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*Framing femicide: from "crime of
passion" to patriarchy.
Mapping the discursive turning
point in the media coverage of
Giulia Cecchettin*

Relatrice

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Introduction

Few categories of crime expose the relationship between language and power as sharply as femicide, the gender-related killing of women and girls. The act is at once intimate and structural: it terminates an individual life and, in doing so, enacts the most extreme consequence of the unequal power relations between women and men that the United Nations and the Council of Europe alike recognise as the root of gender-based violence. How a society narrates these killings is therefore not a secondary or merely stylistic matter. The news media constitute the principal arena in which the public encounters individual femicides, and the interpretative frames they deploy do consequential cultural work: they determine whether a killing is understood as a private tragedy or a public, structural problem, whether responsibility is assigned to a culpable man or dissolved into fate, pathology or provocation, and whether the woman is remembered as a self-determining subject or reduced to an object of news. Studying media narratives of gender-based violence is, in this sense, a way of studying the cultural conditions that make such violence intelligible, and either tolerable or unacceptable.

In contemporary Italy, no single event has tested these narratives more visibly than the killing of Giulia Cecchettin. The twenty-two-year-old engineering student was murdered by her former partner, Filippo Turetta, in November 2023, days before she was due to graduate; her disappearance, the discovery of her body, and the subsequent judicial process unfolded across a saturated national media cycle. What distinguished the case was less the crime itself - grimly typical in its dynamics of separation, control and lethal male possession - than the public intervention of the victim's family, and above all the letter written by her sister, Elena Cecchettin, which named Turetta not a monster but a "healthy son of patriarchy". The case thus offers an exceptional vantage point: a moment in which the established journalistic grammar of femicide was openly contested

in real time, and in which the vocabulary of structural feminist critique entered mainstream headlines on an unprecedented scale. It is precisely this combination of typicality and exceptionality that makes the Cecchettin case so valuable an object of study - typical enough to be representative of how Italian journalism handles femicide, exceptional enough to reveal whether that handling can change.

The objective of this thesis is to examine that possibility rigorously rather than to assume it. Its central research question asks whether, and to what extent, the media coverage of the Giulia Cecchettin case represents a discursive turning point in the Italian representation of femicide and violence against women. The phrasing is deliberate. “Whether” guards against the assumption, widespread in public commentary, that the case self-evidently changed everything; “to what extent” insists that any change be measured in degree and located precisely, distinguishing the level of explicit naming from the level of deep narrative and visual structure. The thesis is situated at the intersection of Communication Studies, Media Studies, Journalism Studies and Feminist Media Studies, drawing on each to treat the coverage simultaneously as a framing phenomenon, a professional practice, and a site of gendered ideological struggle.

The analysis is grounded in the theoretical resources these fields supply. Framing theory, from Goffman’s account of the schemata through which experience is organised to Entman’s canonical formulation, provides the macro-level apparatus for identifying how salience and selection promote particular definitions of a problem and its causes; Iyengar’s distinction between episodic and thematic framing specifies the decisive choice between the isolated event and the structural pattern, with its divergent implications for the attribution of responsibility. Critical discourse analysis, in Fairclough’s tradition, supplies the micro-level instruments - transitivity, agency, lexical selection - needed to expose how journalistic “common sense” naturalises male violence beneath neutral or romanticising language. Feminist media studies frame the whole, from Tuchman’s notion of the symbolic annihilation of women to the critique of victim-blaming and the romantic mythologies that translate a

human-rights violation into a sentimental drama. Three concepts recur as analytical fulcra: Kelly's continuum of violence, which reconnects the lethal act to the escalating abuse that precedes it; the *raptus* or "crime of passion" myth, which frames killing as a sudden derangement rather than the predictable endpoint of coercive control; and "himpathy" (Manne, 2017), the disproportionate sympathy extended to male perpetrators. To these the thesis adds the normative architecture of gender-sensitive journalism - the Istanbul Convention's call on the media, the Beijing Platform, and the Italian profession's own *Manifesto di Venezia* and deontological code - against which actual practice can be measured.

The working hypothesis that emerges from this framework, and that the empirical chapters test, is that the Cecchettin case constitutes a genuine but partial and uneven turning point rather than either a complete transformation or a non-event. More precisely, the thesis anticipates that any shift would register first and most strongly at the level of explicit vocabulary and editorial interpretation - the naming of *femminicidio* ('femicide') and *patriarcato* ('patriarchy') - while the deeper machinery of agency-suppressing syntax, perpetrator-centred sympathy and romanticising imagery would prove far more resistant to change. The hypothesis is held in a balanced, falsifiable form: the evidence is allowed to show transformation, continuity, or, as proves to be the case, their uneasy coexistence.

To test this, the study analyses a purposive corpus of one hundred news articles published across a fourteen-month window, from November 2023 to December 2024. Ninety articles are drawn from seven Italian outlets and ten from three Anglophone outlets. Within the Italian sub-corpus, *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* were each allotted twenty articles - double the share of the others - in recognition of their role as the country's principal agenda-setters: the Milan-based *Corriere*, the centre-liberal paper of record whose framing tends to set the terms of national debate, and the centre-left *Repubblica*, historically the readiest national forum for social and feminist critique. Because each runs both sensationalist crime reporting and structural editorialising, their internal heterogeneity makes them the decisive site for this study's central claim. Ten

articles each were taken from five further outlets selected for breadth of journalistic culture and orientation: *Il Post*, a digital-native title known for explanatory journalism; *Rai News*, the public-service benchmark; *Il Mattino di Padova*, the local daily of the Veneto territory where the case unfolded, included to capture the transition from local tragedy to national emergency; and *Il Giornale* and *Libero*, conservative and polemical outlets included precisely to test resistance to the “patriarchy frame”. The ten Anglophone articles - from *The Guardian*, the *BBC* and *The New York Times* - function as an exploratory external comparator rather than a symmetrical second sample; the asymmetry is deliberate and the comparative claims correspondingly modest.

Methodologically, the thesis integrates frame analysis with critical discourse analysis and a multimodal, visual dimension, operationalised through a mixed coding grid that records framing functions, transitivity and agency, lexical choice, mitigation markers and text-image relations across the periodised corpus. This integration is the methodological core: framing maps the broad interpretative structures, CDA verifies whether the language actually sustains them, and multimodal analysis tests whether the images confirm or contradict the words. To this textual apparatus the study adds two qualitative expert interviews - with the media researcher Monia Azzalini and the journalist Paola Rizzi, the latter active in the gender-sensitive journalism network *GiULiA Giornaliste*. The interviews do not duplicate the content analysis but interrogate it from the side of production, contextualising the corpus findings and supplying explanations - about newsroom constraints, source framing and victim selection - that the analysis of published texts alone cannot recover.

The dissertation is organised so that each chapter advances the central question. Chapter 1 establishes the conceptual and institutional coordinates: the definition and contested conceptualisation of femicide, the Italian statistical and legal context, the historical media narratives that have privatised and romanticised male violence, and the ethical frameworks that seek to reform them. Chapter 2 builds the theoretical and methodological apparatus, elaborating framing, critical discourse analysis and multimodality, and specifying the corpus, the periodisation and the coding instrument. Chapter 3 presents the

corpus analysis itself, tracing the passage from “crime of passion” to “patriarchy” across language, image and genre and locating, with unusual precision, both the achievement and the limits of the shift. Chapter 4 brings the two expert voices into dialogue with those findings, confirming, qualifying and deepening them from the vantage point of professional practice. Together, the chapters move from concept to method to evidence to professional reflection, guiding the reader toward an answer that is, as the following pages argue, neither celebratory nor dismissive but carefully weighed.

Chapter 1. Gender-based violence and media representation

1.1 Defining gender-based violence and femicide

Gender-based violence (GBV) is widely recognised as one of the most pervasive violations of human rights and a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men. It is rooted in patriarchal structures that institutionalise male dominance and control, and it encompasses a wide range of behaviours - physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and economic - directed against individuals because of their gender, including threats of violence, coercion and manipulation. Although GBV can affect both women and men, women are disproportionately affected by this phenomenon worldwide (UN Women, 2024).

1.1.1 International definitions

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as any act *that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life* (United Nations, 1993, Art. 1). Building on this, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women defines gender-based violence as *violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately* (CEDAW Committee, 1992, para. 6).

Within this broader category, femicide represents the most extreme form of gender-based violence: the intentional killing of women and girls for gender-related reasons (UNODC & UN Women, 2024). Femicide is analytically distinct from the more generic category of homicide, in which the motivation is not gender-related. It is rooted in inequality, misogyny and the desire to maintain control, power or to enforce traditional gender roles, and it is driven by

discrimination against women and girls, unequal power relations, gender stereotypes and harmful social norms (UN Women, 2024).

According to UNODC and UN Women (2024), around 50,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by intimate partners or other family members in the most recent reporting year, corresponding to roughly 1.2 victims per 100,000 of the female population. Although lower than the previous estimate of 51,100 victims, this difference is not necessarily indicative of an actual decrease, since it partly reflects variation in data availability at the country level: national differences in criminal-justice recording and investigation practices make it difficult to identify some homicides as gender-related killings. Femicide is a global problem affecting women and girls in every country: of the 83,000 women and girls killed intentionally in the reference year, some 60% were murdered by an intimate partner or other family member (UNODC & UN Women, 2024).

Gender-related killings and other forms of violence against women and girls should not be regarded as inevitable. Rather, femicide frequently represents the final stage of a continuum of repeated and escalating gender-based violence (Kelly, 1988; UN Women, 2024), a characterisation that underscores its fundamentally preventable nature: when early warning signs are promptly recognised and addressed, lethal outcomes can be averted. In this regard, initiatives grounded in primary prevention - particularly those aimed at transforming social norms and mobilising entire communities to foster a culture of zero tolerance towards violence against women - have proven especially effective in reducing the risk of such killings (UN Women, 2024). The role of law enforcement and the justice system is equally crucial: by taking victims' reports seriously, providing adequate protection and support to survivors, and ensuring that perpetrators are effectively prosecuted, these institutions can break cycles of violence and combat impunity. Notably, a significant proportion of femicide victims had previously reported episodes of abuse, indicating that many of these killings could have been prevented through more timely and decisive institutional responses (UN Women, 2024).

To address existing limitations in data collection, UNODC and UN Women developed the *Statistical Framework for Measuring the Gender-related Killing of Women and Girls (femicide/feminicide)*, approved by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2022. The framework was created to remedy the previous absence of a global or regional standardised statistical approach for defining and measuring femicide. It distinguishes three categories: (a) intentional killings of women and girls committed by intimate partners; (b) intentional killings carried out by other family members; and (c) intentional killings perpetrated by persons outside the family or intimate sphere, provided that the case satisfies at least one of the criteria set out in the framework (UNODC & UN Women, 2022).

The framework is designed to provide an operational definition of the gender-related killing of women and girls, enabling the accurate identification and measurement of such cases in statistical data. To this end, it outlines a set of characteristics associated with intentional homicides that make it possible to capture, in a standardised manner, the gender-related motivations underlying these killings. It thereby seeks to promote, enhance and harmonise data-collection tools and to encourage the systematic recording of the key variables necessary for measurement and analysis at both national and international levels (UNODC & UN Women, 2022).

According to the framework, the notion of “gender-related motivation”, which underpins the statistical definition of femicide, refers to the structural root causes that shape the context in which such killings occur - entrenched gender stereotypes, discrimination against women and girls, and persistent inequalities and power imbalances between women and men. Within this framework, violence may be triggered when a woman’s behaviour is perceived as deviating from socially prescribed norms or traditional gender roles. Building on the definition of intentional homicide provided by the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) and on the broader concept of violence against women and girls, femicide can be understood as a killing characterised by four key elements: the death of a woman caused by another person; the perpetrator’s intent to kill or inflict serious harm; the unlawfulness of the act; and

- most distinctively - the presence of a gender-related motivation (UNODC & UN Women, 2022). It is precisely this last element that distinguishes gender-related killings from other forms of homicide.

Extensive evidence shows that the majority of gender-related killings of women and girls are committed by intimate partners - current or former - or by other family members (UNODC & UN Women, 2024). In these contexts, such killings are often linked to the assertion of male control or the punishment of behaviour perceived as deviating from prescribed gender norms. Family-related killings may also be embedded in cultural practices such as so-called “honour” or dowry-related violence and can involve multiple family members. Gender-related killings are not, however, limited to the family sphere: they may also occur in relationships characterised by unequal power dynamics, such as those involving authority or caregiving roles, or even where no prior relationship exists between victim and perpetrator (UNODC & UN Women, 2024).

Accurately measuring gender-related killings requires a standardised methodology capable of isolating cases driven by gender-related motivations from the broader category of female homicides. This task is particularly complex, since existing homicide statistics are not routinely structured to capture such characteristics. For this reason, a robust statistical framework depends on the identification and systematic recording of objective proxy indicators that can be applied consistently across cases, ensuring comparability at both national and international levels. These indicators include, among others, a prior history of violence or harassment by the perpetrator, experiences of exploitation, situations involving abduction or deprivation of liberty, the presence of sexual violence, acts of post-mortem mutilation, the public disposal of the victim’s body, and cases rooted in gender-based hatred (UNODC & UN Women, 2022).

Femicides committed within the domestic sphere are the most prevalent form of gender-related killing, which means that the home is, for many women and girls, the most dangerous place in terms of the risk of femicide. The circumstances under which intimate partner violence escalates into lethal outcomes include a

prior history of violence between perpetrator and victim, previous threats, and situations involving actual or impending separation (UN Women, 2024). Research indicates that female intimate partner homicides are frequently associated with specific risk factors relating both to the perpetrator and to the situational context: access to firearms, patterns of coercive control, a prior history of violence, stalking behaviours, and actual or impending relationship separation. These risks may be exacerbated by substance use, particularly alcohol consumption by the perpetrator, especially when combined with broader structural and situational pressures such as limited social support and the accumulation of stressful life events (UN Women, 2024; Monckton-Smith, 2021).

Over recent decades a wide range of strategies has been developed to prevent gender-based violence against women and girls, including femicide, reflecting an increasingly multidimensional and integrated approach. Primary-prevention initiatives aim to transform social norms and individual behaviours by promoting gender equality through education, awareness-raising and the development of relational and emotional skills. Legal responses have played a crucial role, particularly in several Latin American countries where femicide has been codified as a distinct criminal offence, while in other contexts specific aggravating circumstances have been introduced to account for gender-related motives. Criminal-justice systems have established specialised units within police forces, prosecution offices and courts, often coordinated through multi-agency approaches that bring together law enforcement, social services, healthcare providers and judicial authorities. Public campaigns and advocacy movements - exemplified by global mobilisations such as *Ni Una Menos* and *Me Too* - have reshaped public discourse, and increasing attention has been devoted to data collection and monitoring through national databases and femicide observatories (UN Women, 2024). The elimination of violence against women is, moreover, a key commitment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which Member States pledged to build a world *in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic*

barriers to their empowerment have been removed (United Nations, 2015, para. 8).

Beyond the operational definitions adopted by international organisations, femicide is also a contested analytical and political concept whose meaning has been refined through several decades of feminist scholarship. Clarifying these conceptual debates is important because the way the phenomenon is named shapes how it is measured, researched and, ultimately, represented in public discourse - the central concern of this thesis.

The concept owes its modern articulation to Diana E. H. Russell, who treated femicide as a crucial tool for identifying the gendered nature of lethal violence against women. In her 2012 address to the Vienna Symposium on Femicide, Russell emphasised that many killings of women, commonly subsumed under the broader category of homicide, are in fact driven by misogyny and must be recognised as such, and she traced the historical continuity of this phenomenon across practices such as witch burnings, female infanticide and so-called *honour* killings (Russell, 2012). A central contribution of her work lies in the progressive refinement of the definition: from *the misogynist killing of women by men* (Radford & Russell, 1992) to *the killing of females by males because they are female* (Russell & Harmes, 2001). This evolution reflects an increasing emphasis on the structural and gender-based motivations underlying such acts rather than on the individual characteristics of perpetrators; in this perspective, femicide is not the outcome of isolated or pathological behaviour but the extreme manifestation of systemic gender inequality and cultural misogyny. Russell further argued that the persistent tendency to depoliticise these killings - by portraying them as private incidents or the actions of a few deviant individuals - contributes to their invisibility, and she therefore stressed the importance of a clear and consistent global definition (Russell, 2012).

A significant theoretical shift occurred in the 1990s through the work of the Mexican scholar and activist Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, who introduced the term *feminicidio* (feminicide) to adapt Russell's concept to the Latin American context, specifically in response to the systemic violence in Ciudad Juárez

(Lagarde, 2010). The distinction is not merely linguistic but deeply political: whereas *femicide* refers to the act of killing a woman, *feminicide* encompasses the responsibility of the state, identifying a context in which the state fails to prevent violence, investigate crimes or punish perpetrators, thereby granting impunity through institutional silence (Lagarde, 2010). This perspective is supported by Fregoso and Bejarano (2010), who describe feminicide as a form of gendered terror that thrives in a climate of systemic inequality and institutional neglect. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR), in the landmark *Campo Algodonero* (“Cotton Field”) case (*González et al. v. Mexico*, 2009), legally recognised feminicide as a phenomenon exacerbated by the lack of “due diligence” on the part of public authorities.

The terminology surrounding femicide thus remains contested within academic literature and varies across disciplines and theoretical traditions. As Dawson and Carrigan (2021) observe, different scholarly fields emphasise distinct aspects of the phenomenon. In criminology, the concept is often narrowed to intimate partner homicide or intimate partner femicide, focusing on killings within intimate relationships, which represent the most common form of gender-related killing. In contrast, feminist and gender-sensitive scholarship tends to adopt broader terms such as femicide or feminicide, emphasising the structural and gendered dimensions of violence against women (Corradi & Stöckl, 2014). Building on the influential work of Kelly (1988), some scholars conceptualise femicide as part of a broader continuum of violence affecting women throughout their lives, linking lethal violence to other forms of gender-based abuse.

The limited visibility of femicide within legal scholarship reflects broader challenges in the recognition and measurement of gender-related killings. As Niemi, Peroni and Stoyanova (2020) note in *International Law and Violence against Women: Europe and the Istanbul Convention*, the term femicide appears only marginally in discussions of international legal responses to violence against women, surfacing principally in relation to its absence from the Istanbul Convention. This conceptual invisibility has important implications for measurement: it exposes not only the inherent limitations of existing datasets (Cullen et al., 2021) but also the cultural and institutional boundaries that shape

what is considered measurable or “countable” violence (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Daher-Nashif, 2013). In many cases femicides remain hidden because they are deliberately concealed, misclassified or inadequately investigated: some killings are disguised as suicide or accidental death (Ferguson, 2015), while others go unrecorded owing to systemic impunity or institutional neglect (Godínez Leal, 2008; Livingstone, 2004). Certain cases also fail to be recognised as femicide because of characteristics of the victim, such as age (Roberts, 2021). These dynamics demonstrate how legal, cultural and institutional factors contribute to the undercounting of femicide, reinforcing the need for clearer conceptual definitions and more robust data-collection frameworks.

Some scholars distinguish between “femicide” and “feminicide” in order to emphasise the structural and institutional dimensions of gender-related killings. In particular, Menjívar and Walsh (2017) employ the concept of feminicide to highlight the role of institutional and state violence in the deaths of women, focusing on the ways in which state institutions may contribute, directly or indirectly, to such killings through discriminatory practices, misogynistic attitudes or failures of governance. They distinguish between patterns of “omission” - indirect mechanisms such as the failure to provide prevention, protection and prosecution - and patterns of “commission”, which involve direct actions such as sexual violence, threats and the targeting of women. This framework expands the understanding of gender-related killings by situating them within broader systems of institutional power and structural inequality.

The legal implementation of the concept has likewise been the subject of critical debate. Ingala Smith (2018) warns of the potential depoliticisation of the concept when it is incorporated into policy frameworks developed by international institutions, arguing that gender-neutral language obscures the empirical reality that the vast majority of perpetrators are men, and that the absence of explicit references to women killed in the context of commercial sexual exploitation risks a silent complicity with the commodification of women. From a radical feminist perspective, she therefore argues that research should move beyond counting the women killed to emphasise the political significance of these killings within patriarchal societies. Related reflections are offered by

Howe and Alaattinoğlu (2018), who examine both the potential benefits and the limitations of using criminal law to combat gender-related killings and, building on Carol Smart's feminist critique of law, conceptualise legal reform as part of a broader discursive arena in which gender struggles take place. Other scholars remain sceptical of the concept itself: Liem and Koenraadt (2018) argue that the term is difficult to operationalise empirically and tends to focus on women's victimisation rather than their agency, preferring the more established notion of intimate partner homicide. In contrast, Corradi and Stöckl (2014) criticise outright rejection of the concept while warning that excessively broad interpretations - such as the notion of "slow femicide" proposed by Walklate et al. (2020) - risk diluting its analytical precision. They advocate research that combines recognition of the structural roots of femicide with precise empirical analysis of individual cases, a position that also highlights the continuing challenge posed by the lack of international harmonisation in the definition and statistical recording of femicide.

1.1.2 European frameworks and classifications

The evolution of a European framework for addressing femicide reflects a broader shift in the European Union's commitment to gender equality and the protection of fundamental rights. For decades, lethal gender-based violence was treated across Member States as a matter of national criminal law, producing a fragmented landscape of definitions, protection standards and data-collection methods. Over the last decade, however, an unprecedented effort has been made to institutionalise a coordinated "European response" that bridges sociological theory and legal practice (EIGE, 2021; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2023).

The primary catalyst for this harmonisation is the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210), commonly known as the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011). Although it is a treaty of the Council of Europe rather than an exclusive EU act, its accession by the European Union in 2023 consolidated its role as the principal European standard in this field. The Convention is

significant because it legally recognises that violence against women is a structural phenomenon rooted in unequal power relations. It is a deliberately multidimensional instrument: it is organised around four interconnected pillars - the prevention of violence, the protection of victims, the prosecution of perpetrators, and the adoption of integrated, coordinated policies - and it addresses a wide spectrum of conduct, from psychological violence and stalking to physical and sexual violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation (Council of Europe, 2011).

Within this multidimensional structure, Article 17 is of particular relevance from a communication perspective, as it explicitly encourages the media and the information and communication technology sector to participate in the elaboration and implementation of policies and to set self-regulatory standards to prevent violence and enhance respect for the dignity of women (Council of Europe, 2011, Art. 17). This provision furnishes the legal basis for the analysis of journalistic responsibility undertaken in this thesis and is examined in greater depth, as a legal foundation for media accountability, in Chapter 3.

While the Istanbul Convention provides the political and ethical mandate, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) supplies the technical and analytical infrastructure. EIGE has been instrumental in tackling what scholars describe as “statistical invisibility” - the phenomenon whereby femicides are buried within gender-neutral homicide data, making it difficult to formulate evidence-based prevention policies (Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2023). Its conceptual framework identifies femicide as a multi-contextual crime, encompassing not only intimate partner femicide - the most common form in Europe - but also “hidden” forms such as the killing of women in the context of commercial sexual exploitation, “honour” killings, and deaths related to female genital mutilation (EIGE, 2023). EIGE’s work on gender-sensitive indicators allows for a deeper understanding of the continuum of violence, moving beyond the fatal event to analyse the history of abuse, the effectiveness of prior police interventions and the socio-economic vulnerability of victims.

A central theme in the current European debate is the principle of “due diligence”. Reinforced by the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and by EIGE’s monitoring work, this principle holds that femicide is not only a crime committed by a private individual but may also reflect an institutional failure: when a state fails to conduct a proper risk assessment, ignores repeated calls for help, or lacks adequate shelter provision, it may be held to have breached its duty to protect the right to life (EIGE, 2023; Fitz-Gibbon & Walklate, 2023).

A significant challenge in addressing gender-based lethality at the European level has been the historical absence of a unified measurement framework, a gap that EIGE sought to bridge in 2021 by proposing a comprehensive femicide classification system (EIGE, 2021). This system represents a qualitative shift in how violence is recorded, moving beyond the mere counting of victims to map specific contexts, types of femicide and indicators that reveal the gendered nature of the crime. By emphasising gender motivation, the circumstances of the victim, and the relational dynamics between victim and perpetrator, the EIGE model allows for a more nuanced understanding of how broader structural factors culminate in lethal violence.

Central to this framework is the identification of five distinct, yet often overlapping, contexts in which femicide manifests (EIGE, 2021). The *interpersonal context* remains the most frequently documented form, rooted in unequal power dynamics within intimate relationships, family environments or relations involving figures of authority. Beyond the domestic sphere, the *sexual context* accounts for gender-related killings resulting from or linked to acts of a sexualised nature, while the *societal context* concerns violence triggered by the perceived violation of traditional gender roles, sexual norms or cultural beliefs, encompassing “honour” killings and the targeted killing of transgender women. The framework further identifies a *criminal context*, covering femicides committed within organised-crime activities such as human trafficking, and a *political context*, which links gender-related killings to groups opposing gender equality or to the complicity and inaction of public authorities.

