

Chapter 22

Unmasking Gender–Based Violence in Venezuelan Media

Mariateresa Garrido
University for Peace, Costa Rica

ABSTRACT

The Venezuelan government has been instrumental to implement different types of gender-based violence and discrimination. Reports demonstrate that women have been killed, that their economic power decreased, and that they experienced problems related to access to education, health services, jobs, etc. This reality affects all women; however, there is not updated and systematized information about the problems faced by Venezuelan women journalists. This chapter uses Mohanty's theory and Hernandez's approach to illustrate the situation. It begins with an overview of the Venezuelan context, highlighting cases of gender-based violence and discrimination experienced by women. It also considers cases of economic exploitation, exclusion, disempowerment, cultural imperialism, and direct violence between 2018 and 2019. The chapter demonstrates the deteriorating situation and reveals patterns of oppression experienced by female journalists in Venezuela.

INTRODUCTION

Studies demonstrate that women study journalism and are involved in different journalistic practices; however, “men are still in authority and in control of newsrooms and organisations” (Harret, Mosdell, & Griffiths, 2016, p. 903). For the past 20 years, the Global Media Monitoring Project has been measuring gender equality in news media, and its 2015 report indicates that women “women make up only 24% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspaper, television and radio news” (Macharia, 2015, p. 8). Latin America is not the exception to this rule. In 2018, the Inter-American Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression (hereinafter IASR) published a report analyzing the situation. He recognized the improvements made by governments in the region but highlighted many difficulties faced by female journalists.

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The report considered specific gender-based risks that intersect with other identities (race, ethnicity, etc) and it recognized that this type of violence is a symptom of “a pattern of structural discrimination against women, which is rooted in concepts of inferiority and subordination of women.” (Lanza, 2018, p. 15). The IASR indicated that women are “over-represented among those who report news covering issues traditionally related to “female interest” and under-represented in the coverage of topics considered to be of particular interest, such as those related to politics and government or economics” (Lanza, 2018, p. 17). He also highlighted the existence of a lack of flexibility on working hours, access to childcare and even parental leave policies, which disproportionately affects women, and in his opinion, it is part of the reasons why women are under-represented in senior management positions in the media (Lanza, 2018).

That information gives us a general understanding of the Latin American situation, and the goal of this chapter is to identify the gender-based violence experienced by Venezuelan female journalists. Yet, I must mention that when it comes to Venezuela, the Inter American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR) underscored “the lack of official data for planning and programming public policies aimed at preventing and eradicating gender-based violence against women... This hides the true magnitude of the phenomenon of violence against women in the country” (2020, pp. 522-523). Despite the lack of official data, there are reports made by Venezuelan organizations that provide us general information about the situation faced by women.

Amid the humanitarian crisis, in 2019, Luisa Kislinger led an initiative to gather information and make visible many of the problems experienced by Venezuelan women. The report indicates that 94% of the households do not have enough resources to cover basic needs; which negatively affects women. According to the report, Venezuelan women are worried about not having enough food, income, and access to health and education. Statistics included in the report demonstrate that 96% of women are concerned about not having enough food, 21% of pregnant women in seven states were malnourished, and at least 37% of Venezuelan women have denounced gender-based violence (Kislinger, 2019).

Within this context, female journalists can be subject to these types of oppression. However, there are specific threats and attacks they receive that must be revealed (See also Jamil, 2019). Hence, to achieve the goal of this chapter, I will review reports made by the IACHR, the IASR, and local organizations to unmask the situations female journalists face. The analysis will be conducted following Mohanty’s theory of oppression and Hernandez’s categories of violence. This approach will allow me to discuss the specificities of the Venezuelan situation through Venezuelan voices. The results demonstrate the patterns of violence experienced by female journalists and provide a way forward to continue researching this topic in Venezuela.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist scholarship varies from society to society. It adapts to the lived experiences of oppression and violence faced by women (Matos, 2016). Post-colonial theories address these differences and promote the creation of a scholarship that departs from “western” approaches to bring other voices to the conversation. Nonetheless, to do it, it is necessary to identify “western” ideas, deconstruct them, and reconstruct them by including the aspects that are relevant to that society (Jamil, 2020; Mohantay, 1991)

Mohanty indicates that “Western Feminism” is a discourse that influences political practices. In her opinion, the discourse is ideological and seek specific purposes. She argues that it is “inscribed in relations of power-relations which they counter, resist, or even perhaps implicitly support” (1991, p. 53).

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