 2019 ; Damian-Gaillard and Saitta, 2020 ; Damian-Gaillard et al., 2021), submissions may focus on the new professions and professional tools that have emerged in recent years to deal with gender-based violence (for instance, gender editors, charters and guides for best editorial practices, training workshops). We also welcome papers studying editorial teams working on gender issues, whether for periodical publications (*Causette* and *La Déferlante*, the newsletter *L* published by the daily newspaper *Libération*) or in journalistic collectives such as *Les Journalopes*, as well as media where working groups have been created to devote themselves specifically to gender-based violence (in particular *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Médiapart*). We also invite contributions on violence committed within media companies, for instance case studies of la *Ligue du LOL* (Gaudin, 2020), the Patrick Poivre d'Arvor sex abuse scandal¹¹ or the op-ed column "Bas les Pattes" published in newspaper *Libération*¹². Journalists themselves sometimes initiate projects or publications aimed at defining new rules for journalistic writing and ensuring that gender-based violence is "properly" covered by the media (for example, the journalistic collectives *Prenons la Une* or *l'Association des Journalistes LGBT*).

Bio-bibliographical information on the coordinators of the thematic issue

Maëlle Bazin is a PhD. candidate in communication studies at the research unit CARISM at the University Paris-Panthéon-Assas and an associate researcher at the National Audiovisual Institute (INA). She is currently completing her dissertation on popular graphic practices and productions in social reactions to the January 2015 attacks in France. As part of the ANR *Gender Equality Monitor* and the Podcast Observatory, her work deals with portrayals of women and gender-based violence in native podcasts.

¹¹ Leffiliâtre Jérôme and Diaktine Anne, « [Harcèlements, agressions sexuelles, viols : les témoignages contre PPDA](#) », *libération.fr*, 8 November 2021.

¹² Amar Cécile et al., « [Nous, femmes journalistes politiques et victimes de sexism...](#) », *libération.fr*, 4 May 2015.

Charlotte Buisson is a PhD candidate and teaching and research assistant in communication studies at the University Paris-Panthéon-Assas. Her research deals with the media coverage of sexual violence committed in French political circles, and more specifically focuses on the coverage of the Baupin sex abuse case, the first press investigation into gender-based violence perpetrated by a politician in France. She co-authored the book *Les violences sexistes et sexuelles* published in 2022.

Giuseppina Sapiro is an assistant professor in communication studies at the University Paris 8, a member of the research unit CEMTI and an associate researcher at the research unit CARISM. She works on the media coverage of femicide and domestic violence in France and is developing an action research programme with the France Victimes federation on the use of a digital tool for women in situations of domestic violence. She has published « Quand la télévision italienne démythifie le mythe de la "Mère-Courage" : Les féminicides dans *Amore Criminale* (2011-2016) » (*Genre en séries*, n° 6, 2017) ; « L'amour qui hait. La formule "crime passionnel" dans la presse française contemporaine » (*Semen*, n° 47, 2019) ; « Victimes de violences conjugales face aux campagnes institutionnelles entre ventriloquie, injonctions et paradoxes » (*Études de communication*, n° 54, 2020) ; « Féminicides en France : la chair des archives médiatiques » (Lydie Bodiou, F. Chauvaud (ed.), *Les archives du féminicide*, 2022).

Jeanne Wetzel is a PhD candidate in communication studies at the University Paris-Panthéon-Assas and an associate researcher at the research unit Arènes (CNRS – UMR 6051). Her work deals with the media coverage of sexual violence committed in wartime. She is interested in the processes that result in putting sexual violence on the agenda, in the way it is framed as well as in the logics of journalistic production that underlie its coverage by the media. She co-authored the book *Les violences sexistes et sexuelles* (PUF, 2022).

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