The effort to quantify femicide at a continental level reveals a persistent tension between improving monitoring capabilities and the enduring stability of lethal violence against women. Between 2023 and 2024, EIGE conducted an extensive collection of national administrative data concerning intimate partner and domestic violence, which revealed that, while progress has been made in disaggregating data by sex and relationship type, significant gaps in systematic reporting persist across Member States (EIGE, 2024). The disproportionate impact of gender-based violence is evident in the 2022 figures: while women constituted 42% of general homicide victims, they represented the majority of those killed within the domestic sphere (60%) and an overwhelming 87% of victims of intimate partner homicide. In the 22 Member States that provided data for 2022, 1,231 women were victims of homicide; of these, approximately 13 women were killed every week in a domestic context, with nearly 10 of those weekly deaths perpetrated by an intimate partner (EIGE, 2024).

From a longitudinal perspective, the data collected between 2014 and 2022 show a notable increase in the number of countries capable of providing detailed reporting, rising from 12 to 16 Member States for intimate partner femicide and from 13 to 20 for domestic femicide. Despite this improved granularity, the figures themselves have remained disturbingly stable over the nine-year period, with a total of 4,217 women killed by intimate partners and 6,903 victims of domestic femicide recorded across the reporting states (EIGE, 2024). The reliability of these trends is nonetheless tempered by methodological limitations: data were deemed strictly comparable in only 11 Member States, the only ones able to provide consistent, sex-disaggregated data for every year between 2018 and 2022. In these countries, police recorded 1,530 female victims of intimate partner homicide and 934 women killed by other domestic perpetrators during that five-year window. These discrepancies underscore that, while institutional awareness is growing, the absence of a common, mandatory reporting standard continues to obscure the full scale of femicide across the Union (EIGE, 2024).

A pivotal advancement in the European legal framework is Article 44 of Directive (EU) 2024/1385, which establishes binding obligations for Member

States regarding the collection and dissemination of administrative data on violence against women and domestic violence (European Union, 2024). This provision addresses the chronic problem of statistical invisibility by mandating structured systems for the regular publication of statistics, requiring Member States to gather disaggregated data on the number of victims killed as a result of gender-based violence, alongside variables such as the sex and age of both victim and offender, the relationship between them, and the type of offence (European Union, 2024). By requiring that data be disaggregated by relationship type, the Directive acknowledges the necessity of the term “femicide” in order to distinguish these killings from general homicides (EIGE, 2024), and it mandates cooperation with EIGE to ensure comparability across the Union. Despite this advance, the practical application of Article 44 faces challenges rooted in the persistent lack of systematic reporting: as EIGE (2024) notes, many countries have yet to establish common legal definitions for femicide, which continues to complicate precise measurement. Nonetheless, by transforming data collection from a voluntary practice into a legal requirement, Article 44 constitutes a fundamental pillar for ensuring that gender-related killings are no longer obscured within neutral criminal statistics.

1.1.3 The Italian legal and institutional context

The Italian legal system has undergone a profound transformation, moving from a structure rooted in patriarchal control to a framework centred on the protection of individual liberty and gender equality. The reconstruction that follows draws principally on the historical and socio-legal analysis of Saccà (2021), complemented by reference to the relevant primary legislation; the critical observations on the limits of these developments are likewise indebted to that scholarship and to the monitoring work of the Council of Europe’s expert body, GREVIO (2020).

The reform process began with Law No. 75 of 20 February 1958 (the “Merlin Law”), which abolished regulated prostitution and initiated the fight against exploitation. A pivotal shift in private relations followed with Law No. 151 of 19 May 1975 (the Family Law Reform), which established the legal equality of

spouses, abolished the role of the “head of the family” and his exclusive ownership of assets, eliminated the dowry system, and equated children born outside wedlock with those born within marriage. A fundamental turning point for women’s autonomy came with Law No. 442 of 5 August 1981, which repealed the penal relevance of the “honour killing” (*causa d’onore*); prior to this reform the Italian code had provided significant leniency for those who committed murder or violence to “protect” family honour. The same law abolished the “reparatory marriage” (*matrimonio riparatore*), a practice that had allowed a perpetrator of sexual violence to extinguish the crime by marrying the victim. It was only with Law No. 66 of 15 February 1996 that sexual violence was reclassified as a “crime against the person” rather than a “crime against public morality” (Saccà, 2021).

In the early 2000s, the legislator addressed specific forms of abuse through Law No. 154/2001 (measures against violence in family relations), Law No. 228/2003 (against human trafficking) and Law No. 7/2006 (concerning female genital mutilation). A significant preventive measure was introduced by Law No. 38/2009, which established the offence of stalking (*atti persecutori*) and the administrative warning. This paved the way for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2013, whose principles were integrated into Italian law via Law No. 93/2013 (the so-called “Femicide Law”), which introduced mandatory arrest for flagrant stalking and increased penalties for violence witnessed by minors (Saccà, 2021). Between 2015 and 2017, further measures - such as paid leave for victims of violence and the *Codice Rosa* (Pink Code) protocol for emergency rooms - were implemented, and in 2018 Law No. 4 introduced specific protections for orphans of domestic crimes. Law No. 69 of 19 July 2019, known as the *Codice Rosso* (Red Code), introduced a fast-track procedure for reports of gender-based violence, requiring prosecutors to hear victims within three days, and criminalised the illicit dissemination of sexually explicit images (*revenge porn*), forced marriage and the permanent disfigurement of the victim’s face.

The most recent stage of this evolution is represented by Law No. 181 of 2 December 2025, which introduces further measures to counter gender-based

and domestic violence, with a particular focus on preventive measures and economic support for survivors. It strengthens the use of electronic surveillance tools, such as anti-stalking GPS devices, implements stricter protocols for the assessment of lethality risk by law enforcement, and expands funding for anti-violence centres and shelters, recognising that legal protection must be accompanied by concrete resources for social and economic reintegration. Collectively, these reforms represent a persistent effort to dismantle a cultural heritage that, for decades, protected male violence under the guise of “private honour,” shifting the focus toward a proactive and systemic defence of women’s rights.

The progressive character of this legislative trajectory should not, however, obscure persistent questions of implementation, feasibility and effectiveness. Critical accounts have long observed that the codification of new offences does not, in itself, guarantee protection. In its baseline evaluation of Italy, GREVIO (2020) acknowledged the country’s robust legal arsenal while drawing attention to uneven implementation, inadequate risk assessment, the under-resourcing of specialised services, and the persistence of gender stereotypes within the justice system itself. Subsequent commentary on the *Codice Rosso* has similarly noted a gap between its ambitious procedural timelines and the practical capacity of prosecution offices and courts to meet them, as well as the risk that an exclusively criminal-justice response may overshadow the preventive and cultural measures that the Istanbul Convention regards as equally essential (Saccà, 2021). These critiques indicate that the Italian framework, although among the most advanced in Europe on paper, continues to face challenges of systematic application that are directly relevant to the way gender-based violence is publicly understood and narrated.

1.2 Statistical data in Italy

To establish a solid empirical foundation for this research, it is necessary to examine the statistical landscape of 2024. This year represents a crucial reference point in Italian public consciousness, as it is the first full calendar year following the media explosion of the Giulia Cecchettin case in November 2023,

which significantly altered how gender-based killings are reported and categorised. It is also the most recent period for which a complete and synchronised dataset is available across institutional, administrative and independent sources, allowing for a multifaceted comparative analysis.

A critical examination of the data reveals significant discrepancies that underscore the political nature of counting. According to the *Istituto Nazionale di Statistica* (Istat, 2025), Italy recorded 327 homicides in 2024, of which 116 victims were women. Applying the UN Statistical Framework (UNODC & UN Women, 2022), Istat identifies 106 of these cases as “presumed femicides,” approximately 91.4% of all female homicides. This figure is particularly striking when set against male homicide trends: while killings of men decreased by 2.8% compared with 2023, the number of women killed remained almost unchanged, decreasing by only one. This statistical inertia indicates that, while general violence may be receding, gender-based lethal violence remains a structural and resistant phenomenon (Istat, 2025).

By contrast, the Criminal Analysis Service of the Ministry of the Interior (2025) provides operational data based on more legalistic criteria, reporting 111 female victims out of 314 total homicides, of which 96 occurred within a “family or affective context”; within this sub-group, 59 women were killed by a current or former partner. The gap between Istat’s 106 “presumed femicides” and the Ministry’s 96 “domestic victims” is indicative of a systemic invisibility: institutional figures often fail to capture femicides occurring outside immediate family ties, such as those motivated by sexual predation or gender-based hatred by non-relatives.

The limitations of official recording are further exposed by independent observatories, whose distinct methodologies and political commitments produce higher and more qualitatively detailed counts. The first, *Casa delle Donne per non subire violenza* (Bologna), is a feminist anti-violence centre, active since 1990, that has for many years maintained one of Italy’s longest-running femicide monitors, based on the systematic review of press reports; its purpose is both documentary and advocacy-oriented, aiming to render visible killings

that official statistics overlook. For 2024 it identified 104 femicides, noting that in 68 cases (65.4%) the perpetrator was an intimate partner (53 current, 15 former) and in 23 cases a family member; its report also highlights the prevalence of “murder-suicide” (22.1% of cases), a dynamic that frequently leads media narratives to shift focus toward the perpetrator’s “despair” rather than the victim’s systemic oppression (Casa delle Donne per non subire violenza, 2025).

The second, *Non Una Di Meno* (NUDM), is a transfeminist grassroots movement - the Italian node of the transnational *Ni Una Menos* mobilisation - which since 2016 has campaigned against gender-based violence and maintains its own monitoring activity grounded in an explicitly political methodology. For 2024 it provides the highest count, recording 113 victims. This discrepancy stems from a methodology that rejects the narrow definitions of the penal code: NUDM includes “induced suicides” (deaths resulting from a prolonged history of domestic abuse) as well as “lesbicides” and “transfemicides”, categories frequently misclassified as ordinary homicides by the state. By including them, NUDM challenges the institutional narrative and suggests that the true scale of femicide in Italy is broader than that captured by the Ministry of the Interior or Istat (Non Una Di Meno, 2025).

As this comparison demonstrates, the year 2024 exemplifies the tension between competing “statistical truths”. While the Ministry of the Interior offers a snapshot of judicial reality, the work of Istat, *Casa delle Donne per non subire violenza* and *Non Una Di Meno* reveals the sociological and political dimensions of the phenomenon. For the purposes of this thesis, these figures serve as more than data points: they represent the raw material that Italian media outlets navigate, often selecting the most conservative figures or the most sensationalist details to construct their narratives of violence - a selectivity that the following section examines directly.

1.3 Media narratives of femicide

1.3.1 Framing, stereotypes and the naturalisation of violence

Having established the conceptual, legal and statistical contours of femicide, this section turns to the question that lies at the heart of the thesis: how the media represent gender-based violence. The focus on media framing is not incidental. As the news media constitute the principal arena in which the public encounters individual cases of femicide, the interpretative frames they deploy do significant cultural work, shaping whether such killings are understood as private tragedies or as manifestations of a structural problem, and influencing public attitudes, victim recognition and even institutional responses (Entman, 1993; Saccà, 2021). Examining these frames is therefore a prerequisite for assessing, in the empirical chapters that follow, whether the coverage of the Cecchettin case marked a genuine shift in Italian journalistic practice. The discussion below first sets out what the international literature establishes about the representation of gender-based violence in general, before turning to findings specific to the Italian press.

A substantial international literature has identified recurrent problems in the journalistic portrayal of women and men in the context of gender-based violence. A first tendency is that women are placed at the centre of the narrative while men are marginalised; in this way the media foreground the female figure, often attributing part or the whole of the responsibility to her and attenuating that of the perpetrator (Belmonte, 2021). Closely related is the role of language. As Romito (2005) argues, linguistic practices are central to the way violence against women and children is understood and represented: forms of “linguistic avoidance” contribute - whether intentionally or not - to the disappearance of male perpetrators from public and institutional discourse, while processes of euphemisation frame violence through vague or misleading terminology that obscures both its severity and the responsibility of those who commit it. The cumulative effect is a narrative that appears to avoid assigning blame.

This linguistic avoidance manifests in expressions such as “domestic disputes” or “family violence” in place of more explicit formulations like “male violence,”

and in the tendency to describe violent men through dehumanising terms - portraying them as “monsters” or attributing their actions to a sudden “fit of rage” - which detach violent acts from the social identity of men and frame violence as exceptional or aberrant rather than as rooted in gendered power relations (Belmonte, 2021). Even when the perpetrator does not entirely disappear, he is rarely portrayed as fully responsible. A key finding, widely supported in the literature, is the tendency to downplay or diffuse the perpetrator’s responsibility through three recurring interpretative frames: the depiction of the event as a “domestic dispute” (*lite familiare*), the invocation of jealousy (*gelosia*), and the explanation of the act as a sudden “loss of control” or “fit of rage” (*raptus*). Male responsibility is further mitigated either by framing the perpetrator as a deviant or pathological individual or by implicitly shifting blame onto the victim, whose behaviour is presented as having provoked the violence (Belmonte, 2021).

Within this frame, the perpetrator is frequently depicted as an otherwise ordinary, even mild and respectable man whose violent behaviour is triggered by a specific event - a partner’s desire for autonomy, suspicions of infidelity, or the inability to accept the end of a relationship - so that male violence is reframed as a “crime of passion” (*crimine passionale*), further obscuring its structural and gendered dimensions (Belmonte, 2021). The international literature is sharply critical of this construction. According to Monckton-Smith (2021), the notion of a “crime of passion” is a pervasive myth that erroneously frames intimate partner homicide as a spontaneous emotional explosion or a momentary loss of control triggered by jealousy. Her research, culminating in an eight-stage homicide timeline, demonstrates that such killings are rarely impulsive acts of “red-mist” rage but are instead the predictable, and often premeditated, outcome of a long-standing pattern of coercive control. In her view, the “crime of passion” narrative serves to rationalise the perpetrator’s actions, shifting the focus from his strategic dominance onto the victim’s perceived provocation; killers, she argues, do not “snap” but follow a trackable escalation of possession and entitlement.

By contrast, the persistent insertion of references to love or passion into accounts of violence presents the killing as the natural consequence of the perpetrator's feelings, so that the desire for possession, domination and annihilation underlying crimes against women is reinterpreted as a form of intimacy and affection (Belmonte, 2021). A related descriptive asymmetry is well documented internationally: while reports on perpetrators centre on character and psychological state, descriptions of victims are largely restricted to demographic and familial status - identifying the woman primarily as a "wife", "mother" or "pregnant woman" rather than as a self-determined individual - and frequently invoke her physical beauty, a reference rarely applied to men. This objectification denies the woman full subjectivity, while the tendency to refer to victims solely by their first names infantilises them and strips them of adult identity and social standing, reinforcing a male-centred perspective that defines a woman's existence in relation to her family functions or her perceived value to the male gaze (Belmonte, 2021).

Turning from this general picture to the Italian context, the most systematic recent evidence is provided by Saccà (2021) in *Stereotipo e pregiudizio. La rappresentazione giuridica e mediatica della violenza di genere*, whose corpus analysis documents how these international patterns take specific shape in the Italian press. Saccà finds a marked imbalance in the representation of the protagonists: the words "woman" and "women" occur far more frequently than "man", "men", "husband" or "partner", so that the narrative focuses primarily on the victim, on the violence itself, on its domestic context, and on the response of the authorities, while the male figure is comparatively marginalised. A significant narrative distortion specific to Italian coverage is the persistent use of the *raptus* frame, which mitigates the perpetrator's accountability by presenting the violence as a sudden, uncontrollable explosion of madness, jealousy or love. Although contemporary psychiatry dismisses the *raptus* as an obsolete and scientifically untenable notion, journalistic accounts continue to employ it, paradoxically repositioning the perpetrator as a "victim" of his own pathological emotions rather than a conscious agent of violence (Saccà, 2021).

By framing male brutality as a “sick” or irrational act, such narratives decontextualise violence, stripping it of its socio-structural significance and reducing femicide to an individual pathology rather than an extreme manifestation of unequal power relations. The consequences of this choice are twofold: it fosters an empathetic reaction toward the aggressor, whose accountability is diminished by the suggestion of an emotional “breakdown,” and it simultaneously casts suspicion over the victim, since the naturalisation of violence as an instinctive reaction to an external trigger pivots public discourse toward scrutinising the victim’s behaviour in search of the “provocation” that supposedly unleashed it. The episodic and romanticised framing of femicide does not merely misinform; it actively reinforces the structural inequality it fails to name, transforming a systemic human-rights violation into a private, inevitable tragedy (Saccà, 2021).

This marginalisation of female agency operates alongside a systematic distortion of which forms of violence are deemed newsworthy. According to Saccà (2021), a significant discrepancy exists between the actual prevalence of gender-based violence and its representation in the Italian press: while femicides represent only 0.7% of gender-based crimes, they receive nearly 45% of media coverage, whereas domestic maltreatment - the most widespread form, accounting for roughly 50% of reported gender crimes according to Ministry of the Interior data - features in only 14% of news articles. The press thus offers not a “photograph of reality” but a selective narrative organised around “newsworthiness” factors such as the brutality of the crime or the presence of macabre details. This selectivity is consistent with the findings of the *Global Media Monitoring Project* (GMMP, 2025), which continues to document, at the global level, both the under-representation of women as subjects and sources in the news and the persistence of stereotyped portrayals - evidence that the Italian patterns Saccà describes form part of a wider, transnational structure of gendered news representation.

When domestic violence does not result in extreme physical consequences, it is frequently overlooked or “naturalised” through the “conflictual couple” bias (*bias della litigiosità*), in which unilateral male aggression is reframed as an ordinary,

if turbulent, relationship dynamic (Saccà, 2021). The press often describes the relationship as “stormy”, “troubled” or “tempestuous” and characterises the violence as the “latest” in a series of “furious” arguments, reducing systemic abuse to a “couple’s quarrel” and imposing a sense of co-responsibility on the victim. An analysis of lexical salience in Italian press reports reveals a narrative bifurcated into two spheres, the judicial and the familial: keywords such as *carabinieri*, *polizia*, *court* and *trial* intersect with domestic terms such as *home*, *family*, *wife* and *husband*, suggesting that the press recognises violence mainly when it occurs within intimate relationships and becomes the object of legal proceedings (Saccà, 2021). This focus on the domestic perimeter results in a “privatisation” of the conflict that strips violence of its social and political dimensions, so that gender-based violence is narrated as an episodic, individual tragedy rather than as a result of structural power imbalances.

This individualised framing leads to the exclusion of the broader support and political network: despite their crucial role in victim assistance, anti-violence centres and shelters receive minimal media attention, and the press rarely employs a vocabulary that references feminist movements, power structures or cultural inequalities (Saccà, 2021). The preference for isolated “crime news” (*cronaca nera*) flattens the phenomenon into a permanent state of “emergency” rather than a structural reality, leaving the underlying symbolic order untouched. In contrast to this prevalent privatisation, an alternative “thematic” representation frames femicide as a manifestation of structural inequality, providing data on incidence and highlighting socio-cultural factors such as power imbalances, education and labour disparities, thereby shifting attention toward the institutional tools required for victim protection and the broader necessity of social reform (Saccà, 2021). According to Saccà (2021), however, this thematic approach remains a minority within the Italian press: among major newspapers, only *Il Manifesto* consistently adopts it, explicitly linking violence against women to the national and global gender order. This counter-trend nonetheless demonstrates that the press is capable of framing gender-based violence as a structural problem rather than a private tragedy.

1.3.2 Responses to the dominant narrative: toward a non-sexist journalism

The analysis so far has been descriptive and critical, identifying the frames through which the Italian press has tended to naturalise gender-based violence. The discussion now shifts register, from the analytical to the prescriptive, in order to set out the principles that scholars and professional bodies have proposed as a corrective. These principles are not advanced here as the thesis's own recommendations but are reconstructed from two authoritative sources: the socio-legal analysis of Saccà (2021) and the deontological guidelines of the *Manifesto di Venezia*, examined more fully in Section 1.4.

The media act as primary conduits for the transmission of cultural models, and the ethical weight of journalistic discourse lies in its capacity to construct social reality through linguistic selection. As Sabatini (1987) argued, language is never neutral: the choice of one term over another modifies the thought and attitude of both speaker and listener. In the context of femicide, terminology is therefore not a stylistic matter but a performative act; when news outlets opt for sensationalist or romanticised language, they steer the public's cognitive and emotional response and may entrench the prejudices that sustain a violent culture. On this basis, the construction of an ethical and rigorous journalistic narrative requires a departure from traditional sexist practices along several dimensions (Saccà, 2021).

A primary imperative is the non-obscurisation of the perpetrator: reports should avoid de-gendered euphemisms such as “domestic tragedy” or “family drama”, which erase male agency, in favour of explicit terms such as “male violence”. This transparency is undermined both by de-humanisation - labelling the author a “monster” or “beast” - and by de-responsibilisation through the lens of deviance, portraying him as a “drug addict” or “outcast”, which suggests that violence is the anomaly of a “sick” individual rather than a structural issue. Reporting should likewise refrain from empathetic descriptors such as “mild-mannered” or “simple” that imply an involuntary lapse of control, and must not associate violence with jealousy or attribute it to a *raptus*, nor portray it as a “couple's quarrel” that implies co-responsibility (Saccà, 2021).

A non-sexist narrative must also preserve the woman's subjectivity and dignity, eliminating irrelevant references to physical beauty or familial status and referring to women by their surnames in recognition of their full adult autonomy. Reports should avoid expressions evoking fatality, since violence is a voluntary choice rather than an accident, and should not romanticise the act by pairing terms such as "love" or "passion" with crimes of possession. Nor should the violence be linked to the perpetrator's illnesses or socio-economic hardships, which function as illegitimate alibis. Above all, the media should move from a private "crime news" perspective to a thematic framework that foregrounds the cultural and political roots of violence; in doing so, the press can move beyond the normalisation of abuse and contribute to the deconstruction of the unequal power structures that sustain it (Saccà, 2021).

1.4 Media ethics and journalistic responsibility

Media ethics and journalistic responsibility constitute the final pillar in the theoretical framework of this thesis, since the narrative construction of a crime largely shapes its social and political reception. Journalism does not merely reflect reality; it actively frames it, selecting which details to emphasise and which to omit, and thereby influencing public perception and even judicial outcomes (Entman, 1993). As Saccà (2021) argues, the ethical duty of the press extends beyond the simple reporting of facts to the deconstruction of the cultural stereotypes that normalise male dominance. The international scholarly consensus reinforces this view: Tuchman (1978) coined the notion of the "symbolic annihilation" of women to describe how the media marginalise, trivialise or omit women and thereby erase their agency, while Meyers (1997) stresses that ethical journalism must navigate the tension between a market-driven economy that rewards sensationalism, gruesome detail and victim-blaming, and the requirements of accuracy and empathy. When the media fail this test, they contribute to secondary victimisation, a process in which the victim is, in effect, "killed twice": once by the perpetrator and again by a public discourse that scrutinises her lifestyle or supposed provocations.

This normative concern is not merely abstract: it is anchored in a layered architecture of international, regional and national instruments that provide the legal and policy framework within which the media are called to operate. The remainder of this section reconstructs that architecture in descending order of scope, moving from the foundational global mandate of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, through the regional standard set by the Istanbul Convention, to the national self-regulatory instruments adopted by the Italian journalistic profession - the *Manifesto di Venezia* and Article 5-bis of the journalists' code of conduct.

The gap between such regulatory ambition and journalistic practice is itself the subject of recent comparative research. Examining the visual reporting of femicide in the Italian and British press, Freeland, Baroni and Jogie (2025) find that the more elaborate Italian framework - the *Manifesto di Venezia* together with Article 5-bis - has produced measurable improvements over the United Kingdom, where guidance issues largely from the charitable and non-governmental sector, yet that compliance remains uneven and the visual register in particular continues to reproduce patriarchal stereotypes (Freeland et al., 2025). They emphasise that images are subject to fewer and weaker forms of regulation than written text, so that even where the lexical handling of femicide has improved, the photograph may continue to perform unreconstructed ideological work. This unevenness - between binding and non-binding instruments, and between the textual and the visual - frames a question this thesis pursues empirically: whether the ethical standards surveyed here are realised in, or belied by, the coverage of a single high-profile case.

1.4.1 The Beijing Platform for Action

The international framework for gender-sensitive communication finds its primary historical and political foundation in the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, regarded by the United Nations as the most comprehensive blueprint ever adopted for the advancement of women's rights (United Nations, 1995). Among its twelve "critical areas of concern," Section J (Women and the Media) established an inseparable link between media representation and

substantive gender equality. Its strategic objectives sought a dual transformation: to increase women's access to and participation in expression and decision-making within media structures, and to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women. Section J explicitly urged media outlets to eliminate the continued projection of negative and degrading images of women, identifying journalistic language and narratives as potential instruments of either structural oppression or social emancipation (United Nations, 1995).

