


## Chapter 4

# Framing Femicide: An Analysis of Online Media Reporting on Romanian Immigrant Women Killed in Germany

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Femicides are topics frequently covered by the media, and journalists use different frames when reporting on such lethal acts of violence against women. This chapter addresses the media coverage and framing in German online press articles of two femicides with victims of Romanian ethnicity. The research presented used as methodology thematic content analysis, along with media framing analysis. In the chapter, the results of this study are discussed, that is, the characteristics of media coverage and content related to the killings of the two Romanian women in the German press are analysed, the main frames used by the media in their reporting on the femicides are pointed out, and the extent to which journalists use in their narratives techniques of blaming the victims is examined. Moreover, the chapter investigates whether the media report the crimes against women as singular facts or address them in the broader context of social problems, and contribute, in this way, to the increase of public awareness and social responsibility towards them.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The diagnosis and solution of social problems depends on their awareness and recognition as such by the community (Blumer, 1986). The media is in a position to play a vital role in the process of defining social problems at a given time, because by addressing certain issues and presenting them in certain frames and settings, they contribute to shaping social perceptions of social issues (Ștefănescu, 2005). Public problems revolve around private problems when the experiences of individuals are understood as

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exemplifying a broader social problem, and the media is one of the vectors that can make this connection between individual and social, thus building the public problems (Best, 1989).

At the social level, defining a problem as being of public interest can lead to finding solutions (Mehrotra, 1999). Therefore, the media, especially through news and reporting, is a unique forum in which personal issues are selectively collected and made available to public consumption, being invested with a broader meaning (Sacco, 1995, p. 142). In this way, it is possible to make the transition from individual problems and events, which, however, do not happen in a social vacuum, but are conditioned by society, to public, social problems, on which personal problems depend and which they outline, at the same time.

Violence, including homicide in general and femicide in particular, is a common topic in the media, which use a variety of journalistic genres. Given the role of the media in defining and constructing social issues, the ways in which the media choose to frame domestic violence in the news, including femicide as an extreme form of violence against women, can have important ramifications, influencing how society perceives the dynamics of this type of violence, as well as the solutions and public responsibility (Gillespie et al., 2013, p. 223).

In this chapter, the media coverage of violence against women is analyzed, by examining the framing in the online media in Germany of two cases of femicides with victims of Romanian ethnicity. In addition to the specific objectives of analyzing the media reporting of the homicides, the study also sought to investigate the extent to which individual issues are seen as part of social issues, in other words if the media report the crimes against women as singular facts, or treat them in the context of wider social problems, which they can, in this way, construct and influence, contributing to the increase of awareness and social responsibility towards these problems and even to the formulation of solutions.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Femicide or feminicide is an extreme form of violence against women, and can be defined as “the misogynistic killing of women by men” (Radford, 1992, p. 3) or as “the killing of women by men because they are women” (Russell, 2002, p. 3). This concept has proven to be essential for the efforts of feminist movement representatives in various parts of the world to combat the killing of women as the ultimate expression of gender inequality (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010; García-Del Moral, 2016).

Through the almost exclusive power they have in deciding what issues are worthy of being made public, mass media play a significant role in contemporary society (Chermak, 1995). The media have the ability to shape public perception and thereby influence public policy, strengthen social control, and initiate necessary changes (Berns, 2004; Bullock, 2007; Meyers, 1997). When it comes to crime, especially domestic violence, this influence of the media is very important (Taylor, 2009).

Recent studies that analysed the way in which around sixteen countries covered violence against women between 2000 and 2015 showed the fact that media “misrepresented the realities of women’s experience of violence perpetrated against them” (Sutherland et al., 2016, p. 6). Those misrepresentations were often related to the way in which journalists reported about “social context, sensationalism, misrepresentations and «rape myths», blame and responsibility, and voices of authority and opinion” (ibid.). The situation seems to be similar in the case of femicide.

Several researchers (e.g., Croteau & Hoynes, 1997; Meyers, 1997; Taylor, 2009; Tuchman, 1978) have pointed out that the portrayal that the media assigns to women reflects the general treatment of women in society. This observation also includes the idea that women have a subordinate social status,

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