Three decades later, the Beijing+30 review (2025) provides a critical assessment of these goals. While it acknowledges an increase in the numerical presence of women in newsrooms, it stresses that structural barriers have persisted and evolved into more insidious forms. According to the review, the gender stereotypes originally identified in traditional media have been transposed and amplified within digital ecosystems, and it places unprecedented emphasis on technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF-GBV), reporting that online sexism and digital hate campaigns now represent a primary threat to women's freedom of expression - a phenomenon whose scale was not anticipated by the 1995 signatories (UN Women, 2025). The review also modernises the mandate of Section J by including the governance of algorithms and artificial intelligence among the ethical priorities of global information, warning against "algorithmic biases" that risk automating and scaling gender prejudice. In this sense, media responsibility is no longer confined to the choice of words or images but extends to the management of a technological infrastructure that can act as a multiplier of stereotypes. The continuity between the 1995 mandate and the 2025 appraisal confirms that the struggle against gender-based violence is inextricably linked to the transformation of public narratives, rendering Section J an enduring instrument for analysing media responses to femicide.

1.4.2 The Istanbul Convention and the role of the media

At the regional level, the Istanbul Convention represents the most advanced legal framework addressing gender-based violence (Council of Europe, 2011). A defining feature of the Convention is its recognition of violence against

women as a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men and as a violation of human rights; within this systemic perspective, it assigns a proactive role to the media. As discussed in Section 1.1.2, Article 17 mandates that States Parties encourage the private sector and the mass media to participate in the elaboration and implementation of policies and to set self-regulatory standards in order to promote respect for the dignity of women and prevent violence (Council of Europe, 2011, Art. 17). The Convention treats the media not as mere observers of social reality but as active agents capable of either reinforcing or dismantling the cultural stereotypes that legitimise violence, and it is complemented by Article 12, which calls for the eradication of prejudices, customs and traditions based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles.

The Convention's requirements are not self-executing, and the question of their implementation is therefore central. Compliance is monitored by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the Convention's independent monitoring body. In its baseline evaluation of Italy, GREVIO (2020) identified media reporting as fundamental to public understanding, observing that coverage which focuses on the *raptus* or romanticises the perpetrator's motives directly undermines the Convention's preventive goals. By framing violence as a structural and social phenomenon rather than a private or romantic tragedy, the media would fulfil the Convention's requirement to contribute to primary prevention - a goal they meet only to the extent that they actually adopt such framing. Beyond GREVIO's periodic monitoring, however, systematic evidence on how Article 17 has been taken up across Member States remains limited, which is itself significant: the principal documented responses to the Convention's call have come not from binding regulation but from the self-regulatory initiatives of national journalistic communities. In Italy, the *Manifesto di Venezia* and the subsequent reform of the journalists' code of conduct, examined below, represent precisely such responses, and the present thesis contributes additional empirical evidence on the extent to which these standards are observed in practice. In this sense, the Istanbul Convention transforms the role of the press from a chronicler of crime

into a strategic partner for social change, providing the legal and ethical foundation on which national self-regulatory codes are built and establishing that the fight against violence is inseparable from the struggle for fair and equal representation in the public sphere.

1.4.3 The Venice Manifesto

At the national level, the Venice Manifesto (*Manifesto di Venezia*), signed on 25 November 2017, represents the most significant deontological commitment by the Italian journalistic community to accurate and respectful reporting on gender-based violence. Promoted by the association *GiULiA Giornaliste* in collaboration with the National Federation of the Italian Press (FNSI) and the National Council of the Order of Journalists (CNOG), the Manifesto operates as a practical implementation of the principles established by the Istanbul Convention. Its primary objective is to eradicate the sexist biases and linguistic pitfalls that have traditionally characterised the *cronaca nera* in Italy, where femicide has long been narrated through the distorting lens of romanticism or pathology. The Manifesto mandates the use of correct terminology, urging journalists to replace euphemisms such as “crime of passion” or “family tragedy” with precise definitions such as femicide or male violence against women; it warns against the spectacularisation of pain and the *raptus* myth; and, by discouraging the focus on the perpetrator’s “justifications”, it seeks to prevent the secondary victimisation of the woman (Saccà, 2021).

As Saccà (2021) notes, the Venice Manifesto is not merely a technical guide but a cultural tool for the deconstruction of the patriarchal order within the public sphere, emphasising that the media have a social responsibility to frame violence as a structural violation of human rights rather than a private episode. The question of its uptake and implementation is, however, more difficult to answer than that of its content. The Manifesto is a voluntary, self-regulatory charter, and while its promoter, *GiULiA Giornaliste*, has continued to advocate for its principles and to conduct awareness and training activities, there is to date no comprehensive, systematic monitoring of the degree to which Italian newsrooms comply with it. This gap between the existence of a standard and

the evidence of its application is one of the points to which the empirical analysis of this thesis is intended to respond, by examining how far the Manifesto's principles are reflected in concrete coverage of a high-profile case.

1.4.4 The journalistic code of ethics: Article 5-bis

A regulatory turning point in Italian media ethics was the introduction of Article 5-bis, titled *Respect for Gender Differences*, into the *Testo Unico dei doveri del giornalista* (the consolidated code of journalists' duties). Approved by the National Council of the Order of Journalists (CNOG) and in force since 2021, this article transposes the principles of the Venice Manifesto into the mandatory ethical code binding on all professional and trainee journalists. Article 5-bis requires that, in all cases of gender-based violence, journalists adopt a language that is respectful, balanced and free from sexist bias, and it explicitly prohibits terms and expressions that convey stereotypes, provoke the secondary victimisation of the woman, or tend to simplify the dynamics of violence by attributing it to sudden impulses or uncontrollable feelings. It establishes a duty to provide a correct, objective and non-prejudiced representation of the facts, prohibits an irrelevant focus on the victim's private life or physical appearance, and discourages the romanticisation of abuse through phrases such as "crimes of passion" or "tragedies of love".

By elevating these guidelines to a binding ethical requirement, the Order of Journalists recognises that language is a primary tool of social construction (Saccà, 2021). As with the Manifesto, however, the crucial question concerns systematic application. Unlike the voluntary Manifesto, Article 5-bis is enforceable through the disciplinary mechanisms of the Order of Journalists, whose regional councils may sanction breaches; yet publicly available, aggregated data on the frequency and outcome of disciplinary proceedings specifically concerning the reporting of gender-based violence remain scarce, making it difficult to assess how consistently the provision is enforced in practice. The systematic application of Article 5-bis is nonetheless essential if the press is to function as a watchdog for human rights rather than a multiplier of the cultural prejudices that fuel gender-based violence (Saccà, 2021), and

the empirical chapters of this thesis offer one means of assessing the extent to which its standards are met in a concrete, highly visible case.

Chapter 2. Theoretical framework and methodology

If the previous chapter established what femicide is and how the Italian press has historically narrated it, this chapter sets out the conceptual and methodological apparatus through which that narration can be rigorously examined. Chapter 1 mapped the phenomenon of gender-based violence, its statistical and legal contours, the dominant media narratives that have privatised and romanticised male violence, and the ethical frameworks that seek to reform them. The task now is to translate those substantive concerns into an analytical design capable of testing the central claim of this thesis: whether, and to what extent, the coverage of the Giulia Cecchettin case represents a discursive turning point in the Italian representation of femicide. This chapter therefore occupies a pivotal, hinge-like position in the dissertation, converting the theoretical and contextual groundwork of Chapter 1 into the operational instruments that generate the empirical findings of Chapters 3 and 4.

The framework rests on the conviction that the meaning of a femicide is not given by the event itself but is actively constructed in the act of reporting it. To capture that construction, the chapter draws on two complementary analytical traditions. The first is frame analysis, from Goffman's account of the interpretative schemata through which experience is organised to Entman's formulation of framing as the selective promotion of a particular definition of a problem and its causes, refined by Iyengar's distinction between the episodic and the thematic. Framing supplies the macro-level apparatus for identifying how the press defines the killing of a woman - as a private tragedy or as a structural emergency. The second tradition is critical discourse analysis, in Fairclough's sense, which furnishes the micro-level instruments - transitivity, agency, lexical selection - needed to verify whether the language of a report actually sustains the frame it appears to adopt, or whether it quietly reproduces the patriarchal "common sense" that naturalises male violence. Because contemporary news is irreducibly visual, these two traditions are extended into a

multimodal register, attentive to how photographs and their relation to the written word may confirm or contradict the verbal message.

These concepts are not chosen in the abstract but for their direct purchase on the representation of femicide. The distinction between episodic and thematic framing names precisely the difference between the *raptus* narrative and the structural reading of patriarchy whose contest defines the Cecchettin case; the analysis of transitivity exposes the agency-suppressing syntax through which the perpetrator is so often erased; the concept of *himpathy* - the disproportionate sympathy extended to male perpetrators (Manne, 2017) - captures the mechanism by which a killer is rehabilitated as a “good boy”; and multimodal analysis registers the dissonance between a structural headline and a romantic photograph. Each instrument, in other words, is calibrated to a specific feature of the discourse this thesis sets out to measure.

The chapter proceeds in four movements. Section 2.1 elaborates the analytical framework, presenting frame analysis and critical discourse analysis in turn and then arguing for their integration into a single multidimensional method. Section 2.2 develops the visual and multimodal dimension, examining the rhetorical power of news images and the relations between text and image through which meaning is jointly produced. Section 2.3 sets out the construction of the corpus - the selection of outlets, the periodisation of the coverage, and the range of materials analysed. Section 2.4 details the analytical procedure: the mixed coding grid, the categories and indicators that operationalise the framework, and the staged process of coding and interpretation through which the corpus is read. Taken together, these sections provide the transparent and replicable design on which the analysis of the following chapters depends.

2.1 Analytical framework: framing and discourse

The analytical framework of this study is built on the complementary relationship between two traditions: frame analysis, which identifies the broad interpretative structures of news, and critical discourse analysis, which scrutinises the linguistic mechanisms that realise them. The following subsections present

each in turn before setting out the integrated, multidimensional method that governs the empirical analysis.

2.1.1 Frame analysis: theoretical foundations and media schemata

The primary theoretical pillar of this research is frame analysis, an approach that allows for a systematic investigation of how media outlets construct social reality by supplying the public with specific interpretative lenses. The notion was originally conceptualised by the sociologist Erving Goffman (1974), for whom a frame is an organising structure - a “schemata of interpretation” - that enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label the occurrences of their social world. In Goffman’s epistemology, reality is not a neutral collection of facts but a curated experience in which the media act as a primary framer, deciding which elements of an event are amplified and which are relegated to the margins of public consciousness. This selection is never neutral: it is an exercise of discursive power that shapes the collective understanding and moral weight of a social phenomenon.

Within communication studies the concept was refined and operationalised by Robert Entman (1993), whose synthesis remains the authoritative benchmark for analysing media discourse. Entman defines framing as the selection of certain aspects of a perceived reality and their promotion to greater salience within a text, in such a way as to perform four interlocking functions: defining a problem, diagnosing its causes, making a moral judgement of the actors involved, and suggesting remedies. For the study of femicide, and of the Cecchettin case in particular, this fourfold scheme is indispensable, because it reveals how a journalistic text transforms an act of lethal violence into either a private tragedy or a social emergency. When a report foregrounds the perpetrator’s emotional fragility or jealousy rather than the patriarchal structure within which the killing occurs, it is performing precisely these functions, steering the reader towards a pathologising causal interpretation and away from a structural critique of gender-based violence.

A further distinction, drawn from Shanto Iyengar (1991), specifies two characteristic ways in which the press may organise such an account. Episodic

framing, the dominant journalistic mode, presents social issues as discrete, concrete events: in the reporting of femicide it concentrates on the psychological profiles of the individuals, their personal history and the sensational circumstances of the crime, atomising the violence and confining responsibility to the individual perpetrator. Thematic framing, by contrast, situates the single event within a wider socio-political and historical context, connecting the specific killing to institutional failures, cultural norms and systemic inequalities, and inviting the audience to perceive femicide as a public problem requiring collective solutions. As Saccà (2021) documents, Italian journalism has historically relied on episodic framing when reporting gender-based violence, narrating femicides through the reductive tropes of the *raptus* and the *delitto passionale* (crime of passion) - frames that cast the violence as a tragic anomaly, a momentary breakdown of an otherwise “normal” man, and thereby obscure the structural mechanisms that sustain it.

The coverage of 2024, the primary reference period of this thesis, represents a paradigmatic challenge to this episodic hegemony. The proactive intervention of the victim’s family, and in particular the public letters and statements of Elena Cecchetti, functioned as a powerful counter-framing force that compelled major outlets to adopt a thematic lens, linking the murder to the broader notions of patriarchal culture and the continuum of violence (Kelly, 1988). The framing of the case must also be read through the concept of *himpathy* - the disproportionate sympathy extended to male perpetrators of violence, often at the expense of the victim’s dignity, a concept introduced by Manne (2017) and applied to the Italian femicide context by Saccà and Carbonari (2026). Frames that emphasise a perpetrator’s academic potential, his suffering or his devotion operate as episodic distractors that mitigate criminal responsibility, and one of the questions guiding this study is whether the 2024 press dismantled such himpathetic narratives or merely reproduced them as latent biases in the representation of Filippo Turetta. Frame analysis here attends closely to salience - the prominence given to particular information through placement, repetition or association with familiar symbols - since, as Minnema et al. (2022) show, even the choice between describing a woman as having “died” or as

having been “murdered” functions as a framing device that redistributes agency and responsibility.

2.1.2 Critical discourse analysis (CDA): power, ideology, and linguistic agency

Where frame analysis identifies the macro-interpretative structures of a news narrative, critical discourse analysis provides the finer instruments needed to scrutinise the micro-linguistic mechanisms through which power asymmetries are constructed and sustained. In this research CDA is not a merely descriptive linguistic method but a critical intervention designed to expose how the Italian and Anglophone press reproduce, naturalise or occasionally challenge patriarchal ideologies in their discursive construction of the Cecchettin case. As Norman Fairclough (1995) argues, discourse is a form of social practice that both reflects and actively shapes social reality; his three-dimensional model - integrating the analysis of the text, of discursive practice, and of social practice - positions media language as a contested terrain on which dominant ideologies are normalised. Applied to femicide, CDA investigates how journalistic “common sense” conceals systemic male violence behind a veneer of neutral or romanticising terminology.

A primary object of this analysis is transitivity and agency. As Minnema et al. (2022) demonstrate in their study of the difference between “dead” and “murdered”, the syntactic architecture of a headline can radically alter the reader’s perception of responsibility. The passive voice (“Giulia was found dead”) and nominalisation (“the death of Giulia”) obscure the perpetrator’s agency, presenting the killing as an inexorable tragedy rather than a deliberate act - a linguistic erasure of the aggressor that is a documented trope of Italian *cronaca nera*, in which attention is disproportionately diverted onto the victim’s attributes or choices. The study therefore asks whether the reporting on Turetta perpetuated this obscuring of agency or mobilised the strategy of *himpathy*, softening the gravity of the crime through lexical choices that function as ideological mitigators and reinforce the myth of the “good boy” driven to extremity by emotional volatility.

Lexical selection is a second focus. The contributions of Lipperini and Murgia (2013) and Orrù (2016) provide an important foundation for the critical analysis of the Italian press, arguing that the persistent use of romanticising metaphors - the “extreme gesture”, the “tragedy of jealousy”, “blind love” - validates a possessive and controlling model of masculinity. CDA deconstructs these metaphors as ideological devices that translate a grave violation of human rights into a relatable sentimental drama. Against this traditional vocabulary, the Cecchetti coverage witnessed the unprecedented entry of terms such as *patriarcato* (patriarchy) and “toxic masculinity” into mainstream headlines, catalysed by the counter-discourse of Elena Cecchetti; the analysis examines this clash of discourses, weighing the tension between the emerging transformative lexicon and the conservative vocabulary of institutional journalism. Finally, because meaning is constructed across semiotic modes, the framework follows the multimodal approach of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) in treating the recurrent photographs of Giulia and Filippo in intimate, “happy” settings as part of the message rather than mere illustration; such images frequently create a dissonance with the reality of the violence, reinforcing an episodic frame and complicating the moral judgement of the perpetrator. Integrating these levels, the CDA employed here seeks to establish whether the 2024 discourse achieved a genuine deconstruction of femicide culture or merely repackaged archaic stereotypes within a modern institutional rhetoric.

This contention finds systematic empirical support in Dell'Anno's (2021) analysis of nearly three hundred articles from the principal Italian dailies, covering twenty-six femicides committed between April 2019 and April 2020. Working from an explicitly constructivist premise, she demonstrates that the press narrates these killings through a limited, prepackaged repertoire of narrative frames - among them the template of *amore tragico* (“tragic love”), which casts the perpetrator as a man who loved the victim and the killing as an incomprehensible domestic tragedy - and argues that, because authoritative institutions such as the press and the courts adopt this restricted lexicon, readers are led to accept it as natural precisely because it confirms familiar stereotypes. Her account establishes the lexical and narrative baseline of Italian

femicide reporting in the years immediately preceding the present corpus, and it is against this default that the analysis developed in Chapter 3 measures whether, and how far, the coverage of the Cecchettin case departed from it.

2.1.3 Integrating framing and discourse approaches: a multidimensional methodology

The analytical core of this research lies in the deliberate integration of frame analysis and critical discourse analysis. Although the two are often treated as distinct traditions, their convergence is essential for a holistic account of how a media event such as the Cecchettin case is constructed and consumed: by synthesising the macro-sociological perspective of framing with the micro-linguistic precision of CDA, the study can capture both the broad interpretative narratives and the subtle discursive manoeuvres that sustain gendered power imbalances. The rationale for the integration lies in the limitations of either method used alone. Frame analysis, as developed by Entman (1993) and Iyengar (1991), is highly effective at mapping the dominant themes, the attribution of responsibility and the evaluative tone of coverage, but it tends to overlook the grammatical and lexical choices that naturalise those very frames; CDA, in Fairclough's (1995) tradition, excels at deconstructing the ideological work of language but can lose sight of the broader narrative structures that guide public opinion.

Integration allows the analysis to move from the frame, understood as a mental schema, to the discourse, understood as its linguistic realisation. Identifying a thematic, patriarchy-naming frame in the 2024 reporting is only the first step; CDA must then verify whether the language of those articles - their transitivity, voice and word choice - genuinely supports a systemic critique or remains anchored in traditional, victim-blaming structures. As Pan and Kosicki (1993) argue, news frames are realised through specific signifying devices, including syntactic, script and thematic structures, so that a fully critical analysis must attend both to the boundary of the frame and to the texture of the discourse within it. The concept of the continuum of violence (Kelly, 1988) marks one important intersection between the two levels: the shift from an episodic to a

thematic frame required a corresponding linguistic shift, and an integrated lens can track how the event was discursively transformed from a singular homicide into a manifestation of structural patriarchy, through the introduction of new discursive objects such as coercive control. The integrated method is likewise indispensable for deconstructing *himpathy* (Manne, 2017; Saccà & Carbonari, 2026): frame analysis may identify a sympathetic orientation towards the perpetrator, but only CDA can isolate the precise mitigators - such as the contrastive conjunction in “he was a murderer, but also a fragile student” - that perform the ideological work of softening his agency. Extended to the multimodal dimension, the same logic treats images as visual frames in dialectical relation with the textual discourse, enabling the analysis of inter-semiotic dissonance, where a text offers a thematic critique of patriarchy while the accompanying image continues to romanticise the relationship. In sum, the integration of frame analysis and CDA furnishes the thesis with a double-check mechanism that grounds its findings not in superficial thematic categories but in a deep-level linguistic and ideological critique - an approach particularly suited to tracking the evolution of a national discourse on femicide across the 2024 cycle, and to identifying both its moments of change and its pockets of resistance.

2.2 The visual and multimodal dimension

Because contemporary news is a multimodal construct, the analytical framework must extend beyond the verbal text to the images that accompany it and to the relations between the two. The following subsections examine, first, the rhetorical role of news images in the representation of victim and perpetrator and, second, the text–image relations through which meaning is jointly produced.

2.2.1 The role of images in news narratives

In the contemporary media landscape news is rarely a purely textual phenomenon; it is a multimodal construct in which images and words interact to produce a unified interpretative frame. For a study of the media representation

of femicide, the analysis of images is therefore not an auxiliary task but a fundamental requirement, since visual elements do not merely illustrate the written word but possess an autonomous rhetorical power that can reinforce, qualify or contradict it. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) argue, images are governed by a grammar of visual design that shapes how viewers perceive agency, social distance and moral evaluation, and the selection of photographs for victim and perpetrator constitutes a significant act of visual framing. In the Italian press, as Saccà (2021) observes, a “victimisation through beauty” trope recurs, in which the victim is shown smiling, young and radiant; while intended to evoke empathy, such imagery can also objectify her, framing her worth through her appearance or her lost future.

In the Cecchettin case the visual narrative was especially consequential. The recurrent use of photographs depicting Giulia and Filippo Turetta together in moments of apparent happiness produced what this study terms inter-semiotic dissonance: while the text might describe a brutal murder and a history of coercive control, the visual frame remained anchored in the trope of romantic tragedy, normalising the perpetrator by visually suggesting that he had been an ordinary partner until a sudden breaking point, and thereby supporting the episodic frame of the *raptus* rather than the thematic frame of systemic violence. The relation between text and image is equally central to the attribution of responsibility. As Machin and Mayr (2012) note, visual choices perform ideological work by humanising or demonising the actors involved; the publication of “normalised” images of the perpetrator - graduation or childhood photographs - facilitates *himpathy* by emphasising his ordinariness and mitigating his agency. The placement of images relative to headlines further directs the reader’s emotional response: a passive-voice headline paired with a vibrant photograph of the victim shifts attention onto the loss and erases the perpetrator from the initial visual encounter. Using multimodal critical discourse analysis, this study examines such semiotic gaps, identifying where the visual choices of Italian and Anglophone outlets challenged the established narrative - through symbolic images of protest and the red shoes that symbolise the

struggle against violence against women - and where they reverted to the romanticised portrayal of the unhappy couple.

Images in femicide reporting also draw on deep cultural myths, among them the dichotomy between the “angel of the hearth” and the “demon”, reinforced through lighting, framing and gaze. As Orrù (2016) observes, the visual representation of femicide often spectacularises the family’s pain, converting a political problem into a consumable drama. Drawing on Barthes’ (1977) account of myth and of the denotative and connotative levels of the image, this thesis reads the visual coverage of the Cecchettin case as a site of ideological struggle, in which the transition from private photographs to images of mass mobilisation - the “noise” of the protests - marked a shift in the visual frame from the isolated victim to collective resistance, and signalled a potentially transformative moment in the Italian visual culture of gender violence.

2.2.2 Text–image relations in the construction of meaning

The construction of meaning in news is fundamentally relational: text and image function as a semiotic unit in which each mode conditions the interpretation of the other, so that the coverage of the Cecchettin case must be approached not through a separate study of words and pictures but through an integrated understanding of their relations. Martinec and Salway (2005) classify these relations according to logico-semantic categories that specify whether an image expands, contradicts or simply illustrates the written word, while the semiotic tradition of Barthes (1977) identifies anchorage as the primary function of text in relation to the inherently polysemous image. Because an image carries a “floating chain” of potential meanings, the journalist uses headline, caption and lead to fix one intended reading and repel the others; in the present corpus this anchorage is frequently strained, as when a headline announcing a premeditated murder accompanies a photograph of victim and perpetrator smiling at a graduation party, producing a semiotic friction in which the criminal reality asserted by the text competes with the romantic normalcy suggested by the image.

A more nuanced account is offered by the concept of inter-semiotic complementarity. As Royce (2007) argues, when text and image work in harmony they reinforce a single interpretative frame; but in the Cecchettin coverage one frequently encounters the opposite, an inter-semiotic dissonance in which the linguistic and the visual offer conflicting messages about agency and responsibility. Where the language correctly assigns agency through active verbs - "Turetta killed" - while the accompanying photographs humanise the perpetrator in scholarly or familial settings, the multimodal message becomes contradictory, and the dissonance serves an ideological purpose: it allows an outlet to appear responsible in its prose, even using the term *femminicidio*, while catering to sensationalist or empathetic impulses through its imagery, facilitating a pathologising reading in which the violence figures as an anomaly in an otherwise unremarkable life. The composition of the page reinforces these effects. In the given–new and ideal–real structures described by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), the image often occupies the "ideal" space that sets the emotional tone while the text occupies the "real" space of factual detail; in the Cecchettin coverage the ideal space was frequently dominated by the figure of the angelic victim, whose visual salience overshadowed the textual analysis of the crime's patriarchal roots. Through the multimodal critical discourse analysis of Machin and Mayr (2012), this study examines how the proximity of particular words to particular images creates meaning by association - the word "jealousy" set beside a sorrowful photograph of the perpetrator forming a cluster that sustains the crime-of-passion narrative even where the surrounding article attempts a structural reading. The caption performs the most explicit ideological work of all, often romanticising the relationship through formulas such as "Giulia and Filippo in happier times" and so maintaining the episodic frame of a broken love story. The meaning of the Cecchettin case, this analysis demonstrates, was located not in the words alone but in the often contradictory interplay of written report and visual evidence.

2.3 Corpus construction

The empirical basis of the study is a purposive corpus assembled to capture the diversity of the Italian and international coverage. The following subsections describe the selection of outlets, the periodisation of the coverage across the fourteen-month observation window, and the range of journalistic materials analysed.

2.3.1 Selection of Italian and international news outlets

The corpus follows a purposive sampling strategy (Krippendorff, 2018) designed to capture the multifaceted character of the Italian and international media landscape across a fourteen-month window, from November 2023 to December 2024, which permits a longitudinal observation of the discursive shifts that followed the murder. The selection spans a wide spectrum of journalistic traditions, from institutional newspapers of record to digital-native explanatory journalism and polarised editorial perspectives, so as to map how the patriarchy frame diffused across different readerships and political orientations. At the centre of the Italian sub-corpus stand *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica*, the two pillars of national agenda-setting: the Milan-based *Corriere*, a moderate, establishment voice that often served as the principal stage for the Cecchettin family's counter-discourse, and the centre-left *Repubblica*, historically attuned to social movements and feminist critique. Reflecting their disproportionate weight in shaping national debate, and their internal heterogeneity - each runs both sensationalist crime reporting and structural editorialising - these two titles were each allotted twenty articles, double the share of the other Italian outlets.

The remaining Italian outlets were selected for breadth of journalistic culture, with ten articles each. *Il Post*, a digital-native title known for its explanatory style, played a pivotal part in contextualising the case, moving away from the sensationalism of *cronaca nera* towards a pedagogic analysis of structural violence, while *Rai News* represents public-service journalism and its standardised, institutional address to a broad national audience. To examine resistance to the patriarchy frame, the corpus includes the conservative and frequently polemical *Il Giornale* and *Libero*, which tended to prioritise episodic

accounts or to criticise the politicisation of the crime, offering a crucial counterpoint to the progressive narrative. The inclusion of *Il Mattino di Padova* introduces the dimension of territorial proximity: deeply embedded in the community where the events unfolded, the local daily allows the study to observe how the transition from a local tragedy to a national emergency was managed at community level, oscillating between empathy for the victim and the protection of local identity. The transnational dimension is secured through three globally influential outlets, which together contribute ten articles. *The Guardian*, selected for its standards in reporting gender-based violence, provides an external ethical benchmark whose coverage typically foregrounds systemic issues over sensational detail; the *BBC*, as a leading public-service broadcaster, offers a further structural benchmark with consistent editorial standards; and *The New York Times* contributes a high-level sociological gaze, interpreting Italian patriarchal culture through a global lens and frequently highlighting the exceptional scale of the Italian mobilisation. The final corpus comprises one hundred articles - ninety from the seven Italian outlets and ten from the three Anglophone outlets. As Fairclough (2003) observes, the aim of critical discourse analysis is not an exhaustive quantitative sweep but a deep engagement with the texture of the text and its social implications; by ranging from the localism of *Il Mattino di Padova* to the global perspective of *The New York Times*, and from the explanatory tone of *Il Post* to the polemics of *Libero*, the corpus achieves a high degree of triangulation, ensuring that the findings on the “Cecchettin effect” reflect the broader ideological struggle of the 2024 media ecosystem rather than the line of any single editorial bubble.

2.3.2 Periodisation of the Cecchettin case coverage

The analysis of a high-impact media event requires a rigorous periodisation that can track the evolution of frames and the shifting salience of keywords over time. The fourteen-month window has therefore been subdivided into four analytical phases, a segmentation grounded in the theory of media events advanced by Dayan and Katz (1992), which holds that certain news stories transcend routine reporting to become collective rituals that challenge or reaffirm social values; periodisation thus allows the study to locate the moment

at which the patriarchy frame eclipsed the crime-of-passion narrative. The first phase spans the disappearance of Giulia Cecchettin on 11 November 2023 and the discovery of her body a week later. During the first days the reporting was predominantly episodic, organised around the typical tropes of *cronaca nera* - the mystery of the disappearance, the portrait of the “good boy”, the search operations - before a decisive discursive break occurred with the public interventions of Elena Cecchettin, which suddenly brought the term *patriarcato* into mainstream usage; the phase closes with the mass demonstrations of 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, by which point the narrative had officially shifted from private tragedy to political emergency.

The second phase covers the public funeral in Padua on 5 December and its legislative aftermath, when coverage concentrated on the ritual dimension of the event. Analysed through Turner's (1974) concept of social drama - in which the media become a stage on which a society negotiates its moral boundaries - this period saw the discourse become highly institutionalised, focused on new anti-violence measures and on the debate over relationship education in schools, and marked in the corpus by a high density of thematic framing in editorials and opinion pieces. The third and longest phase, extending from February to October 2024, encompasses the cooling of media attention and its transition into judicial procedure and commemoration; essential for testing the stability of the linguistic shift, it allows the research to assess whether the press sustained the structural critique or reverted to the frame of individual pathology. Read through the concept of media memory (Neiger et al., 2011), this phase shows how the figure of Giulia Cecchettin was transformed into a secular symbol of resistance whose image kept the legislative debate alive in the absence of new developments. The fourth phase marks the first anniversary of the murder, a commemorative trigger that compelled outlets to produce reflexive, year-end content; by comparing these retrospectives with the coverage of late 2023, the study can gauge the durability of the “Cecchettin effect” - the increased frequency of terms such as *patriarcato* and the decline of justifications such as *raptus*. As Krippendorff (2018) notes, longitudinal content

analysis must account for the seasonal rhythms of the news cycle; segmenting the corpus into these four phases guards against over-representing the initial emotional peak and balances the breaking-news urgency of the first phase, the legislative reaction of the second, the judicial persistence of the third and the reflective consolidation of the fourth.

2.3.3 Types of materials analysed

To secure the multidimensionality of the analysis, the corpus draws on a range of journalistic materials rather than a single genre of reporting. As Bhatia (2004) observes, news discourse is a “genre colony” in which sub-genres such as hard news, editorial and feature interact to shape public perception; diversifying the materials therefore allows the study to track how the discourse on patriarchy migrated from the urgency of breaking news to the reflective depth of commentary. The first layer comprises hard-news reports, associated chiefly with the early phases of the case and represented by the *cronaca nera* of *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* and the rapid updates of *Rai News*. These materials provide the factual foundation of the narrative and, with their crime-scene lexicon focused on the mechanics of the killing and the logistics of the investigation, constitute the primary site for observing the baseline episodic framing and, from a CDA perspective, the transitivity and agency of the headlines.

The second and most consequential category comprises editorials and opinion pieces, the reflexive heart of the media event, in which the journalistic voice is not neutral but interpretative. In the wake of the Cecchettin case these texts - particularly in *la Repubblica* and *Il Post* - became the principal vehicle for the thematic frame, the place where terms such as *patriarcato*, “toxic masculinity” and “state failure” were most frequently deployed and debated, and where high-profile columnists lent the cultural legitimacy necessary for the shift in the national lexicon. A third category consists of the visual materials associated with the selected articles, treated not as secondary illustration but as autonomous semiotic artefacts in line with the multimodal framework of Section 2.2: these range from portraits of victim and perpetrator and images of mass protest and

street art to the infographics and data visualisations - notably in *// Post* - whose charts on national femicide rates perform a rationalising function, anchoring the emotional narrative in statistical evidence and supporting a structural understanding of the violence. A fourth category captures a distinctive feature of the case: the integration of social-media content directly into journalistic texts, as when articles embedded the open letters and posts of Elena Cecchetti and other activists. Categorised as counter-discourse artefacts, these materials create a clash of voices within the journalistic text; as Hermida (2012) notes, the incorporation of social media into professional journalism produces a hybrid media system in which the boundary between private grief and public activism is blurred, and they are essential for understanding the bottom-up pressure that forced the move towards a more adequate language of patriarchy. This multi-genre approach secures what Krippendorff (2018) terms contextual validity: had the corpus been confined to hard news it might have suggested a persistent episodic bias, whereas the inclusion of editorials and social-media embeds reveals the “Cecchetti effect” to have been not a uniform change but a contested evolution in which some genres moved towards structural critique faster than others.

2.4 Coding and analytical procedure

The framework set out above is rendered operational through a structured analytical procedure. The following subsections describe the mixed coding grid that integrates frame analysis and CDA, the categories and indicators through which the framework’s concepts are made observable, and the staged process of coding and interpretation through which the corpus is read.

2.4.1 Mixed coding grid: integrating frame analysis and CDA

The operational phase of the research is governed by a mixed coding grid, a custom analytical instrument designed to synthesise the macro-sociological insights of frame analysis with the micro-linguistic precision of critical discourse analysis. As Neuendorf (2017) observes, the reliability of content analysis depends on the clarity of its coding categories, and the grid accordingly

provides a standardised protocol for deconstructing each article along three dimensions. The first dimension applies Entman's (1993) framing functions and Iyengar's (1991) episodic–thematic dichotomy, requiring the coder to determine how each article defines the problem - as a singular tragedy or as a systemic manifestation of gender-based violence - how it interprets the cause, whether in terms of the perpetrator's individual psychology or of patriarchal structures, how it morally evaluates the actors, registering any moralisation of the victim's behaviour or pathologisation of the aggressor's agency, and what remedy it implies, whether individual punishment or structural cultural change. The second dimension moves from what is said to how it is articulated, drawing on the linguistic tools of Fairclough (1995) to expose the ideologies embedded in journalistic syntax: it records whether the perpetrator appears as the grammatical subject of active verbs or whether his agency is suppressed through nominalisation or the passive voice; it monitors the relative frequency of a mitigating lexicon - *raptus*, *folia* (madness), *passione* (passion) - against a structural one - *patriarcato* (patriarchy), *violenza sistemica* (systemic violence); and, following Manne (2017) and Saccà and Carbonari (2026), it isolates the mitigation markers, the adjectives and adverbs such as *fragile* or *studente modello* (model student), through which *himpathy* is enacted. The third dimension accounts for the inter-semiotic relation between text and image, evaluating the degree of anchorage or dissonance and recording the visual gaze - whether the image humanises the perpetrator through intimate, smiling photographs or challenges the viewer through symbolic imagery of protest - so as to uncover the cases in which a thematic verbal discourse is undermined by a romanticising visual frame.

The coding procedure combines deduction and induction. The predefined categories of frame analysis and CDA are applied deductively, but the grid also admits inductive coding, allowing new categories to emerge from the data; this proved essential for the Cecchetti case, where novel discursive tropes - notably the formula *figlio sano del patriarcato* (healthy son of patriarchy) - required codes absent from earlier studies of Italian femicide reporting. To strengthen reliability (Krippendorff, 2018), the grid was tested on a pilot sample

of ten articles, a preliminary phase that allowed ambiguous categories to be refined so that the instrument could function as a robust bridge between the corpus and the interpretative analysis.

2.4.2 Analytical categories and indicators

To convert the theoretical framework into a functional instrument, its abstract concepts must be tied to observable features of the texts through a process of operationalisation. As Holsti (1969) argues, a rigorous content analysis requires categories that are exhaustive, mutually exclusive and derived from a consistent theoretical rationale; the indicators used here are accordingly grouped into four clusters. The lexical-semantic cluster tracks the frequency and context of two competing vocabularies: a traditional, mitigating lexicon that pathologises or romanticises the killing - *raptus*, *folia*, *gelosia* (jealousy), *gigante buono* (gentle giant), *amore malato* (sick love) - whose presence indicates episodic framing and the persistence of the crime-of-passion myth; and a transformative, structural lexicon - *patriarcato*, *femminicidio*, *violenza di genere* (gender-based violence), *cultura del possesso* (culture of possession) - whose appearance, especially in headlines and leads, signals a thematic shift.

The syntactic-relational cluster operationalises transitivity in order to measure the attribution of responsibility. High responsibility is indicated by agentive salience, the use of the perpetrator as the active subject of transitive verbs (“Turetta killed”, “he kidnapped”); its mitigation is indicated by agency suppression through the passive voice (“Giulia was killed”), nominalisation (“the death of Giulia”) and intransitive constructions (“she died”, “the tragedy occurred”), which together effect the linguistic erasure of the aggressor by shifting attention from the act to its outcome. The rhetorical-narrative cluster measures *himpathy* (Manne, 2017; Saccà & Carbonari, 2026) through the descriptive qualifiers applied to the perpetrator: humanising modifiers such as *fragile*, *timido* (shy), *educato* (polite) or *bravo ragazzo* (good boy) signal a sympathetic bias, while the “promising future” trope - references to his studies, hobbies or prospective career - reframes the crime as a loss of potential for the aggressor rather than a violation of the victim’s rights, measuring the degree to

which the press rehabilitates the image of the killer. The multimodal-visual cluster, derived from Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), records visual proximity and gaze - close-up shots of the victim as an index of sentimentalisation, “normal” settings for the perpetrator as an index of normalisation - together with inter-semiotic friction markers that register the mismatch between a thematic headline and a romantic image, an index of the media’s internal contradiction between institutional correctness and sensationalist appeal. By fixing these indicators, the analysis secures coding stability: the term *raptus* is consistently coded as a mitigating lexical marker, the passive description of the killing consistently as agency suppression. As Krippendorff (2018) insists, the validity of the results rests on demonstrating that such indicators are not chosen arbitrarily but are grounded in the pervasive patterns of the discourse analysed.

2.4.3 Coding and interpretation process

The final stage of the methodology applies the grid through a structured process that transforms raw journalistic data into interpretable evidence, following the principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) in order to move beyond description towards an account of the ideological structures underlying the reporting. The coding proceeds through three stages. In open coding, each article is read in full to identify raw discursive fragments, highlighting keywords, noting the principal visual subjects and registering the tone of the piece, while remaining open to unanticipated indicators such as the emergence of the “noise” metaphor inspired by Elena Cecchetti’s words. In axial coding, these initial codes are grouped into the predefined categories established in Section 2.4.2, so that instances of agency suppression, for example, can be clustered and tested for correlation with particular outlets or particular phases of the case. In selective coding, the core categories that define the corpus are identified and the “Cecchetti effect” is empirically mapped, as the analysis traces the transition from the crime-of-passion theme to the patriarchy theme and selects the most representative articles that illustrate this discursive turning point.

Triangulation is a critical component of the interpretation. Internal triangulation checks for consistency between headline, lead and accompanying photograph, recording a semiotic dissonance where a structural critique in the text is paired with a romanticising image; external triangulation compares the Italian sub-corpus with the Anglophone sub-corpus of *The Guardian*, the *BBC* and *The New York Times*, in order to determine whether the patriarchy discourse was a specifically Italian reaction or part of a broader transnational shift. To ensure stability - the consistency of the coder over time (Krippendorff, 2018) - a test-retest procedure was applied, with a tenth of the corpus re-coded after four weeks to confirm that the initial interpretations held, while a standardised spreadsheet database served as a procedural audit trail allowing any external reviewer to retrace the logic of each coding decision. Following the tenets of critical discourse analysis, the interpretation also attends to discursive absences, asking what is not said or shown: the replacement of the perpetrator's name in headlines by "the boyfriend" or "the student" is read as a choice that deflects individual accountability, and the absence of *patriarcato* from certain conservative outlets as a strategic omission that preserves a traditional, episodic view of femicide. Together, the mixed coding grid and the three-stage protocol provide a robust foundation for the analytical chapters that follow, ensuring that the findings presented in Chapter 3 are not anecdotal but the result of a systematic, transparent and replicable interrogation of the media discourse, adequate to the historical significance of the Giulia Cecchettin case.

Chapter 3. The discursive construction of the Giulia Cecchettin case in the media

The preceding chapters established the conceptual coordinates of this study: femicide as the gendered killing of women, the framing repertoires through which the press has historically rendered such killings intelligible, and the feminist critique of a journalism that has tended to privatise, romanticise and depoliticise male violence (Meyers, 1997; Boyle, 2005; Gill, 2007). This chapter brings those coordinates to bear on a single, unusually dense case. Drawing on a purposive corpus of one hundred articles - ninety published by seven Italian outlets and ten by three Anglophone outlets - it asks whether the coverage of the killing of Giulia Cecchettin, the twenty-two-year-old engineering student murdered by her former partner Filippo Turetta on 11 November 2023, represents a genuine discursive turning point in the Italian mediation of gender-based violence, or whether the established interpretative grammar persisted beneath a renovated surface vocabulary. The analysis is organised thematically rather than outlet by outlet, on the premise that a discursive turning point, if it occurred, would manifest not in the editorial line of any single newspaper but in the framing, language, visual strategies and ethical practices that the coverage shared and contested across the field.

The argument developed across the chapter is that the case constitutes a real but partial and uneven rupture. The pivot can be dated and attributed with unusual precision: the letter written by the victim's sister, Elena Cecchettin, and published on 20 November 2023, supplied a fully formed structural frame - femicide as a "crime of power" rather than passion, the perpetrator as a "healthy son of patriarchy" rather than a monster - that the press could neither ignore nor easily contain. Within days, the lexicon of *femminicidio* ('femicide') and *patriarcato* ('patriarchy') migrated from feminist and activist registers into mainstream headlines and editorials, including those of outlets ideologically hostile to that vocabulary. Yet this lexical and interpretative shift was not matched by a transformation of the deeper discursive machinery. Agency-suppressing transitivity, the *raptus* repertoire of sudden and inexplicable

derangement, empathetic attention to the perpetrator's suffering and respectability (Manne, 2017), the aestheticising and dissonant use of photographs, and a sustained traffic in morbid forensic detail and private material all persisted - and around the release of Turetta's confession in June 2024 they intensified. The turning point, in short, is located at the level of explicit naming and editorial interpretation rather than at the level of narrative and visual structure. A second, related finding threads through the analysis: the Cecchetti family, and Elena in particular, did not function merely as sources but as meta-discursive actors who contested the media's framing in real time and partly compelled its revision.

Throughout the thesis, journalistic genre is treated as consequentially as the outlet itself. The corpus repeatedly shows the same newspaper hosting a structural, patriarchy-naming editorial alongside a news report saturated with the very mitigation devices that that editorial denounces. Reading the coverage as an internally contradictory field, rather than as a set of homogeneous editorial lines, is essential to grasping both the achievement and the limits of the shift.

3.1 Corpus composition and newspaper positioning

Because newspapers are not interchangeable containers of information but institutions with distinct histories, audiences and ideological commitments, the interpretation of any pattern in the coverage depends on knowing where each outlet sits within the Italian media system. The corpus was therefore assembled not as a random sample but as a purposive one, designed to span the principal axes along which Italian femicide discourse is differentiated: the centre-left/centre-right cleavage of the national press, the divide between legacy and digital-native journalism, the distinction between commercial and public-service broadcasting, and the difference between national and local proximity to the event. The Anglophone outlets were added for external comparison. The aim of this composition is not statistical representativeness, which a purposive design cannot claim, but analytical comprehensiveness: by holding the same event constant and varying the institutional vantage point, the

corpus makes the ideological and professional determinants of femicide framing visible in a way a single-outlet study could not.

Two national newspapers anchor the corpus and were each allotted twenty articles, double the share of the other Italian outlets. *Corriere della Sera* is the country's paper of record, a Milan-based daily of broad mainstream readership traditionally associated with a moderate, centre-liberal orientation and an establishment, agenda-setting authority: what it frames as the meaning of an event tends to become the terms of national debate. *La Repubblica*, founded as an explicitly centre-left oriented national daily, occupies the progressive position and has long been a leading forum for debate on social and gender issues, which makes it the outlet in which a structural, feminist reading of femicide would be most expected to find institutional space. Assigning these two titles a larger number of articles reflects their disproportionate role in shaping national public discourse: a turning point that did not register in *Corriere* and *Repubblica* could hardly be called a turning point in the Italian mediation of the case at all, and their internal heterogeneity - each runs both sensationalist crime reporting and structural editorialising - makes them the decisive site for testing this study's central claim about the gap between surface vocabulary and deep structure.

Two further national titles, *Libero* and *Il Giornale*, were included precisely because their conservative editorial orientation supplies the ideological counter-position against which the structural frame can be measured. Both are combative, opinion-driven papers of the political right, and their value to the analysis is diagnostic: they reveal which elements of the emerging femicide vocabulary were genuinely consensual and which remained contested, since a frame that even hostile outlets feel compelled to engage has achieved a different kind of penetration from one confined to sympathetic pages. Their coverage also foregrounds alternative framings - the perpetrator's family as victims of online hatred, the critique of "ideological exploitation", scepticism toward the very category of *femminicidio* - that clarify, by contrast, the assumptions of the dominant account.

The corpus then widens beyond the national commercial press along three further axes. *Il Mattino di Padova*, a local daily covering the area in which Giulia Cecchettin lived and was killed, offers direct geographical proximity to the case; its inclusion captures community-level reporting practices, the texture of local mourning, and a closeness to the family and the territory that the national outlets lack, while also exposing the particular ethical pressures that proximity creates. *Il Post*, a digital-native publication without a print legacy, represents a distinct journalistic culture: explanatory, contextual and self-consciously analytical, it tends to prioritise structural background over event-by-event drama, and it therefore functions in the analysis as something close to a control condition - a demonstration of what disciplined, de-sensationalised femicide reporting can look like within the same national context. Rai News, the online news service of the public-service broadcaster, carries an institutional mandate of impartiality and public interest; assessing how public-service journalism handles a femicide is important both because of its reach and because its institutional position ought, in principle, to align it with the dignity-centred standards of professional guidelines.

Finally, ten articles from three Anglophone outlets - *The Guardian*, the BBC and *The New York Times* - were included for exploratory external comparison rather than as a symmetrical second sample. Their function is to provide a vantage point from outside the Italian media system from which the nationally specific features of the Italian coverage - above all its empathetic and sensationalist conventions - become more clearly visible, and to test whether the discursive shift catalysed within Italy was legible, and how it was inflected when refracted through a foreign press. The asymmetry of the sample (ten articles against ninety) is deliberate and its comparative claims are correspondingly modest.

3.2 Italian media narratives

3.2.1 Dominant and secondary frames

Framing, a notion rooted in Goffman's (1974) account of the frames through which experience is organised and given its canonical media formulation by

Entman (1993), involves selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient so as to promote a particular definition of a problem and its causes; in the journalistic context, Iyengar's (1991) distinction between episodic and thematic framing specifies two characteristic options - the isolated event and the structural pattern - with divergent implications for the attribution of responsibility. The dominant frame of the earliest Cecchetti coverage was episodic in precisely this sense, and the contrast between outlets is visible from the first reports of the disappearance. The *Corriere della Sera* report titled «L'urlo di Giulia Cecchetti, l'ultimo messaggio, il panino, la lite: cosa sappiamo della scomparsa degli ex fidanzati» ('The cry of Giulia Cecchetti, the last message, the sandwich, the quarrel: what we know about the disappearance of the former partners') (*Corriere della Sera*, 15 November 2023) opens not with the perpetrator but with the victim's cry, staging the event as an enigma of the human heart. Its lead reads:

«C'è quell'urlo di Giulia: «Lasciami!». Il litigio, una spinta, lei che sale contro voglia nella Punto.»

'There is that scream of Giulia's: "Let me go!". The quarrel, a shove, she who gets into the Punto against her will.'

Across the opening three paragraphs of this report the perpetrator is not named at all, and the prose remains uniformly passive. The killing is glossed as *la storia semplice di questi due giovani universitari* ('the simple story of these two university students'), and the interpretative energy is turned inward, toward what might have "snapped" in the young man's mind. Selection and salience here work to individualise and psychologise; structural causation is not so much rejected as rendered invisible. The same event, the disappearance, was framed very differently elsewhere. The local *Il Mattino di Padova*, under «Scomparsa coppia di ragazzi, il testimone: Giulia urlava e Filippo la tratteneva. Poi più nulla» ('A young couple missing, the witness: Giulia was screaming and Filippo was holding her back. Then nothing more') (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 13 November 2023), foregrounds a witness account of restraint and a screaming woman, while *Il Giornale*, in «Le urla, la lite, la scia di sangue. Ma di Giulia e Filippo non c'è traccia» ('The screams, the quarrel, the trail of blood. But of Giulia and

Filippo there is no trace') (*Il Giornale*, 14 November 2023), aestheticises the same facts into a sequence of sensational fragments. The shared lexicon of *lite* ('quarrel') and *coppia* ('couple') across these openings already encodes the episodic, romance-inflected frame that the structural reading would later have to dislodge.

Against this baseline, the corpus documents a rapid and traceable migration toward a thematic frame. The earliest and most disciplined exponent of this frame is the digital-native outlet *Il Post*, which in «La storia del femminicidio di Giulia Cecchettin, dall'inizio» ('The story of the femicide of Giulia Cecchettin, from the beginning') (*Il Post*, 20 November 2023) used *femminicidio* not as a contested political term but as the default descriptive noun, glossing it explicitly for its readers:

«Tutte le informazioni disponibili fanno pensare che quello di Cecchettin sia stato un femminicidio, cioè un omicidio conseguenza di violenze [...] che derivano da una dinamica di potere e controllo alimentata da stereotipi e aspettative di genere.»

'All the available information suggests that Cecchettin's was a femicide, that is, a killing resulting from violence [...] arising from a dynamic of power and control fuelled by gender stereotypes and expectations.'

Il Post's consistency - the term recurs from the killing through the funeral in «I funerali di Giulia Cecchettin a Padova» ('Giulia Cecchettin's funeral in Padua') (*Il Post*, 5 December 2023) to the trial in «Inizia il processo contro Filippo Turetta» ('The trial against Filippo Turetta begins') (*Il Post*, 23 September 2024) - furnishes an internal benchmark against which the hesitation of the legacy press becomes visible. Where *Il Post* names the structural category from the outset, *Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* reach it largely through their editorial and opinion pages while their news reporting lags behind, a genre split to which the chapter returns repeatedly.

The decisive accelerant of this migration was not a journalistic decision but an external intervention. Elena Cecchettin's letter, published under the title «La lettera di Elena Cecchettin: "I 'mostri' non sono malati, sono figli sani del patriarcato"» ('Elena Cecchettin's letter: "The 'monsters' are not sick, they are

the healthy sons of patriarchy””) (Elena Cecchetti, *Corriere della Sera*, 20 November 2023), reframed the entire interpretative field in a few sentences:

«Turetta viene spesso definito come mostro [...] invece mostro non è. Un mostro è un'eccezione, una persona esterna alla società [...] E invece la responsabilità c'è. I «mostri» non sono malati, sono figli sani del patriarcato, della cultura dello stupro. [...] Il femminicidio non è un delitto passionale, è un delitto di potere.»

‘Turetta is often described as a monster [...] but a monster he is not. A monster is an exception, a person external to society [...] And yet the responsibility is there. The “monsters” are not sick; they are the healthy sons of patriarchy, of rape culture. [...] Femicide is not a crime of passion, it is a crime of power.’

The discursive force of this passage lies in its surgical dismantling of the episodic frame’s central trope. The figure of the “monster”, which permits society to externalise responsibility, is named precisely so that it can be refused; the alternative offered is not pathology but normality - *figli sani*, ‘healthy sons’ - which relocates the explanation from the individual psyche to the social order, exactly the move from episodic to thematic framing that Iyengar (1991) associates with a shift in attributed responsibility. The explicit negation *non è un delitto passionale, è un delitto di potere* (‘it is not a crime of passion, it is a crime of power’) directly contests the lexicon the news pages were simultaneously deploying. That a newspaper of record handed its front page to this counter-frame, in the victim’s family’s own words, is the single most consequential editorial act in the corpus: the letter is not so much reported on as it sets the terms within which subsequent reporting must position itself.

The uptake of the structural frame can be measured by tracing the letter’s circulation across the ideological spectrum within a single news cycle. *Il Post* embedded it within its own definitional apparatus in «La lettera di Elena Cecchetti sul femminicidio di sua sorella» (‘Elena Cecchetti’s letter on the femicide of her sister’) (*Il Post*, 20 November 2023); most tellingly, the conservative *Libero* reported it under «Giulia Cecchetti, la sorella: “Turetta figlio sano della società patriarcale”» (‘Giulia Cecchetti, the sister: “Turetta a healthy son of patriarchal society”’) (*Libero*, 20 November 2023), reproducing

Elena's words faithfully but immediately surrounding them with a counter-discourse, observing that some of her claims had been *molto criticate sui social da chi non accetta stereotipizzazioni e generalizzazioni* ('heavily criticised on social media by those who do not accept stereotyping and generalisations') and characterising the letter itself as an *attacco* ('attack'). The lexical choice reframes an analytical claim as an act of aggression, and the appeal to anonymous social-media dissent licenses scepticism while preserving deniability - a textbook instance of the ideological management of an unwelcome proposition through lexicalisation and the orchestration of voices (van Dijk, 1988; Fairclough, 1995). That even an outlet predisposed to reject the patriarchy thesis nonetheless felt obliged to report it indexes how quickly the structural frame became unavoidable: it had to be engaged, even if only to be neutralised.

The thematic frame consolidated across the corpus's editorial and opinion genres, where authorship carries interpretative weight. In his editorial «Patriarcato, siamo tutti responsabili» ('Patriarchy, we are all responsible') (Luigi Manconi, *La Repubblica*, 28 November 2023), Manconi generalises responsibility outward in terms that explicitly echo Elena's argument: «*Un sistema mentale come il patriarcato non si manifesta solo nei crimini efferati [...]: vive anche del silenzio e della connivenza di tutti*» ('A mental system like patriarchy does not manifest itself only in heinous crimes [...]: it lives also on the silence and complicity of all'). Almost a year later, in «Quel rumore negato per Giulia Cecchettin» ('That denied noise for Giulia Cecchettin') (Michela Marzano, *La Repubblica*, 11 November 2024), Marzano reasserts the same frame against the rhetoric of love, insisting that the possessive script of «*sei mia*» ('you are mine') is *l'opposto esatto dell'amore* ('the exact opposite of love'). At *Corriere della Sera*, Aldo Cazzullo's editorial «Un tornante nella storia: perché l'assassinio di Giulia, e il discorso del padre, hanno cambiato le cose» ('A hairpin bend in history: why Giulia's murder, and her father's speech, changed things') (Aldo Cazzullo, *Corriere della Sera*, 6 December 2023) registers the perception of a turning point in its very title. The editorial genre, in short,

achieved a near-consensus around the structural frame that the news genre never matched.

The persistence of the episodic frame, and of the secondary frames clustered around it, is therefore best understood as a phenomenon of news reporting rather than of the press as a whole. Two secondary frames are especially durable. The first is the *raptus* frame of sudden, involuntary derangement, sustained lexically by the recurrent formula that something “snapped” - reported in «La confessione fiume di Filippo Turetta e i punti oscuri: “in testa mi è scattato qualcosa”» (‘Filippo Turetta’s lengthy confession and the obscure points: “something snapped in my head”’) (*Corriere della Sera*, 2 December 2023), which notes that the claim *tiene viva la strada di un gesto improvviso, non premeditato* (‘keeps alive the possibility of a sudden, unpremeditated act’). The second is the romance frame, the construction of the killing as the tragic terminus of a love story, to which the visual and linguistic analysis below returns. The crucial longitudinal point is that the judicial process ultimately repudiated the *raptus* frame: the court found premeditation and imposed a life sentence, as reported in «Delitto Giulia Cecchettin, ergastolo a Filippo Turetta. I giudici: “Premeditato”» (‘Giulia Cecchettin murder, life sentence for Filippo Turetta. The judges: “Premeditated”’) (*Corriere della Sera*, 3 December 2024). The gap between an early news discourse that flirted with the language of involuntary impulse and a verdict that found cold planning measures the distance between the press’s instinctive interpretative reflexes and the evidentiary record.

3.2.2 Representation of the victim and the voices of the family

The discursive construction of Giulia Cecchettin oscillates between two impulses in unresolved tension: a humanising personalisation that renders her grievable, in Butler’s (2009) sense of a life whose loss can be publicly mourned, and a sensationalising objectification that subordinates her to the drama of her own death. The humanising impulse is most visible in the signed feature «Giulia Cecchettin, la malattia della mamma e l’intelligenza sopra la media. Filippo Turetta, la famiglia “quadrata” e la pallavolo: le tappe della loro relazione»

(‘Giulia Cecchettin, her mother’s illness and her above-average intelligence. Filippo Turetta, the “solid” family and volleyball: the stages of their relationship’) (Marco Imarisio, *Corriere della Sera*, 20 November 2023), whose biographical detail individuates the victim and invites identification. Against a long history of femicide victims reduced to a name and a number (Meyers, 1997), this specificity performs a restorative function. Yet the same article’s symmetrical curiosity about the perpetrator’s “solid family” and sporting life already hints at the slippage by which humanising attention migrates from victim to killer.

Giulia Cecchettin, la malattia della mamma e l'intelligenza sopra la media. Filippo Turetta, la famiglia «quadrata» e la pallavolo: le tappe della loro relazione

 di Marco Imarisio

La mamma morta di Giulia. La passione per le moto e il trekking di Filippo, «il tubo». I messaggi ossessivi, ogni sera, dalla fine della relazione



Figure 1: *Corriere della Sera*, 20 November 2023

Uncontrolled, the humanising impulse slides into an aestheticisation of suffering. The clearest instance is the report «Il massacro di Giulia Cecchettin, il corpo trovato in fondo a un dirupo. Ha provato a difendersi, uccisa a coltellate» (‘The massacre of Giulia Cecchettin, the body found at the bottom of a ravine. She tried to defend herself, killed by stabbing’) (*La Repubblica*, 19 November 2023), which renders the discovery of the body in a register that is almost fairy-tale-like:

«In un posto da innamorati, con il foliage da fotografare, il lago, le montagne, un posto sperduto e magico dove ieri è stato ritrovato il cadavere della ragazza [...] In più, il sangue cristallizzato dal freddo.»

‘In a lovers’ spot, with the foliage to photograph, the lake, the mountains, a remote and magical place where yesterday the girl’s body was found [...] And on top of that, the blood crystallised by the cold.’



Figure 2: *La Repubblica*, 19 November 2023

The landscape is lyricised - *magico, da innamorati* ('magical', 'for lovers') - and the corpse is composed into a scene, the crystallised blood converting a forensic fact into an image of cold beauty (Meyers, 1997; Boyle, 2005). The phrase *posto da innamorati* is doubly damaging, importing the romance frame into the description of the killing site itself. The aestheticising choice stands out sharply when the same event is compared across outlets: *Il Post* reported the discovery under the flat, agentive-where-possible headline «È stato trovato il corpo di Giulia Cecchettin» ('Giulia Cecchettin's body has been found') (*Il Post*, 18 November 2023); the local *Il Mattino di Padova* confined itself to geography in «Trovato il corpo di Giulia Cecchettin in un canalone fra Piancavallo e Barcis» ('Giulia Cecchettin's body found in a gully between Piancavallo and Barcis') (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 18 November 2023); and Rai News combined location with an agentless passive in «Il corpo di Giulia ritrovato in un canalone. Uccisa con più coltellate» ('Giulia's body found in a gully. Killed with multiple stab wounds') (*Rai News*, 19 November 2023). The contrast demonstrates that the lyricised

treatment was an authorial and editorial choice, not a constraint imposed by the facts.

A subtler mode of subordination foregrounds trivial details that carry an implicit evaluative charge. The observation that Giulia paid for the couple's last meal recurs across outlets as a hard-news "fact" - in the *Repubblica* headline «Giulia Cecchettin ha lottato per 25 minuti contro il suo carnefice. E pagò lei l'ultima cena» ('Giulia Cecchettin fought for 25 minutes against her executioner. And it was she who paid for the last supper') (*La Repubblica*, 21 November 2023) and in the *Giornale* headline «Filippo Turetta si è fatto pagare la cena da Giulia Cecchettin. Poi l'ha massacrata per 22 minuti» ('Filippo Turetta got Giulia Cecchettin to pay for dinner. Then he massacred her for 22 minutes') (*Il Giornale*, 22 November 2023). The detail performs no evidential work; its function is affective, generating a frisson of incongruity that aestheticises the killing while doing nothing to explain it - and, in the comparison, exposes the shared tabloid reflex of two ideologically opposed papers.

It is precisely against this construction that the victim's family intervened, and their interventions are best understood not as ordinary sourcing but as a sustained effort to reframe the coverage from within. In the interview «Elena Cecchettin: "Non ricordate Giulia solo come la vittima del suo assassino"» ('Elena Cecchettin: "Do not remember Giulia only as the victim of her killer"') (Concita De Gregorio, *La Repubblica*, 24 December 2023), Elena refused the reduction of her sister to the status of object-of-a-killing:

«E neppure vorrei che mia sorella fosse ricordata solo in relazione al suo assassino: è morta perché voleva essere indipendente, per la sua libertà. È un paradosso che il suo nome resti legato a quello di chi l'ha uccisa.»

'Nor would I want my sister to be remembered only in relation to her killer: she died because she wanted to be independent, for her freedom. It is a paradox that her name remains tied to that of the man who killed her.'

This is a remarkable act of discursive resistance. Elena identifies the structural effect of the coverage - the welding of victim to perpetrator - and reattributes agency to Giulia, recasting her death as the consequence of an aspiration to autonomy rather than the by-product of a man's love. The reframing converts

Giulia from the passive grammatical patient of the news reports into the subject of her own life project, and in doing so it directly attacks the romance frame's foundational presupposition. That this counter-construction had to be articulated by a family member, in an interview, rather than emerging from the reporting itself, measures how far the dominant construction tended in the opposite direction.

The father, Gino Cecchettin, performed a complementary discursive role, redirecting attention from grief to collective male responsibility. At the funeral, reported under «Il papà ai funerali di Giulia: “Noi uomini in prima linea contro la violenza sulle donne”» ('The father at Giulia's funeral: “We men on the front line against violence against women”') (Francesco Furlan, *Il Mattino di Padova*, 5 December 2023), he framed men as the primary agents of change; at the sentencing, reported in «Processo Cecchettin, ergastolo a Filippo Turetta» ('Cecchettin trial, life sentence for Filippo Turetta') (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 3 December 2024), he called *famiglia, scuola e politica* ('family, school and politics') to account. The Anglophone coverage rendered the same intervention in the register of structural critique, reporting his insistence that gender violence is a collective failure rather than a private matter in «‘We need a cultural revolution’: femicide victim's family seek change in Italy» (*The Guardian*, 26 November 2024). The two Cecchettin voices thus divided the discursive labour: Elena dismantled the monster-passion frame and defended her sister's autonomy, while Gino converted private mourning into a public summons to men, and together they supplied the press with a ready-made structural vocabulary that the more progressive editorials then amplified. Their prominence is itself a marker of the turning point: the interpretative initiative passed, for a decisive interval, from the newsroom to the bereaved.

3.2.3 Representation of the perpetrator and the operation of himpathy

If the victim is constructed through an unstable oscillation, the perpetrator is constructed through a remarkably stable repertoire of mitigation, best read through Manne's (2017) concept of himpathy - the disproportionate sympathy extended to male perpetrators of gendered harm, frequently at the victim's

expense. Himpathy operates in the corpus through four overlapping devices: the “good boy” topos, the psychologisation of intent, the foregrounding of the perpetrator’s suffering, and his self-construction as a remorseful subject.

The “good boy” topos is pervasive and is typically voiced through proxy speakers whose testimony the press relays without distance. Its clearest formulation appears in «“Filippo? Dottor Jekyll e mister Hyde”. Lo choc dell’allenatore di pallavolo» (“Filippo? Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde”. The shock of the volleyball coach’) (*Il Giornale*, 20 November 2023), in which the coach recalls *un ragazzo d’oro* (‘a golden boy’). The Jekyll-and-Hyde figure, which recurs in «Giulia sparita, la vita segreta del fidanzato Filippo» (‘Giulia vanished, the secret life of her boyfriend Filippo’) (*Libero*, 18 November 2023), is itself a himpathetic device: it splits the perpetrator into a true, benign self and an aberrant, transient other, preserving the “real” Filippo as innocent. The same logic underwrites the *doppia faccia* (‘double face’) of the *bravo ragazzo* (‘good boy’) invoked in «Giulia Cecchetti è morta per uno “shock emorragico”: dalla cena alle 26 ferite, cosa è successo ora per ora» (‘Giulia Cecchetti died of a “haemorrhagic shock”: from the dinner to the 26 wounds, what happened hour by hour’) (*Corriere della Sera*, 22 November 2023). The device offers the reader a stable, sympathetic identity for the perpetrator that the act itself ought to have dissolved.

The psychologisation of intent is the lexical heart of himpathy, relocating the killing from the domain of choice to that of medical accident. Turetta’s father supplies its most graphic versions: in the interview «Il papà di Filippo Turetta: “È mio figlio, ma quasi preferivo che la cosa finisse in un altro modo”» (‘Filippo Turetta’s father: “He is my son, but I almost would have preferred that the thing had ended another way”’) (D’Este and Merlin, *Corriere della Sera*, 19 November 2023), and in the report «Filippo Turetta, domani l’interrogatorio del pm. Il padre: “Non so cosa gli sia preso, forse gli è saltato un embolo”» (‘Filippo Turetta, tomorrow the prosecutor’s questioning. The father: “I don’t know what came over him, perhaps an embolism went off”’) (*La Repubblica*, 30 November 2023). Reporting a parent’s words is legitimate; the difficulty is that the news

genre frequently adopts the same register in its own voice, lending the *raptus* hypothesis its authority - an authority the court would later withdraw.

The third device, the foregrounding of the perpetrator's suffering, produces the corpus's most flagrant himpathetic moments, and they are concentrated not in the conservative press but in *Corriere della Sera*. The commentary «Giulia Cecchettin, nessuno tocchi Filippo Turetta: uno Stato deve garantire giustizia e non praticare la vendetta» ('Giulia Cecchettin, let no one touch Filippo Turetta: a State must guarantee justice and not practise vengeance') (Francesco Chiamulera, *Corriere della Sera*, 28 November 2023) performs the operation in its headline: although framed as a principled defence of due process, its rhetorical effect is to make the perpetrator the object of the reader's protective solicitude, displacing the victim from the position the headline nominally reserves for her. The pattern recurs in the coverage of Turetta's prison reunion with his parents, and a direct comparison of the two legacy dailies on this single event is revealing. *Corriere's* «Filippo Turetta incontra i genitori: gli abbracci, le lacrime, "non ti abbiamo abbandonato"» ('Filippo Turetta meets his parents: the embraces, the tears, "we have not abandoned you"') (*Corriere della Sera*, 4 December 2023) dwells on his fragility:

«Le stesse [cautele] che [...] gli altri detenuti [...] hanno scelto di adottare per preservare il 21enne: cambiare canale quando si parla di lui, far sparire articoli e giornali sul caso dalle parti comuni.»

'The same [protective measures] that [...] the other inmates [...] chose to adopt to shield the twenty-one-year-old: changing the channel when he is discussed, making articles and newspapers about the case disappear from the common areas.'

La Repubblica covered the identical episode in near-identical terms, down to the same closing quotation from the father, in «In carcere a Verona il lungo abbraccio di Filippo Turetta con i genitori. Il padre alle guardie: "Grazie per prendervi cura di lui"» ('In the Verona prison the long embrace of Filippo Turetta with his parents. The father to the guards: "Thank you for taking care of him"') (*La Repubblica*, 3 December 2023). That two centre and centre-left dailies independently selected the same affect-laden human-interest angle on the

same day demonstrates that the himpathetic treatment of this episode was a shared reflex of the legacy press rather than the idiosyncrasy of a single title.

In carcere a Verona il lungo abbraccio di Filippo Turetta con i genitori. Il padre alle guardie: “Grazie per prendervi cura di lui”

dal nostro inviato Rosario Di Raimondo

Il primo incontro dopo l'arresto e l'interrogatorio del giovane che ha confessato l'assassinio di Giulia Cecchettin: più lacrime che parole



Figure 3: *La Repubblica*, 3 December 2023

The fourth device is the perpetrator's self-construction, transmitted at length. Turetta's prison letter, reproduced in both «La lettera di Filippo Turetta dalla Germania: “Non sono cattivo, non merito perdono. Così ho provato a suicidarmi, ma non ce l'ho fatta”» ('Filippo Turetta's letter from Germany: “I am not evil, I do not deserve forgiveness. So I tried to take my own life, but I did not manage it”') (*Corriere della Sera*, 3 December 2024) and «La lettera di Filippo Turetta ai genitori: “Non sono cattivo. Merito odio e il carcere a vita”» ('Filippo Turetta's letter to his parents: “I am not evil. I deserve hatred and life in prison”') (*Rai News*, 24 September 2024), centres his remorse and his forfeited future - the degree he will not finish, the family he will not have - inviting the reader to mourn a future the victim will never have. The asymmetry is compounded in the Rai News treatment, across which the victim is barely named, so that the perpetrator's remorse is rendered while Giulia is grammatically marginal to it. The asymmetry of nomination - the perpetrator fully individuated as a suffering subject, the victim effaced - is himpathy realised at the level of textual architecture, and it inverts the relation of grievability that Butler (2009) makes central to the public recognition of a life.

La lettera di Filippo Turetta ai genitori: "Non sono cattivo. Merito odio e il carcere a vita"

Scritta dopo l'arresto in Germania prima di essere trasferito in Italia. "Meglio un figlio morto che uno come me"

24/09/2024



Figure 4: Rai News, 24 September 2024

The corpus also differentiates outlets in the *direction* of their himpathy. Where Corriere della Sera and La Repubblica extend sympathy to the perpetrator through affect and psychologisation, the conservative press redirects it toward his family and toward a complaint about the case's politicisation. The commentary «Giulia Cecchetti, perché il dramma è doppio: l'odio contro i genitori di Filippo» ('Giulia Cecchetti, why the tragedy is double: the hatred against Filippo's parents') (Giordano Tedoldi, *Liberò*, 17 November 2023) frames Turetta's parents as themselves victims of online hatred, while «Il padre a Filippo Turetta: "Non sei uno che ammazza, hai avuto un momento di debolezza"» ('The father to Filippo Turetta: "You're not someone who kills, you had a moment of weakness"') (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 27 July 2024) relays, without rebuttal, the father's extraordinary minimisation, «Non sei l'unico. Ci sono stati parecchi altri» ('You're not the only one. There have been quite a few others'). The appeal to the ubiquity of femicide here functions not to indict a structural problem but to dilute individual responsibility - a striking inversion of the very statistic the structural frame mobilises.

3.3 Anglophone media narratives

3.3.1 Frames and discursive strategies

The Anglophone corpus is small and serves an exploratory, complementary function rather than grounding a symmetrical international comparison; its value lies in providing an external vantage point from which the contours of the Italian coverage become more sharply visible. Its most striking feature is frame homogeneity. Where the Italian field is internally divided between episodic news reporting and thematic editorialising, the Anglophone coverage is uniformly thematic, and the structural lexicon appears in the headline of each article. The Guardian announces a national reckoning in «Anger across Italy as killing of student highlights country's femicide rate» (*The Guardian*, 25 November 2023), and the BBC frames the case from the outset as a catalyst in «Giulia Cecchettin's killing sparks Italian reckoning over femicide» (*BBC News*, 24 November 2023). The category “femicide”, which the Italian news pages approached only gradually, is the Anglophone default; in Iyengar's (1991) terms, the Anglophone coverage begins where the most progressive Italian editorials end.



Figure 5: *BBC News*, 24 November 2023

Crucially, the Anglophone outlets adopted Elena Cecchettin's frame as their primary interpretative key, treating it as the case's authoritative meaning. The Guardian reports that Elena had linked her sister's killing to the normalisation of

toxic male behaviour and described those who commit femicides as the “children” of patriarchy, and the BBC reproduces the formulation almost verbatim (*BBC News*, 24 November 2023). This matters for the central question: the discursive shift was not merely visible beyond Italy but was exported in the specific terms the family had supplied, confirming both the reality of the turning point and the family’s role as its author. A second distinctive strategy is the Anglophone press’s explicit thematisation of Italian journalistic practice as itself part of the problem. The Guardian quotes a representative of the anti-violence network Di.Re directly criticising the Italian media’s himpathetic conventions:

“In Italy we need to put an end to journalism that still emphasises the point of view of the murderer, explaining what motivated him to kill a woman [...] This kind of narrative carries on legitimising femicide as a reaction to a woman’s behaviour.”

(Quoted in *The Guardian*, “Anger across Italy as killing of student highlights country’s femicide rate”, 25 November 2023.)

Anger across Italy as killing of student highlights country’s femicide rate

Death of Giulia Cecchettin, 22, allegedly at hands of ex-boyfriend, casts spotlight on violence against women



Protesters in Naples carrying torches in memory of Cecchettin on Thursday. Photograph: Alessandro Garofalo/LaPresse/Shutterstock

Figure 6: *The Guardian*, 25 November 2023

This is a meta-discursive move with no equivalent in the Italian news pages: the coverage does not merely avoid the himpathetic frame but names it and attributes to it a legitimating function - the very critique that feminist media

scholarship has long levelled at crime reporting (Meyers, 1997; Boyle, 2005). The Guardian amplifies the point in «‘We need a cultural revolution’: femicide victim’s family seek change in Italy» (*The Guardian*, 26 November 2024) through Elena’s account of watching the case discussed on Italian television, where Filippo was depicted as a good boy who could never hurt a fly while the questions that mattered went unasked. The Anglophone coverage thus performs, in its reporting, the critique this chapter advances analytically.

3.3.2 Convergences and divergences with Italian media

The principal convergence is the shared destination of the structural frame. By the sentencing in December 2024, Italian and Anglophone outlets alike narrated the case as a femicide rooted in patriarchal culture and registered the political controversy that followed - in particular the education minister’s claim that patriarchy no longer existed in Italy - in «‘We need a cultural revolution’: femicide victim’s family seek change in Italy» (*The Guardian*, 26 November 2024), «Killer in femicide that shocked Italy sentenced to life in jail» (*BBC News*, 3 December 2024) and «Italian Man Given Life Sentence for Brutal Murder of Ex-Girlfriend» (*The New York Times*, 3 December 2024). On the interpretative plane, the two fields ended in substantial agreement.

The divergences are instructive. First, the Anglophone corpus is almost entirely free of the himpathetic and morbid registers that pervade the Italian news pages: there are no smiling couple photographs, no trekking portraits, no hour-by-hour reconstructions of the wounds, and no prison-reunion human-interest pieces. The perpetrator is named and his actions described, but he is not psychologised into a suffering subject. This suggests that the himpathetic repertoire is not an inevitable feature of femicide reporting but a culturally specific convention of a particular journalistic tradition (Gill, 2007). Two qualifications temper the contrast. The first is that agency suppression is not unique to the Italian press: even structurally framed Anglophone reports lapse into the agentless passive when describing the victim’s injuries, as when The New York Times notes that she had been stabbed more than seventy times (*The New York Times*, “Italian Man Given Life Sentence for Brutal Murder of

Ex-Girlfriend”, 3 December 2024), where the perpetrator vanishes from the clause - a transnational feature of crime reporting (Halliday, 1994; van Leeuwen, 1996). The second concerns the Anglophone framing of Italy itself. The BBC’s sources describe Italy as a deeply patriarchal and “backward” society (*BBC News*, “Giulia Cecchettin’s killing sparks Italian reckoning over femicide”, 24 November 2023), and *The New York Times* invokes “traditional gender roles” as a national characteristic in «Student’s Killing Pushes Italy to Confront Violence Against Women» (*The New York Times*, 22 November 2023). While not inaccurate, the cumulative effect is to construct Italian gender violence as the problem of a culturally backward elsewhere, an othering move that subtly exempts the Anglophone reader’s own society from the structural critique it endorses. The structural frame, exported, acquires a faint Orientalising inflection that the Italian self-critique does not share.

Student’s Killing Pushes Italy to Confront Violence Against Women

The case of Giulia Cecchettin, found dead days before she would have graduated, has prompted an outpouring of rage and debate on how to shift an entrenched culture of chauvinism.

 Share full article  



A vigil in Milan for Giulia Cecchettin, 22, who was missing for a week before her body was found in a ditch. Marco Ottico/LaPresse, via Associated Press

Figure 7: *The New York Times*, 22 November 2023

3.4 Linguistic analysis of news texts

If framing organises the macro-structure of meaning, it is realised in the micro-structure of language: in the choices of headline, clause, lexis and presupposition through which a text encodes its understanding of who did what to whom (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1988). This section treats the grammar of the coverage as the site where the contest between the passion frame and the patriarchy frame was waged most consequentially - and where the older repertoire proved most resistant to change.

3.4.1 Headlines and leads

Headlines concentrate a text's framing work in its most salient position (Entman, 1993), and the corpus's headlines fall into three types whose distribution maps onto the genre and ideological divisions traced above. The first is the agentless headline, which narrates the killing while deleting the killer. «Il corpo di Giulia ritrovato in un canalone. Uccisa con più coltellate» ('Giulia's body found in a gully. Killed with multiple stab wounds') (*Rai News*, 19 November 2023) names neither perpetrator nor agent; «Giulia Cecchettin è stata uccisa con coltellate alla testa e al collo. Poi lanciata in un dirupo. Turetta in fuga, l'auto avvistata in Austria» ('Giulia Cecchettin was killed with stab wounds to the head and neck. Then thrown into a ravine. Turetta on the run, the car sighted in Austria') (*La Repubblica*, 18 November 2023) stacks two agentless passives; and the nominalisation of «Il massacro di Giulia Cecchettin» ('The massacre of Giulia Cecchettin') (*La Repubblica*, 19 November 2023) transforms, in Halliday's (1994) terms, a material process that requires an actor into an entity that does not, so that the reader encounters a massacre that appears to have happened to Giulia rather than to have been done to her by an identifiable man.

Il corpo di Giulia ritrovato in un canalone. Uccisa con più coltellate

E' il risultato dell'esame esterno sul corpo effettuato dal medico legale Antonello Cirmelli. La vittima ha tentato una difesa disperata: la conferma viene da ferite alle mani e alle braccia

19/11/2023



La foto di Giulia Cecchettin postata dalla sorella su Facebook

Figure 8: *Rai News*, 19 November 2023

The second type is the perpetrator-voiced headline, which elevates the killer's words to the position of interpretative authority, as in «I 10 minuti in cui Filippo Turetta ha ucciso Giulia Cecchettin: "Lei era mia e solo mia, non poteva essere di altri"» ('The 10 minutes in which Filippo Turetta killed Giulia Cecchettin: "She was mine and only mine, she could not belong to others"') (*Corriere della Sera*, 3 December 2023) and «Giulia Cecchettin, "L'ho uccisa guardandola negli occhi. Voleva vivere senza di me"» ('Giulia Cecchettin, "I killed her looking into her eyes. She wanted to live without me"') (*La Repubblica*, 22 June 2024). Even as quotations, leading with the perpetrator's possessive logic grants him the narrative's opening word. A particularly damaging variant turns the victim's own words against her: «Gli ultimi messaggi di Giulia a Turetta: "Sei uno psicopatico". Lui aveva annotato un piano» ('Giulia's last messages to Turetta: "You're a psychopath". He had noted down a plan') (*Rai News*, 30 June 2024) sequences her accusation before his plan in a way that implies a causal chain, subtly relocating initiative to the victim. The third type, by contrast, is the structural headline that names the killing as femicide and ties it to a pattern, exemplified by *Il Post* and the Anglophone headlines discussed above. The distribution is genre-bound: agentless and perpetrator-voiced headlines dominate the news pages, structural headlines the explanatory and Anglophone reporting.

3.4.2 Lexical choices, agency and responsibility

At the level of the clause, the coverage exhibits a systematic management of agency through transitivity (Halliday, 1994) and the representation of social actors (van Leeuwen, 1996), achieved by three means: the agentless passive, nominalisation, and the promotion of abstractions to subject position. The agentless passive is pervasive in the early reporting, as in «È stato trovato il corpo di Giulia Cecchettin» ('Giulia Cecchettin's body has been found') (*Il Post*, 18 November 2023), whose body text states that she *era stata convinta o forzata a risalire sull'automobile* ('had been convinced or forced back into the car'), the conjoined passives evacuating the agent at the precise moment of coercion. Nominalisation performs the same erasure: when «Giulia Cecchettin tenta la fuga, Filippo Turetta la colpisce e la carica sull'auto inerme: cosa è successo e cosa si vede nel video» ('Giulia Cecchettin tries to flee, Filippo Turetta strikes her and loads her limp body into the car: what happened and what is seen in the video') (*Corriere della Sera*, 18 November 2023) reports that *sabato scorso è culminata la lite fra i due giovani* ('last Saturday the quarrel between the two young people culminated'), the noun *la lite* ('the quarrel') becomes the grammatical subject of *culminare*, so that the violence appears to escalate of its own accord between two symmetrical parties rather than being inflicted by one upon the other.

Giulia Cecchettin tenta la fuga, Filippo Turetta la colpisce e la carica sull'auto inerme: cosa è successo e cosa si vede nel video

di Andrea Pasqualetto

Nel video l'aggressione di Filippo Turetta e la ragazza disperata che cerca aiuto. Il sangue e i capelli trovati sull'asfalto: le ultime notizie sui ragazzi scomparsi in Veneto



Figure 9: *Corriere della Sera*, 18 November 2023

The third and most revealing strategy is the elevation of emotion to grammatical subject. In «Il massacro di Giulia Cecchettin» (*La Repubblica*, 19 November 2023), rage acts in the perpetrator's stead: «*Quella rabbia infine è esplosa*» ('that rage finally exploded') and «*gli era calata la rabbia tremenda che gli avvelenava la vita*» ('the terrible rage that poisoned his life had come over him'). The same structure recurs in «L'interrogatorio di Filippo Turetta: "La volevo per me, lei scappava". L'omicidio di Giulia Cecchettin in tre fasi» ('Filippo Turetta's interrogation: "I wanted her for myself, she was running away". The murder of Giulia Cecchettin in three phases') (*Corriere della Sera*, 3 December 2023), where *la rabbia di Filippo non si era ancora scatenata* ('Filippo's rage had not yet been unleashed') makes rage, not Filippo, the actor. This construction is the grammatical correlate of the *raptus* frame: it encodes diminished responsibility into the syntax, presenting the killing as something that happened to the perpetrator's agency rather than as its exercise (van Leeuwen, 1996).

These strategies are not uniform, and their counter-examples mark the structural frame's linguistic signature. «Inizia il processo contro Filippo Turetta» (*Il Post*, 23 September 2024) restores full transitivity - *si vedeva Turetta aggredire, ferire e caricare forzatamente in macchina Cecchettin* ('Turetta could be seen assaulting, wounding and forcibly loading Cecchettin into the car') - a clause in which the perpetrator is the actor of three material processes and the victim their explicit goal. The editorial «Giulia Cecchettin e il sottile confine tra controllo e sopraffazione» ('Giulia Cecchettin and the thin line between control and domination') (Concita De Gregorio, *La Repubblica*, 19 November 2023) does the same, naming *lui che nel video la colpisce e la carica in macchina* ('he who in the video strikes her and loads her into the car'). The presence of both repertoires within the same outlets confirms that agency suppression was a stylistic default of the crime-news register rather than an unavoidable constraint, and that the restoration of agency was a deliberate, frame-bearing choice.

Inizia il processo contro Filippo Turetta

Il 22enne ha confessato il femminicidio di Giulia Cecchettin, e l'accusa contro di lui è aggravata dalla premeditazione: rischia una condanna all'ergastolo



Un cartello con la foto di Giulia Cecchettin durante i funerali della 22enne (AP Photo/Luca Bruno)

Figure 10: *Il Post*, 23 September 2024

3.4.3 “Fidanzato” versus “Ex fidanzato”: the lexis of the relational bond

A single lexical choice - whether Turetta is named as Giulia's *fidanzato* ('boyfriend') or her *ex fidanzato* ('ex-boyfriend') - condenses much of the framing contest, because it encodes a claim about the state of the relationship at the time of the killing and therefore about its meaning. The accurate description is *ex*: the couple had separated, at Giulia's initiative, some months earlier, and it was precisely her movement toward independence that preceded the violence. The choice to retain the present-tense *fidanzato* is concentrated in *Libero*. Its early reporting refers to the perpetrator as the current boyfriend in «Giulia Cecchettin, dove la stanno cercando. Il fidanzato indagato» ('Giulia Cecchettin, where they are searching for her. The boyfriend under investigation') (*Libero*, 17 November 2023) and, more strikingly, in «Giulia sparita, la vita segreta del fidanzato Filippo» ('Giulia vanished, the secret life of her boyfriend Filippo') (*Libero*, 18 November 2023), where *del fidanzato Filippo* ('of her boyfriend Filippo') presents the bond as live and ongoing at the very moment the report concerns his “secret life” as a suspect.

GIULIA SPARITA, LA VITA SEGRETA DEL FIDANZATO FILIPPO

sabato 18 novembre 2023



Figure 11: *Libero*, 18 November 2023

The contrast with the outlets that mark the separation is sharp and consequential. *Corriere della Sera* registers the rupture in its first headline, which speaks of *la scomparsa degli ex fidanzati* ('the disappearance of the former partners') (*Corriere della Sera*, 15 November 2023), and *Il Post* is more explicit still, embedding the separation into the relational description in «Filippo Turetta, il ragazzo di Padova scomparso l'11 novembre insieme all'ex fidanzata Giulia Cecchettin, è indagato per tentato omicidio» ('Filippo Turetta, the young man from Padua who disappeared on 11 November together with his ex-girlfriend Giulia Cecchettin, is under investigation for attempted murder') (*Il Post*, 17 November 2023). The difference is not pedantic. To call a man who has killed a woman who left him her *fidanzato* erases the separation that is the criminological and political heart of the case. It normalises the bond as intact and reciprocal, obscuring the dynamic of control and the refusal of separation that the structural frame identifies as the engine of intimate-partner femicide (Kelly, 1988). It thereby softens the attribution of responsibility, since a death within a present relationship reads as a private tragedy between partners, whereas a death following a separation reads as punishment for a woman's autonomy. Above all, the present-tense lexis silently contradicts the victim's own account, recovered by the family, that *voleva essere indipendente* ('she wanted to be independent'): the word *fidanzato* re-attaches to Giulia the very bond she

had severed, and in doing so it works against the public understanding of separation-related violence as a recognised and lethal phase of coercive control rather than a romance that simply ended badly.

3.4.4 Presuppositions and implicit meanings

Beneath the explicit propositions lie presuppositions - the meanings a text takes for granted rather than asserts (Fairclough, 1995) - that the structural frame was mobilised to expose. The most consequential is the love-violence continuum carried by the lexicon of passion. It surfaces in the description of *quell'amore cattivo* ('that bad love') in «Il massacro di Giulia Cecchettin» (*La Repubblica*, 19 November 2023), where the killing is construed as the end of a love, merely a bad one, and in the father's account, relayed in «Filippo Turetta, domani l'interrogatorio del pm» (*La Repubblica*, 30 November 2023), that his son *ha ucciso il suo angelo [...] quella che lui amava* ('killed his angel [...] the one he loved'). The presupposition is that love can result in killing without ceasing to be love. It is exactly this implicit equation that Marzano's editorial detonates by naming the possessive script *l'opposto esatto dell'amore* ('the exact opposite of love') (*La Repubblica*, 11 November 2024); the recognition that such killings lie on a continuum of routine, normalised control rather than in a separate category of exceptional passion is precisely the analytic Kelly (1988) supplies.

A second presupposition concerns social provenance: the reassuring formula of the "good family" and the "good boy", which takes for granted that lethal violence originates outside the respectable social order. The editorial «Giulia Cecchettin e il sottile confine tra controllo e sopraffazione» (*La Repubblica*, 19 November 2023) deconstructs this formula by placing its recurrent phrases in sceptical quotation marks - "*buone famiglie*" ('good families') and "*bravi ragazzi*" ('good boys') - exposing the ideological work it performs, while Elena's *figli sani del patriarcato* supplies the precise counter-presupposition, relocating the origin of violence from the aberrant outsider to the well-socialised insider. A third operation is the insinuation of doubt against the evidentiary record: «Filippo Turetta si è fatto pagare la cena da Giulia Cecchettin. Poi l'ha massacrata per 22 minuti» (*Il Giornale*, 22 November 2023) refers to *un'altra presunta*

aggressione, presunta perché si parla di sagome ('another alleged assault, alleged because one speaks of silhouettes') and then concedes that the blood at the two sites matches - an admission that renders the hedge *presunta* ('alleged') difficult to justify. Taken together, these presuppositions reveal that the contest between the two frames was waged less over stated facts than over the unstated assumptions that organise them, which is why a reframing intervention as compact as Elena's letter could exert such disproportionate force.

3.5 Visual analysis

The photographs accompanying the coverage are active participants in meaning-making, and they are read here through Barthes's (1977) distinction between anchorage - in which the text directs the image toward a settled meaning - and relay, the looser and sometimes contradictory relation in which image and text pull in different directions. The visual dimension is reconstructed from a descriptive record of the images rather than from the images themselves; within that limit, the patterns are consistent and analytically legible.

3.5.1 Recurrent visual typologies

Six visual typologies recur. The first is the solo portrait of the victim, almost invariably smiling, which performs a humanising function consonant with the grievability that public mourning requires (Butler, 2009). The second is the leisure portrait of the perpetrator, shown repeatedly playing volleyball - as in «"Filippo? Dottor Jekyll e mister Hyde". Lo choc dell'allenatore di pallavolo» ("Filippo? Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde". The shock of the volleyball coach') (*Il Giornale*, 20 November 2023) - or hiking, an image recurring from «Filippo Turetta, la fuga per oltre mille chilometri: "Portatemi in Italia"» ('Filippo Turetta, the flight of over a thousand kilometres: "Take me to Italy"') (*Corriere della Sera*, 19 November 2023) through to «La lettera di Filippo Turetta dalla Germania» (*Corriere della Sera*, 3 December 2024). The third is the couple photograph, the two smiling together or hand in hand, as accompanies «Giulia Cecchetti, dove la stanno cercando. Il fidanzato indagato» (*Libero*, 17 November 2023) and «Filippo Turetta, "omicidio premeditato" di Giulia Cecchetti: rischia l'ergastolo»

(‘Filippo Turetta, “premeditated murder” of Giulia Cecchettin: he risks life imprisonment’) (*Libero*, 15 May 2024). The fourth is the family photograph; the fifth the institutional or judicial image - the German prison, the courtroom - distinctively complemented by *Il Post*’s use of neutral cartographic images, as in «Le ricerche dei due giovani scomparsi in Veneto» (‘The search for the two young people missing in Veneto’) (*Il Post*, 16 November 2023); and the sixth the collective-memorial typology of torchlight processions, the red bow (*fiocco rosso*), demonstrations and the funeral.

GIULIA CECCHETTIN, DOVE LA STANNO CERCANDO. IL FIDANZATO INDAGATO

venedì 17 novembre 2023



Figure 12: *Libero*, 17 November 2023

The distribution is itself a framing fact. The leisure portraits and couple photographs cluster in the Italian news pages and the conservative press, where they accompany the romance and *raptus* frames; the memorial and protest imagery clusters in the thematic and Anglophone reporting, where it accompanies the structural frame, as in «Italy rallies to condemn violence against women, draw huge crowds» (*BBC News*, 25 November 2023). *Il Post*’s preference for neutral images performs a deliberate de-dramatisation: a map of a car park refuses the affective charge a smiling portrait would supply.

Le ricerche dei due giovani scomparsi in Veneto

Da sabato 11 novembre non si hanno più notizie di Giulia Cecchettin e Filippo Turetta, due studenti dell'Università di Padova

Condividi



(Google Street View)

Figure 13: *Il Post*, 16 November 2023

3.5.2 Emotionalisation and aestheticisation

Two visual operations dominate. The first is the emotionalisation of the perpetrator through his leisure imagery. The recurrent hiking and volleyball photographs are the visual arm of *himpathy* (Manne, 2017): they depict Turetta as a wholesome young man, and their repetition beside texts reporting his confession or prison routine sustains the “good boy” topos at the level of the image. The effect is most acute when a serene portrait accompanies the most damning revelations, as in «Femminicidio di Giulia Cecchettin, la confessione di Turetta: “L’ho accoltellata guardandola negli occhi”» (‘Femicide of Giulia Cecchettin, Turetta’s confession: “I stabbed her looking into her eyes”’) (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 22 June 2024): the benign image visually contradicts the textual account of a premeditated killing, inviting the reader to favour the image. The second operation is the emotionalisation of the relationship through the couple photograph, which visually asserts the warmth of the bond and lends support to the romance frame; the photograph operates below the threshold of argument, importing the presupposition of mutual love directly into the visual field (Barthes, 1977), since such images do their work by circulating affect rather than asserting propositions (Ahmed, 2004). Even the victim’s solo portraits can be put to questionable use, as when a smiling photograph of Giulia

is paired with a forensic report of the killing in «Il corpo di Giulia ritrovato in un canalone. Uccisa con più coltellate» (*Rai News*, 19 November 2023), so that tenderness and atrocity share a single page.

Femminicidio di Giulia Cecchettin, la confessione di Turetta: «L'ho accoltellata guardandola negli occhi»

Per la prima volta a Quarto Grado le parole messe a verbale davanti al pm dallo studente reo confesso dell'uccisione della ragazza di Vigonovo: «Lei si proteggeva mentre la colpivo, l'ho uccisa perché voleva stare senza di me»

22 giugno 2024
4' di lettura



Figure 14: *Il Mattino di Padova*, 22 June 2024

3.5.3 Alignment or tension between text and images

The corpus's most significant visual finding is the predominance of dissonance over anchorage in the news pages. Across many Italian reports a smiling portrait or couple photograph sits beside a text narrating coercion and killing, so that the image proposes warmth and reciprocity while the text reports their violent negation - as in «L'urlo di Giulia Cecchettin, l'ultimo messaggio, il panino, la lite» (*Corriere della Sera*, 15 November 2023), «Filippo Turetta, la fuga per oltre mille chilometri» (*Corriere della Sera*, 19 November 2023) and «Il massacro di Giulia Cecchettin» (*La Repubblica*, 19 November 2023). Because the photographic image carries a strong presumption of authenticity, the dissonance does not cancel into neutrality; it tends to soften the textual horror, lending the killing the retrospective aura of a love story gone wrong. Visual dissonance is thus the pictorial accomplice of the romance and *raptus* frames. Anchorage, where it occurs, aligns image with the structural frame: in the thematic reports, protest and memorial images - the torchlight procession, the red bow Elena is shown hanging in the coverage of «La lettera di Elena Cecchettin sul femminicidio di sua sorella» (*Il Post*, 20 November 2023) - direct

the reader toward solidarity and structural indictment, and the courtroom images at sentencing in «Delitto Giulia Cecchettin, ergastolo a Filippo Turetta» (*Corriere della Sera*, 3 December 2024) fix the perpetrator as convicted defendant rather than suffering boy. The Anglophone outlets rely almost exclusively on anchoring imagery and avoid the couple and leisure typologies altogether, so that their visual field reinforces rather than undercuts their structural text. The contrast between a predominantly dissonant Italian news photography and a consistently anchored Anglophone and thematic coverage is one of the clearest demonstrations in the corpus that the deeper repertoire, here operating visually, lagged behind the renovated vocabulary.

3.6 Sensationalism, morbid detail and the mediation of private communication

Two related practices warrant separate treatment because they bear directly on the ethical dimension of the turning point and because they intensified, rather than abated, as the structural vocabulary spread: the spectacularisation of the victim's death through quantified suffering and forensic detail, and the reproduction of private digital communication. Both reveal a coverage that had increasingly learned to name femicide correctly while continuing to narrate it in a register of consumption.

3.6.1 Spectacle and the quantification of suffering

A recurrent and ethically fraught feature of the corpus is the conversion of the killing into a quantified spectacle, organised around two figures: the duration of the attack and the number of wounds. The duration is rendered with tabloid precision and, crucially, in competing versions across outlets. *Il Giornale* fixes it at twenty-two minutes twice on the same day, in «Filippo Turetta si è fatto pagare la cena da Giulia Cecchettin. Poi l'ha massacrata per 22 minuti» ('Filippo Turetta got Giulia Cecchettin to pay for dinner. Then he massacred her for 22 minutes') (*Il Giornale*, 22 November 2023) and, more luridly, in «Giulia dissanguata: l'agonia di 22 minuti. "Filippo feroce può uccidere ancora"» ('Giulia bled dry: the 22-minute agony. "Ferocious Filippo can kill again"') (*Il Giornale*, 22 November 2023). *Libero* deploys the same figure with the authority of the

judge in «Filippo Turetta, il gip: “Come ha ucciso Giulia, condotta disumana. 22 minuti di agonia”» (‘Filippo Turetta, the judge: “How he killed Giulia, inhuman conduct. 22 minutes of agony”’) (*Liberio*, 21 November 2023), whereas *La Repubblica* gives a different number in «Giulia Cecchettin ha lottato per 25 minuti contro il suo carnefice. E pagò lei l’ultima cena» (‘Giulia Cecchettin fought for 25 minutes against her executioner. And it was she who paid for the last supper’) (*La Repubblica*, 21 November 2023). The lexical register of these headlines - *massacrata* (‘massacred’), *agonia* (‘agony’), *carnefice* (‘executioner’) - belongs to spectacle rather than information, and the discrepancy between twenty-two and twenty-five minutes exposes the figure’s function: a precise-sounding number that dramatises duration as suffering, regardless of its evidential stability.

Filippo Turetta si è fatto pagare la cena da Giulia Cecchettin. Poi l’ha massacrata per 22 minuti

Lei gli paga la cena al Mc Donald’s, poi la violenza di “inaudita ferocia”: cosa dice l’iniziale ricostruzione dell’omicidio di Giulia Cecchettin

Angela Leucci | 22 novembre 2023 - 13:33



Figure 15: *Il Giornale*, 22 November 2023

The second figure is the wound count, presented through an hour-by-hour forensic reconstruction. *Corriere della Sera* itemises both the cause of death and the tally in «Giulia Cecchettin è morta per uno “shock emorragico”: dalla cena alle 26 ferite, cosa è successo ora per ora» (‘Giulia Cecchettin died of a “haemorrhagic shock”: from the dinner to the 26 wounds, what happened hour by hour’) (*Corriere della Sera*, 22 November 2023), and *La Repubblica* reconstructs the mechanism of death in clinical detail in «Giulia Cecchettin è morta dissanguata dopo la coltellata al collo nel parcheggio» (‘Giulia Cecchettin bled to death after the stab to the neck in the car park’) (*La Repubblica*, 1

December 2023). The *ora per ora* ('hour by hour') structure invites the reader to follow the killing as a timeline, an arrangement that maximises emotional impact while adding nothing to public understanding of femicide as a phenomenon. Measured against the Manifesto di Venezia, which enjoins journalists to refuse morbid and gratuitous detail and to protect the dignity of the victim, this quantified spectacle is a clear breach, and its persistence is best read through the feminist critique of a media culture that processes male violence as entertainment (Boyle, 2005; Meyers, 1997). The decisive evidence that these details serve spectacle rather than information is, once again, comparative: *Il Post* narrated the same investigative findings without the wound tally, the agony clock or the executioner lexicon, demonstrating that a fully informative account was achievable without converting the victim's death into a procedural drama. The contrast also cuts across the ideological axis: the twenty-two-minute spectacle is most intense in the conservative *Il Giornale* and *Libero*, but the wound-by-wound reconstruction appears equally in the centre and centre-left *Corriere* and *Repubblica*, indicating that tabloidisation operated as a property of the crime-news genre across the political spectrum rather than as a marker of any single editorial line.

3.6.2 Private messages and the construction of victim and perpetrator

From late 2023 and with greater intensity through 2024, the coverage drew heavily on private digital communication - WhatsApp chats, text messages and the contents of the victim's and perpetrator's phones - and the framing of this material is analytically double-edged. On one reading it serves the structural frame, because Giulia's own words document the coercive control that preceded her death. Her message to a friend, reported in «Giulia Cecchettin all'amica del cuore: "Filippo mi ha fatto paura. Dice anche che sono cattiva perché esco con voi"» ('Giulia Cecchettin to her closest friend: "Filippo frightened me. He also says I'm bad because I go out with you"') (*La Repubblica*, 13 December 2023), evidences isolation and intimidation; her note that he threatened to *si farà giustizia da solo* ('take justice into his own hands'), reported in «Giulia Cecchettin scriveva: "Se si sente tradito dice che si farà giustizia da solo"» ('Giulia Cecchettin wrote: "If he feels betrayed he says he will

take justice into his own hands””) (*La Repubblica*, 26 November 2024), evidences premeditated menace. In these instances the victim’s voice testifies, in real time, to the dynamic the structural frame names, and her messages function as evidence of a pattern rather than as an enigma of passion.

On a competing reading, however, the same material is mobilised for voyeuristic consumption, exposing the private life of a dead woman to the reader’s gaze. The publication of the contents of her phone in «Giulia Cecchettin, le ultime foto nel telefono dell’assassino. Le chat: “Sei psicopatico, smettiti di controllarmi”» (‘Giulia Cecchettin, the last photos in the killer’s phone. The chats: “You’re a psychopath, stop controlling me”’) (*Corriere della Sera*, 29 June 2024) is the clearest example: the headline pairs intimate photographs with a private message, and the framing offers both as revelations for the reader rather than as evidence for a court. The same exchange is recycled across outlets within forty-eight hours - in «Gli ultimi messaggi di Giulia a Turetta: “Sei uno psicopatico”. Lui aveva annotato un piano» (*Rai News*, 30 June 2024) and «Gli ultimi messaggi di Giulia Cecchettin a Turetta: “Sei uno psicopatico, mi fai paura”» (‘Giulia Cecchettin’s last messages to Turetta: “You’re a psychopath, you frighten me”’) (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 29 June 2024) - a synchronised reproduction that signals the appetite for private content as content. *Il Giornale*’s «“Mi ossessiona”. “Fondamentale la buonanotte”. Le chat tra Giulia Cecchettin e Filippo Turetta» (““He obsesses over me”. “Saying goodnight is essential”. The chats between Giulia Cecchettin and Filippo Turetta’) (*Il Giornale*, 28 November 2024) goes further, mining the exchanges for arresting fragments in the manner of a tabloid exposé. The reproduction of an intimate plea such as *smettiti di controllarmi* (‘stop controlling me’) in a mass-circulation headline turns the victim’s resistance to surveillance into an object of the reader’s own surveillance - an irony the framing never registers, and a privacy violation the Manifesto di Venezia’s dignity provisions are designed to prevent.

The messages also construct the perpetrator, and here their effect is more consistently incriminating, which makes their differential treatment instructive. Turetta’s instructions to Giulia’s sister in the hours after the killing, reported in «I

messaggi di Turetta alla sorella di Giulia Cecchettin: “Falle accendere il telefono”» (‘Turetta’s messages to Giulia Cecchettin’s sister: “Have the phone switched on”’) (*La Repubblica*, 6 December 2023) and in «Quegli sms di Turetta alla sorella di Giulia: “Dille di accendere subito il telefono”» (‘Those text messages from Turetta to Giulia’s sister: “Tell her to switch the phone on at once”’) (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 7 December 2023), present him as calculating and manipulative even in the immediate aftermath, undercutting the *raptus* frame. The asymmetry is telling: the victim’s private words are reproduced in ways that oscillate between testimony and voyeurism, while the perpetrator’s digital traces, which most clearly evidence premeditation, are reported more soberly and with less recycling. The pattern confirms the chapter’s broader finding - that the coverage extended its most intrusive attention to the woman, even when narrating the man’s guilt - and shows that the migration of private communication into public reporting, however much it could serve the structural account, was governed less by evidentiary necessity than by the same spectacle logic that drives the morbid detail of section 3.6.1.

Quegli sms di Turetta alla sorella di Giulia: «Dille di accendere subito il telefono»

Tutta l'ossessione per l'ex fidanzata nei messaggi inviati dal 22enne a Elena Cecchettin. Turetta dallo psicologo dell'Usl prima dell'omicidio

07 dicembre 2023
3' di lettura



La chat tra Elena Cecchettin e Filippo Turetta e, a destra, il ragazzo che ha ucciso Giulia Cecchettin

Figure 16: *Il Mattino di Padova*, 7 December 2023

3.7 Media practices and ethical guidelines

The ethical assessment of the coverage is anchored in the Manifesto di Venezia, the set of guidelines adopted within Italian journalism for the reporting of violence against women, whose core injunctions are to name femicide as

such, to avoid the lexicon of *raptus*, jealousy and passion, to refuse morbid and sensationalist detail, to respect the victim's dignity and privacy, to decline to centre or justify the perpetrator, and to situate the individual case within its structural context. Measured against these standards, the coverage presents a record of both conspicuous deviation and meaningful, if incomplete, movement toward compliance - a pattern that mirrors, at the level of professional practice, the partial turning point identified throughout this chapter.

3.7.1 Compliance with and deviations from the Venice Manifesto

The deviations can be grouped against the Manifesto's specific provisions. The proscription of the *raptus* lexicon is breached from the news genre's adoption of the "something snapped" formula in «La confessione fiume di Filippo Turetta e i punti oscuri: "in testa mi è scattato qualcosa"» (*Corriere della Sera*, 2 December 2023) to the defence's plea, faithfully relayed, in «Femminicidio Cecchettin, la difesa di Turetta: "Filippo non è Pablo Escobar, non merita l'ergastolo"» ('Cecchettin femicide, Turetta's defence: "Filippo is not Pablo Escobar, he does not deserve life imprisonment"') (*La Repubblica*, 26 November 2024). The injunction against morbid detail is breached by the quantified spectacle examined in section 3.6.1; the requirement of privacy by the reproduction of the victim's photographs and chats examined in section 3.6.2; the prohibition on romanticisation by the lexicon of *amore cattivo* and the couple photographs; and the injunction not to centre the perpetrator most flagrantly by «Giulia Cecchettin, nessuno tocchi Filippo Turetta» (*Corriere della Sera*, 28 November 2023) and the prison-reunion reports of December 2023.

Against this, the evidence of compliance and improvement is real and concentrated in two places: in the explanatory and editorial genres throughout, and in the news genre increasingly over time. *Il Post* complies with virtually every provision - it names femicide, explains it structurally, restores agency, declines morbid detail, and uses de-dramatising imagery - demonstrating that full compliance was achievable within the news genre, not merely the opinion genre. By the 2024 sentencing, *femminicidio* had become the near-universal descriptor even in news headlines, including in outlets that had earlier hesitated,

as in «Femminicidio di Giulia Cecchettin: Turetta condannato all'ergastolo» ('Femicide of Giulia Cecchettin: Turetta sentenced to life imprisonment') (*Rai News*, 3 December 2024) and «Femminicidio di Giulia Cecchettin, la confessione di Turetta: "L'ho accoltellata guardandola negli occhi"» (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 22 June 2024). Most strikingly, the coverage contains instances of journalistic self-reflexivity in which the press turns the Manifesto's critique on its own practice: «Il padre a Filippo Turetta: "Non sei uno che ammazza, hai avuto un momento di debolezza"» (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 27 July 2024) relays the objection that the broadcasting of the prison reunion amounted to misplaced voyeurism' with no journalistic, social or judicial utility. This reflexive naming of voyeurism, within the coverage itself, is perhaps the clearest sign that the case altered the profession's sense of what is permissible.

3.7.2 Recurring critical issues in coverage

Three critical issues recur with enough regularity to count as structural features rather than isolated lapses. The first is the depoliticisation contest, in which the structural reading was actively resisted as ideological overreach. The opinion piece «Basta circo mediatico sui funerali di Giulia» ('Enough of the media circus over Giulia's funeral') (Vittorio Feltri, *Il Giornale*, 6 December 2023) denounces the *strumentalizzazione politica e soprattutto ideologica* ('political and above all ideological exploitation') of the case and treats the obligatory term *femminicidio* as itself suspect, while «"Tutti voi maschi siete colpevoli". L'accusa choc di Valeria Fonte su Giulia» ("All of you males are guilty". Valeria Fonte's shocking accusation regarding Giulia') (Giuseppe De Lorenzo, *Il Giornale*, 21 November 2023) ridicules the notion of a *problema sistemico* ('systemic problem'). These interventions are themselves part of the discursive event: the structural frame provoked an organised backlash, and the intensity of that backlash is evidence of the frame's arrival. The depoliticising move - insisting that the killing was a private tragedy exploited for political ends - is the precise negation of the Manifesto's contextual requirement and of the structural analysis that feminist scholarship brings to such cases (Boyle, 2005; Gill, 2007).

The second recurring issue is the differential and sympathetic narration of the perpetrator's incarceration, documented from his detention to his sentence: the birthday spent with television and a games console in «Compleanno tra videogiochi e tv: Filippo Turetta esce dall'isolamento» ('Birthday between video games and TV: Filippo Turetta comes out of isolation') (*Il Giornale*, 18 December 2023), the inventory of his phone in «Nel cellulare di Turetta la lista dei buoni propositi e le sue frustrazioni» ('In Turetta's phone the list of good resolutions and his frustrations') (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 1 October 2024), and his post-sentence reflections in «Turetta dopo l'ergastolo: "Nulla sarà mai abbastanza rispetto a quello che ho commesso"» ('Turetta after the life sentence: "Nothing will ever be enough compared with what I have done"') (*Il Mattino di Padova*, 5 December 2024). This thread of human-interest reporting, which has no analogue in the treatment of the victim, keeps the perpetrator continuously available as a person with a routine and a future. The third issue is the persistent, low-level suppression of agency in the news pages even after the structural lexicon had been adopted: the agentless and emotion-as-subject constructions of section 3.4.2 survive into the sentencing coverage, as in the agentless account of where *sarebbe avvenuta la prima aggressione* ('the first assault is said to have taken place') in «Cecchettin, ergastolo per Filippo Turetta. Esclusa l'aggravante della crudeltà» ('Cecchettin, life sentence for Filippo Turetta. The aggravating circumstance of cruelty excluded') (*Il Giornale*, 3 December 2024). The survival of these constructions is the linguistic proof of the chapter's central claim: the vocabulary changed faster than the grammar.

Compleanno tra videogiochi e tv: Filippo Turetta esce dall'isolamento

Filippo Turetta è stato trasferito in una sezione con altri detenuti. Intanto proseguono le indagini, anche per finalizzare le accuse nei suoi confronti

Angela Leucci | 18 dicembre 2023 - 10:49

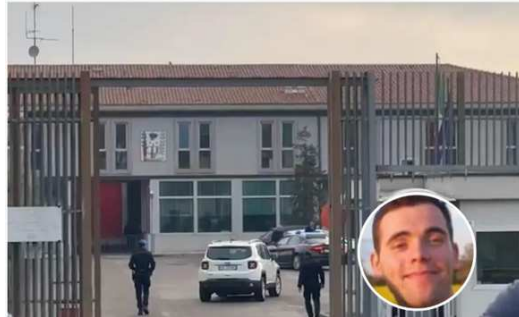


Figure 17: *Il Giornale*, 18 December 2023

3.8 Conclusion: a partial and contested turning point

Returning to the question that organises this chapter - whether the Cecchettin coverage marks a discursive turning point in the Italian mediation of femicide - the evidence supports a qualified affirmative. The turning point is genuine and unusually well attested. The lexicon of *femminicidio* and *patriarcato* moved decisively from the margins into mainstream headlines, leads and editorials; the structural frame achieved a near-consensus in the opinion genre and a substantial presence in the news genre; the case generated mass mobilisation, political controversy and a documented professional self-reflexivity about voyeurism and himpathy; and the reframing was legible beyond Italy, exported to the Anglophone press in the very terms the family had coined. The pivot is datable to Elena Cecchettin's letter of 20 November 2023, and its mechanism is identifiable: a victim's family seized the interpretative initiative and supplied a counter-frame so cogent that even hostile outlets had to engage it. In this respect the case confirms that framing contests are not waged only among journalists and institutional elites (Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1991) but can be decisively shaped by non-elite actors who refuse the role of passive source.

Yet the turning point is partial and contested in equal measure. The shift was concentrated at the level of explicit naming and editorial interpretation, while the deeper discursive machinery - agency-suppressing transitivity, the *raptus*

repertoire, the himpathetic centring of the perpetrator, romanticising and dissonant imagery, the quantified spectacle of the victim's death, and the intrusive mediation of her private communication - persisted across the news pages and, around the 2024 confession leak, intensified. The renovated vocabulary frequently coexisted, within a single outlet and sometimes a single page, with the unreformed grammar and the unreformed image. The retention of the present-tense *fidanzato* in place of *ex fidanzato*, the competing stopwatch figures of the “twenty-two-minute agony”, and the recycling of the plea *smettila di controllarmi* across outlets are so many signs that the surface had changed faster than the structure. The judicial finding of premeditation, which repudiated the *raptus* hypothesis the early reporting had entertained, stands as an external measure of the distance between the press's interpretative reflexes and the evidentiary record, and the structural frame was met by an organised depoliticising backlash that contested its very legitimacy.

The most durable analytical lesson concerns the location of discursive change. The Cecchettin case demonstrates that a frame can be transformed at its surface - in its nameable categories and its editorial verdicts — while persisting in its depths, in the syntactic, lexical and visual habits through which a killing is routinely rendered (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1988). It also demonstrates that this surface transformation was not achieved by the press acting on its own initiative but was substantially compelled by sources who refused to remain sources - above all Elena Cecchettin, whose insistence that her sister not be remembered only as her killer's victim names, in a single sentence, both the achievement and the unfinished task of the coverage. On the evidence of this corpus, the Giulia Cecchettin case is a turning point that has begun but is not complete: the Italian media learned to call femicide by its name, but not yet, consistently, to tell it in a grammar and an image worthy of that name.

Chapter 4. Professional perspectives on the coverage of the Giulia Cecchettin case

Chapter 3 concluded, through the analysis of a corpus of one hundred articles, that the coverage of the killing of Giulia Cecchettin marked a real but partial and uneven discursive shift in the Italian mediation of femicide. This chapter tests and deepens that conclusion through two qualitative expert interviews. The discussion is built around the perspectives of the two interviewees, the media researcher Monia Azzalini and the journalist Paola Rizzi, whose reasoning is reconstructed as fully as the transcripts allow and then read against the corpus findings. The aim is not to summarise the interviews but to let two expert accounts of how femicide is produced and represented lead, confirm, qualify or challenge the conclusions of the textual analysis.

4.1 The GiULiA network and gender-sensitive journalism

Both interviewees are connected, in different capacities, to the Italian movement for gender-sensitive journalism that centres on *GiULiA Giornaliste* (*Giornaliste Unite Libere Autonome*), the association of women journalists founded in 2011. GiULiA promoted the *Manifesto di Venezia*, the deontological charter on the reporting of violence against women examined in Chapter 1, and it sustains an active monitoring practice, including a monthly press review through which it tracks the representation of women across the news. Its objectives are to increase the authoritative presence of women in the media, to professionalise the reporting of gender-based violence through training, and to translate the commitments of the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011) and the Beijing Platform into national standards.

Paola Rizzi speaks from within this network: she is a journalist active in GiULiA, involved in training and in the association's monitoring, and she articulates the profession's deontological framework from the inside. Monia Azzalini speaks as

a media researcher specialising in the monitoring of gender representation, whose work is tied to the international tradition exemplified by the Global Media Monitoring Project; she also collaborates with GiULiA, having co-produced, with the association's then-president Silvia Garambois, one of the first streaming training courses on the narration of violence against women made available through the journalists' professional body. The two therefore offer complementary expert vantage points - one rooted in professional practice and advocacy, the other in the empirical study of media output - on the same questions.

4.2 Qualitative interviews: emerging themes

The analysis is organised around the two axes of the research question - change and continuity - and proceeds, in each case, by reconstructing first Azzalini's and then Rizzi's argument before drawing the comparison explicitly.

4.2.1 Changes in journalistic practices

Azzalini argues that the Cecchettin case represented, "in the immediate term, a turning point" for two distinct reasons. The first is a capacity for social identification: a young middle-class student killed by a young middle-class peer, a configuration in which a broad Italian public could recognise itself. The second, and for her the decisive one, is the intervention of the victim's family, and in particular a feature without precedent in routine coverage - the public availability of Giulia Cecchettin's own recorded voice. She develops this into a sustained argument about the victim's subjectivity:

"The real difference was made by Elena and Gino Cecchettin: Gino by making available the audio messages Giulia had recorded on WhatsApp - recorded, of course, while she was still alive - which gave a voice to the victim, something that generally does not happen, because the victim of a femicide dies and therefore becomes a source unavailable to those who work in the media. This gave subjectivity to the victim, whereas normally she becomes an object, at the very least an object of news, the object of a femicide. And this subject recounts the signals - well known to those who deal with violence against

women - that generally precede the extreme act: subtle forms of psychological violence, the threat of suicide on Turetta's part. Then there was Elena Cecchetti's letter to the *Corriere*, which invited reflection on the fact that Filippo Turetta was not a monster but a healthy son of patriarchy - and this was truly an opportunity for a turning point, to put violence against women back in its place, that is, within the hierarchical structure between the genders of Italian society, and indeed of almost all societies, because this phenomenon certainly crosses national borders." (Azzalini)

Two analytical points are compressed in this passage. First, Azzalini identifies a precise textual mechanism for the shift: the recovered messages restored to the victim a subjectivity that the genre of *cronaca* structurally denies her, because the dead victim is normally an unavailable source. Second, she reads the content of those messages as a documentation of the escalating warning signs that precede a femicide - in effect, a lay articulation of the feminist understanding of violence as a continuum rather than an isolated explosion (Kelly, 1988). Elena's letter then supplied the structural vocabulary ("healthy son of patriarchy") that relocated the killing from individual pathology to social hierarchy.

Crucially, Azzalini regards this opening as having been only partially realised, and she immediately qualifies it with evidence of regression, observing that the effect "has become somewhat diluted over time". She substantiates this with the subsequent year's coverage: "this last year was largely devoted to the Garlasco case ... yet the victim, Chiara Poggi, always remained somewhat in the background, and it is the 'Garlasco case', the 'Garlasco crime' - never the 'Garlasco femicide' or the 'Poggi femicide'", while other killings are "still presented as homicides, murders - and not as femicide". For Azzalini, then, the case demonstrated what the media could do, but the renovated practice did not stabilise.

Rizzi reaches a convergent conclusion by a different route, emphasising not the victim's recovered voice but the family's politicisation of a death that would normally have remained private. She begins by refusing a simple answer: the

case was “a unicum in our recent history”, because “the novelty is the taking of the floor by the victim’s relatives, which rarely happens in these terms”. Their prominence, she argues, “gave a different reading of this single episode, which usually remains within the sphere of family grief, of family tragedy, and is not ‘politicised’ as it was in this case”, and it “forced the media, too, to talk about what the relatives were talking about”, so that “this discussion about patriarchy was triggered - a word that practically was not in the newspapers before this case”. Her most original observation concerns the way even hostile outlets were drawn onto this terrain:

“What struck me, as a contradictory but interesting signal, was an editorial in *Libero* by its director, Mario Sechi, which argued that one should not instrumentalise a femicide - he had it in, if I recall correctly, for the public stances taken by Giulia Cecchettin’s sister. And yet, in saying this, he was adopting a term that only makes sense within a narrative frame that presupposes a crime so bound up with patriarchy as femicide. So someone standing on the opposite, polemical front had nonetheless internalised that language”. (Rizzi)

Like Azzalini, however, Rizzi denies that this amounts to a change of paradigm, and she supports the denial with a case she uses in her own training. About a month after the discovery of Giulia’s body - with the patriarchy debate already at its height - a femicide was reported in the *Corriere della Sera*, she recalls, “in terms of total romanticisation”:

“It was a murder-suicide: a woman, the mother of two children, killed by her ex-husband - the usual story, she wanted to separate, and then the husband killed himself. There were no witnesses; he killed her, then he killed himself, end of the story. And yet the account was ‘after the last embrace, the tragedy’ - but that embrace was an absolute invention; no one can know whether there was a last embrace. And the story of this couple who had separated was a very heavy one, which had had a very ugly aftermath, not a romantic one ... The need of whoever wrote that piece to romanticise the account - because he did not want to leave her, because he loved her, and so on - was as if the killing of Giulia Cecchettin and that whole debate had never taken place”. (Rizzi)

She nonetheless registers measurable progress, citing the monitoring of the STeP Observatory (of which GiULiA is a partner), which has “certified some improvement”, above all a quantitative reduction in the use of *raptus* - a term whose survival still “surprises” her when it appears. The comparison between the two experts is therefore one of strong convergence with a difference of emphasis: both locate the engine of change in the family rather than in the profession, and both judge the change real but unstable, each offering a concrete example of rapid regression (Azzalini’s Garlasco, Rizzi’s romanticised murder-suicide). Where Azzalini stresses the mechanism, the restoration of the victim’s subjectivity through her own words, Rizzi stresses the effect on the field, the forced uptake of “patriarchy”, visible even in its adversaries. Both, finally, treat the 2025 recognition of *femminicidio* as an autonomous criminal offence, and the parallel revision of the journalists’ deontological code, as the institutional residue of the debate; Azzalini adds that this legal change removes the old professional alibi that, in the absence of a specific offence, naming a killing a femicide would be “an ideological position”.

4.2.2 Persistent challenges in reporting femicide

On the persistence of an individualising frame, the two experts again converge but illuminate different parts of the process. Asked whether reporting now attends more to the structural dimensions of violence, Azzalini answers “unfortunately, not so much”. She locates the structural reading largely within her own professional “bubble” of media-and-gender specialists, and she grounds the judgement in monitoring evidence rather than impression, citing a 2025 report on public-service television: although roughly a fifth of programmes touch on violence against women, the coverage is for the most part “not in-depth treatment but coverage of news cases”, still frequently narrated as instances of “private violence”. Her point is that the structural frame remains occasional and event-bound rather than a default, even though, as she notes, brevity could be served simply by using the word *femminicidio*, now that the offence exists in law.

Rizzi adds a mechanism that operates upstream of the published article and that a textual analysis cannot see: the framing transmitted by the primary source. She distinguishes two planes - the plane of public debate, where structural recognition has advanced to the point of producing a new criminal offence, and the plane of daily crime reporting, which remains conditioned by the police:

“The hard life of the crime reporter, who then has to tell the story, is also very much conditioned by the first source of these accounts, which is the police. The police, too, are making a great effort to update themselves and do great things, but it still happens that you find descriptions of the event that insist on family conflict, ‘they were arguing because she wanted ...’ Recently I have read press releases, from the carabinieri or the police, in which everything is somewhat traced back to the individual matrix of family conflict, to the tragic outcome of a private matter. So, as professionals of information, one has to be careful not to be too conditioned by stereotypes that can reach you from the neighbours or even from the carabinieri.” (Rizzi)

This is a significant addition to Chapter 3: where the corpus analysis could observe privatising, agency-suppressing language in the article, Rizzi identifies one of its origins in the institutional source on which the reporter depends, recasting part of what the textual analysis read as editorial choice as the downstream transmission of a prior framing. Thus, on the same problem, Azzalini supplies quantitative-monitoring evidence of its scale while Rizzi supplies a production-level account of its source.

On the representation of the perpetrator, both experts develop the critique of “himpathy” - the disproportionate sympathy extended to male perpetrators (Manne, 2017) - but they emphasise different mechanisms. Azzalini’s argument is that the duty of *cronaca* is to report only the elements essential to understanding the news, and that the damage is done by the qualifying adjectives and inessential biographical details that carry implicit value judgements. She develops this most fully in relation to the low-profile, often local cases that the high-visibility coverage neglects:

“The latest report of the STeP Observatory, in the part on femicide edited by Mimma Caligaris, shows how these mitigating factors are extremely strong in the cases that have less national coverage and are more local, those concerning elderly people, elderly couples, in which the husband kills the wife, generally a wife who suffers from serious chronic illnesses. Here there is this justification, with formulas of the kind ‘exasperated’, ‘he wanted to free her’, and so the killing turns into a sort of heroism: he becomes the hero, the liberator who had the courage to free his wife from suffering, from an illness. A journalistic account should instead describe both the victim and the aggressor objectively, using only the elements that are essential. Sometimes it is not even essential to know what job the perpetrator did, or how old he was, because if a person who killed his wife has a medium-high socioeconomic status, he ends up enjoying the reflected authority of that status: if it is a doctor who has killed a sick wife, you end up generating the idea that the doctor knew what he was doing, because he deals with health and life”. (Azzalini)

Azzalini extends this into a critique of the gendered double standard surrounding care, observing that “no one would set about justifying a woman who killed her husband because she could no longer cope”, since “women have for millennia been caregivers to everyone in the home”. The sympathetic “mercy-killing” frame, in other words, is available to male perpetrators precisely because caregiving is culturally expected of women and treated as exceptional in men. Rizzi approaches perpetrator representation through the logic of causation rather than description. The duty to report, she argues, requires describing who committed a crime, but “the problem is introducing elements that establish cause-and-effect relations that do not necessarily have anything to do with the fact you are reporting”. Job loss, loneliness or economic difficulty are repeatedly mobilised to explain - and thereby to excuse - the killing, and she proposes a simple test of the fallacy by reversing the subjects: “many people lose their jobs and do not go and kill; women lose their jobs too”. She situates *raptus* within the evidentiary record, noting that judicially it is shown to be “at the origin of an infinitesimal percentage of femicides - around one per cent”, so that it “cannot be the first element brought out to justify” a killing; it is used “less, but

it is not entirely gone". The two accounts are complementary: Azzalini exposes the smuggling of exculpation through inessential status detail and the neglected elderly cases, while Rizzi exposes the importation of spurious causal explanations; both converge on the empirical marginality of the "loss of control" narrative, a convergence consistent with Monckton-Smith's (2021) demonstration that intimate-partner killers follow a trackable escalation rather than "snapping".

It is on visual communication that the two experts agree most emphatically - both regard it as the domain of least progress - while again dividing the explanatory labour. Azzalini treats iconographic narration as "a fundamental part" of the account and explains the dissonance between a critical text and a romantic image through a cluster of production constraints:

"In many cases an inadequate iconographic representation is used because it is in contrast with the text of the article: if I say that a man has killed his wife and then I put the photo of their wedding, the photo portraying the couple in a happy moment obviously clashes with what has happened. This occurs for three co-present reasons. On the one hand there is the need to want to use images - we live in a society in which the image is very important, because it takes very few seconds to be absorbed, whereas a written text requires the time of reading - and so an image is attached because it is considered a fundamental requirement, when in fact it is not: one can perfectly well report a piece of news without an image. And then the images are chosen badly for two reasons: first, because there is not much awareness; second, because there is haste and people do not know where to look". (Azzalini)

She illustrates the resulting vacuum with an episode from her own experience of advising broadcasters - a public-television journalist who explained that the newsroom knew only what *not* to use: "we can't use only little red shoes", the symbol of the struggle against violence, "and there are no guidelines on which image to use". For Azzalini this exposes a failure of critical media work, which "cannot only say what is wrong" but must "also say what is right", and she offers a concrete proposal: where an image must be used, one can draw on images

that connote structural protection, such as those of law-enforcement or of anti-violence centres. She also notes that incongruent images persist simply because suitable images are lacking and are taken wherever they can be found, including from open social-media profiles. Rizzi, by contrast, emphasises not the production mechanism but the pattern of selection and its ideological effect. She notes a genuine improvement - the near-disappearance of the staged “symbolic” photographs of a cowering woman, which she criticises sharply because they “see the violence from the point of view of its author”, adopting “the aggressor’s gaze” - but identifies two persistent distortions:

“What we notice is that, if you look at the images accompanying femicide news, it seems that the victims are all young and beautiful: the images are predominantly of young women, beautiful women, sometimes even galleries of girls at the seaside, in swimsuits, because there is a strong sexualisation of the image of the victim of violence - whereas older women, ordinary women, seem almost not to exist, when in reality the proportion of older women among the victims of femicide is higher than that of young women. And the other aspect is the frequent use of the images of the ‘good old days’, taken from Facebook, of the couple of times past, which is always within that romanticisation of gender-based violence that seems to have great purchase in the newspapers. So if in language we see some steps forward, on images, and on the imagination they ground, we see far fewer - and this is certainly a critical point”. (Rizzi)

The two visual analyses are thus complementary rather than identical: Azzalini explains *why* dissonant images appear (the felt obligation to illustrate, haste, lack of awareness, and the absence of positive guidance), grounding the image’s narrative force in Barthes’ (1977) account of the image as a constitutive part of the message; Rizzi documents *which* images are chosen (sexualised young victims, invisibilised older ones, the romantic couple) and reads the selection as the reproduction of a gendered imaginary. Together they explain Chapter 3’s finding of text-image dissonance from both the production and the selection side.

Finally, both experts trace these failures to the political economy of journalism, and here the convergence is at its strongest. Rizzi names precarity as the first obstacle and ties it directly to the non-application of guidelines:

“There are various factors. One is the state of Italian journalists, who live in a condition of maximum precarisation and therefore of isolation from shared professional practices ... because journalists paid five euros a piece have to make a living and find it hard to refine their ethics on the sacred texts. Another problem is that, unlike what presumably happens in foreign newspapers, in Italian ones few have precise internal policies on how one should speak about gender issues. One of the requests we have made as GiULiA would be to make training on gender issues compulsory, whereas now whoever wants to do it does it and whoever does not, does not: you can go and do training on, say, the anchovy - a food topic - or on gender issues, and it counts the same. We think it should be compulsory, because it is a sensitive theme that concerns the proactive function of journalism. Within our deontological code, Article 13 was introduced, on how to treat gender issues, on the basis of what was already in the *Manifesto di Venezia* - which is not a deontological charter but a manifesto of recommendations - which in turn takes up the indications of the Istanbul Convention and the Beijing Charter [the Beijing Platform for Action]”. (Rizzi)

Azzalini independently identifies the same economic root, framing it as a “poverty” of time and resources: the web supplies news “at a crazy speed”, “haste is not a good counsellor of good journalistic practice” and a “world of underpaid freelance journalism” offers “little incentive” to those “paid five, six, seven euros a piece” to verify and go in depth, since “going in depth requires time”. Her distinctive contribution is to convert this into a normative principle - “accuracy requires slowness” - and to connect the resulting superficiality to a measurable crisis of public trust, invoking the Reuters Institute’s monitoring of digital news and the finding that part of the audience “says it does not understand the news”. The two thus agree on the diagnosis (precarity and speed) while proposing different remedies: Rizzi, the practitioner-advocate, calls for institutional levers - compulsory gender training and internal editorial policies

modelled on foreign newsrooms - whereas Azzalini, the researcher, calls for a slower, verification-based journalism and, as a longer-term measure, for media literacy taught from school onwards.

4.3 Dialogue between the interviews and Chapter 3

Read together, the two expert accounts speak directly to the findings of the media analysis, confirming its central conclusion, corroborating several of its specific results, and - most valuably - supplying explanations and cautions that the corpus analysis could not generate on its own.

4.3.1 Points of convergence

The experts confirm Chapter 3's central thesis - a real but partial and uneven turning point - and they independently corroborate its most distinctive claim, namely that the shift was driven by the victim's family acting as discursive protagonists rather than by the profession. Azzalini's account of the WhatsApp voice and of Elena's "healthy son of patriarchy", and Rizzi's account of the relatives "taking the floor" and politicising the case, both locate the pivot exactly where Chapter 3 placed it, and Azzalini's observation about the victim's restored subjectivity specifies the textual mechanism that the content analysis could describe only from the outside. Rizzi's recollection of the *Liberio* editorial corroborates another of Chapter 3's findings - that the structural lexicon penetrated even hostile outlets - and gives it a sharp formulation: a frame has prevailed when even its opponents must argue on its terrain. On continuity, both experts confirm the persistence beneath the renovated vocabulary of the precise elements Chapter 3 identified - the reduced but surviving *raptus*, the himpathetic mitigation of the perpetrator, and the romanticising couple-image - with Rizzi naming the social-media "happy couple" photograph in almost the same terms the corpus analysis used to describe its visual dissonance. The episodic/thematic asymmetry that framing theory predicts (Iyengar, 1991; Entman, 1993) is corroborated from the production side: Azzalini finds the structural reading confined to occasional, non-in-depth coverage, and Rizzi finds it concentrated in the "appointed days" of the calendar rather than in daily

cronaca. Rizzi's closing argument that violence is countered also by "telling women well" across science, sport and politics restates, in professional terms, the thesis of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978; GMMP, 2025) that underpins the feminist-media-studies framework of Chapter 3 (Meyers, 1997; Boyle, 2005; Gill, 2007).

4.3.2 Tensions, gaps and added insight

The interviews also qualify Chapter 3 in ways that begin from the experts' own reasoning. The first qualification concerns durability and the representativeness of the corpus. Because Chapter 3 analysed a single emblematic case at the height of public attention, it risks recording the high-water mark of awareness rather than routine practice; this is precisely what both experts warn against from opposite examples - Azzalini's observation that the effect "diluted over time" in the Garlasco coverage, and Rizzi's romanticised murder-suicide reported, with an invented "last embrace", only weeks after Giulia's death. Their testimony does not contradict Chapter 3, which framed the turning point as partial, but it specifies the limit: the corpus cannot by itself distinguish a durable change in practice from a temporary, attention-driven spike, and the experts' evidence points toward the latter as the routine condition.

The second qualification is reflexive and is the chapter's most consequential contribution. Both experts independently describe a systematic selection bias - Azzalini through the neglected, strongly attenuated cases of elderly and ill wives, Rizzi through the sexualisation of young, "beautiful" victims and the erasure of older and "ordinary" ones who are in fact the numerical majority. This converging observation turns back on the case study itself: Giulia Cecchettin - young, photogenic, middle-class - corresponds exactly to the profile the experts identify as over-represented and sympathetically framed. The very salience that made her case a turning point therefore makes it unrepresentative of the wider field of femicide, and Chapter 3's conclusions about what the media can do when fully mobilised must be read alongside the experts' evidence about what the media routinely do with less newsworthy victims. This is a caution the corpus, centred on the emblematic case, could not have produced from within.

The third qualification concerns causation, where the experts relocate part of Chapter 3's findings outside the published text and partly outside ideology. Chapter 3 necessarily read agency-suppressing language and image-text dissonance as features of the artefact, inviting an ideological interpretation. Rizzi's account of the police press release as a primary framing source, and Azzalini's account of dissonant imagery as a product of haste, of the felt obligation to illustrate, of social-media sourcing and of an absence of positive guidance, together reframe part of this material as the downstream effect of source dependence and production poverty rather than of editorial endorsement of romance. Both, moreover, ground persistent malpractice in the precarity and speed of contemporary journalism. These accounts do not refute Chapter 3's reading of the texts, but they convert several of its descriptive findings into explanatory hypotheses about the conditions of news production - the principal added value of the interviews. A related tension complicates Chapter 3's reading of the lexical shift as straightforward progress: both experts stress that "patriarchy" entered public discourse already captured by political polarisation - Rizzi noting that the term is used "not so much to talk about the phenomenon" as for "a political positioning", becoming "divisive" and "instrumentalised", and Azzalini that, in an ecosystem that "privileges polarisation", the word risks being ridiculed or reduced to mere "male domination" rather than understood as an entire social organisation with intersectional effects. A frame, in this view, can be simultaneously victorious and hollowed out, its vocabulary saturating the headlines as its analytical content is evacuated.

4.4 Methodological reflections, limitations and future research

4.4.1 Research limitations

The interview component is subject to limitations characteristic of qualitative expert research conducted within the constraints of a Master's dissertation. The most evident is the small number of participants: two interviews cannot represent the range of positions within Italian journalism, and the findings are offered not as generalisable but as expert interpretations that enrich and

contextualise the corpus analysis. This constraint reflects a well-known difficulty in this kind of research - access to media professionals and recognised experts is genuinely hard to obtain, given their limited availability and understandable caution, and a student researcher has restricted means of securing their time. The recruitment of two highly qualified interviewees through the supervisor's scholarly network should be read in the light of these barriers rather than as a freely chosen target.

Several further limitations follow. Both interviewees, while occupying complementary positions, are aligned with the gender-sensitive reform agenda - Rizzi through GiULiA, Azzalini through media-monitoring research - so the sample does not capture the perspectives of crime reporters working under daily deadline pressure, of editors and newsroom managers who control resourcing, or of journalists sceptical of that agenda; their convergent diagnoses would be strengthened by triangulation with those voices. The interviews were conducted in Italian and analysed for an English-language thesis, an unavoidable layer of translation mitigated by rendering excerpts as faithfully as possible and by preserving key Italian terms (*raptus*, *patriarcato*, *femminicidio*) where their precise sense matters. They are, further, self-reported professional judgements, with the usual reflexive limits of expert testimony. Finally, several monitoring sources the experts cite - the 2025 public-service television report, the Reuters Institute's digital-news monitoring, and the STeP Observatory's reports - are reported at second hand rather than independently verified here. None of these limitations invalidates the analysis: the interviews were never intended as an independent representative study, but as qualified professional insight against which to test and deepen the corpus findings, and in that role they contribute explanatory knowledge - about source framing, production constraints and victim selection - that content analysis alone could not have produced.

4.4.2 Future research directions

The findings map directly onto an agenda for further research. The most immediate step is to widen and diversify the expert sample, deliberately

including crime reporters, editors and newsroom managers, as well as the precarious freelancers whose working conditions both experts identified as decisive; interviews with publishers would test how far the reform-oriented account offered here is shared or contested within the profession. The experts' insistence that the post-Cecchettin shift "diluted over time" calls for a longitudinal design that tracks femicide coverage across several years and compares the Cecchettin corpus with that of later cases, so as to distinguish a durable change in practice from a temporary, attention-driven spike and to assess the long-term impact of the case on journalistic routines.

Two directions follow specifically from the experts' distinctive contributions. Rizzi's account of the deontological apparatus - the *Manifesto di Venezia*, Article 13 of the code, and the demand that gender training be made compulsory - invites evaluative research that measures the actual effect of these instruments on output, comparing the coverage of trained and untrained journalists or of outlets with and without internal policies. Rizzi's identification of the police press release as a primary framing source invites a study that traces the path from institutional communiqué to published article, testing empirically how much of the privatising, conflict-centred framing originates upstream; combined with Azzalini's emphasis on the algorithmic amplification of polarisation, this points toward following femicide discourse across its entire production chain rather than only at the point of publication.

The experts' evidence that visual practice lags behind language, and that older and disabled victims are erased, recommends both a dedicated multimodal study of femicide imagery and a comparative analysis of high-profile and low-profile, local cases, so that the field's selection biases - obscured by a single emblematic case - become visible. Both experts repeatedly pointed beyond the press, Azzalini to public-service television and algorithmic platforms and Rizzi to the social-media provenance of romanticising images, which recommends extending the analysis to television and social-media circulation and triangulating professional perspectives with audience reception, so as to answer the question both experts raised but neither could resolve - how the contested vocabulary of "patriarchy" is actually received. Taken together, these

directions show that the present research does not close the question of the discursive turning point but specifies it: it establishes that a shift occurred, locates its limits through the experts' testimony, and identifies the production conditions, victim hierarchies and temporal dynamics that future work must address to determine whether the turning point endures.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to determine whether, and to what extent, the media coverage of the Giulia Cecchettin case marked a discursive turning point in the Italian representation of femicide. The evidence assembled across the corpus analysis and the expert interviews supports a single, carefully qualified answer: the case was a genuine turning point, but a partial and uneven one, located at the level of explicit naming and editorial interpretation rather than at the level of the deep narrative and visual structures through which the press makes male violence intelligible. The initial hypothesis is therefore largely confirmed, with the important refinement that the shift proved not merely incomplete but internally contradictory - a field in which transformation and continuity coexist within the same outlets, often within the same pages.

The corpus analysis demonstrated that the pivot can be dated and attributed with rare precision. Before Elena Cecchettin's letter of 20 November 2023, the dominant frame was episodic, organised around the enigma of the disappearance, the figure of the "good boy", and the romantic vocabulary of jealousy and loss. After it, the structural lexicon of *femminicidio* and *patriarcato* migrated within days from feminist and activist registers into mainstream headlines and editorials, reaching even outlets ideologically hostile to that vocabulary. Yet the linguistic analysis showed that this lexical victory did not penetrate the syntax: agency-suppressing transitivity, nominalisation and the passive voice continued to obscure the perpetrator, while the *raptus* repertoire and himpathetic attention to Turetta's suffering, respectability and "wasted potential" persisted and, around the release of his confession in June 2024, intensified. The visual analysis traced the same gap in a different register: photographs of the couple "in happier times", aestheticising portraits of the victim and the dissonant pairing of structural headlines with romantic images repeatedly undercut the critique the text purported to advance. The comparison across outlets revealed, crucially, that the decisive fault line ran less between newspapers than between genres - structural editorials coexisting with hard-news reporting saturated by the very mitigation devices those editorials

denounced - while the Anglophone comparators, framing the killing in structural terms from the outset, set the nationally specific Italian conventions of sensationalism and himpathy in contrast.

The expert interviews confirmed this reading from the side of production and extended it in ways the texts alone could not. Both Azzalini and Rizzi located the engine of change outside the newsroom, in the family's unprecedented intervention - Azzalini stressing how Giulia's recovered voice messages restored to the victim a subjectivity the genre normally denies her, Rizzi stressing how the relatives' "taking of the floor" politicised a death that would otherwise have remained private. Both, however, denied that a paradigm had changed, each adducing concrete evidence of rapid regression once public attention moved on. Above all, they supplied explanations that the content analysis could only infer: the privatising frame transmitted upstream by police press releases, the dissonant image produced by haste, social-media sourcing and an absence of positive visual guidance, and the political economy of a precarious, accelerated journalism in which, as Azzalini put it, accuracy requires a slowness the profession can no longer afford.

The original contribution of the thesis lies in this layered demonstration and in the method that produced it. By combining corpus-based frame analysis, critical discourse analysis, multimodal visual analysis and expert interviews within a single design, the study does more than confirm that Italian femicide coverage remains flawed: it shows precisely where, and at what depth, change did and did not occur, and why. To the literature on the media representation of femicide it offers a finely grained anatomy of a discursive turning point - datable, attributable to non-elite actors, and stratified by level and by genre - rather than the blunt verdict of progress or stasis that single-method studies tend to yield. About contemporary Italian media discourse it reveals a press capable of naming patriarchy in its editorials while reproducing patriarchal common sense in its reporting and its imagery, and a lexical advance simultaneously hollowed by political polarisation. About the representation of victims and perpetrators it documents the persistence of an asymmetry in which the woman is sentimentalised or objectified while the man is humanised and partly

exculpated. Finally, about the relationship between journalism and gender-sensitive reporting, it exposes the gap between an advanced normative apparatus - the Istanbul Convention, the *Manifesto di Venezia*, the deontological code - and a daily practice constrained by precarity, deadline and source dependence. The interviews' most pointed insight is reflexive: because the press systematically over-represents young, photogenic, middle-class victims while rendering older and marginalised women invisible, the very salience that made the Cecchettin case a turning point also makes it unrepresentative of the field it transformed.

It would therefore be wrong to conclude either that everything has changed or that nothing has. The evidence of transformation is real: a vocabulary once confined to feminist critique is now part of the mainstream repertoire, the structural reading has institutional purchase, and the period under study culminated in the recognition of *femminicidio* as an autonomous criminal offence. The evidence of continuity is equally real: the deep grammar of mitigation, sympathy and romanticisation survived the shift and reasserted itself the moment the emblematic case receded. The most accurate characterisation is of a turning point that is genuine in its lexical and editorial dimension, partial in its reach, and provisional in its durability - a potential transformation whose long-term significance depends on whether the naming achieved in 2023-24 hardens into a change of routine practice or fades, as the experts feared, into a diluted memory. Whether the Cecchettin moment proves a permanent realignment or a high-water mark cannot be settled from a single case at the peak of its visibility; it can only be settled by what the press does, over years, with the women whose deaths command no such attention.

These conclusions must be read in light of the study's limitations. The corpus, though diverse, is bounded in size and time, and its Anglophone component is a deliberately modest comparator rather than a full cross-national sample; the visual analysis rests on a descriptive record of the images rather than the images themselves; and the interview component comprises two experts, reflecting the genuine difficulty of securing access to busy media professionals within the constraints of a Master's dissertation. These are real constraints, but

they do not undermine the findings: the interviews were never intended as a representative survey, and their value lies in the qualified, production-side insight they bring to the textual analysis. Framed appropriately, the study's scope is the source of its precision rather than a weakness to be apologised for.

The limitations map directly onto an agenda for future research, developed from the interviews. A longitudinal design tracking femicide coverage across several years, and comparing the Cecchettin corpus with that of later cases, would distinguish a durable change in practice from a temporary, attention-driven spike. A comparative study of high-profile and low-profile, local killings would test the victim-selection bias the experts identified, and a dedicated multimodal study would address the visual lag that both the corpus and the interviews found most resistant to reform. Widening the expert sample to include crime reporters, editors and precarious freelancers would test how far the reform-oriented account is shared within the profession, while extending the analysis to television, social-media circulation and audience reception would follow femicide discourse across the production chain rather than at the single point of publication. Each of these directions emerges not as a generic suggestion but as a question this study has opened and could not, within its scope, close.

Beyond its specific findings, this thesis affirms that the way a society speaks about the killing of women is never incidental to the violence itself. Media discourse does not merely report femicide; it participates in the cultural order that produces it, naturalising or contesting the assumptions about love, possession and male entitlement on which such killings rest. The Cecchettin case matters, finally, because it made that participation visible - because, for a moment, a grieving family forced an entire press system to confront the gap between the language it used and the reality it described. That this confrontation produced a real but fragile shift is not a counsel of despair but a measure of the stakes: it shows that journalistic practice can change, that the words chosen in a headline carry moral weight, and that responsible, gender-sensitive reporting is not a stylistic refinement but a contribution to the slow cultural work of making violence against women unspeakable in the only

sense that ultimately counts - by making it unthinkable. The significance of Giulia Cecchettin's story, beyond the grief of a single family, lies in what it revealed about how close that work remains, and how much of it is still to be done.

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Acknowledgements

I won't deny that this thesis was difficult for me, a long and complex journey with several changes of direction.

Giulia was murdered on November 11, the day of my 22nd birthday. At the time, I was in Rome with my best friend; it was our graduation trip after we both graduated with our Bachelor's degrees on October 13.

Giulia was the same age as me. Giulia lived in the same region as me. Giulia attended the same university as me. Giulia was supposed to graduate around the same time as me. Giulia could have been my friend. Giulia could have been me.

This femicide affected me deeply right from the start; I took part in the demonstrations against violence against women that were held in Padua in the weeks that followed. I was also present at her funeral; I remember that cold morning in early December perfectly, when, to my surprise, I was interviewed live by a reporter.

How did this thesis come about? First of all, the fields of journalism and gender studies are particularly close to my heart. Right from the start, I noticed how the media coverage of Giulia Cecchettin's case focused on morbid or superfluous details, describing every little detail or word spoken by the two families. Where is the line between news reporting - the journalist's duty to recount the facts - and sensationalism? From this question of mine - from this boundary that, as a reader and journalism student, I often saw being crossed - came my idea to analyze media language in cases of femicide.

In reality, my initial project was more ambitious: to analyze the media coverage of various cases of femicide in Italy, not just one. Among these were the case of Giulia Tramontano, which occurred in the same year, and those of Sara Campanella and Ilaria Sula, both students who were victims of femicide in circumstances similar to those of Giulia Cecchettin in 2025. This serves as

evidence that, despite the huge media outcry, femicides unfortunately did not stop after Giulia Cecchettin's murder. Giulia was not "the last".

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I dedicate this thesis to Giulia Cecchettin and to all victims of femicide. Although, at the same time, I wish this thesis had never existed. I wish I had never had to ask myself these questions. I wish Giulia and all women like her were still here with us, busy studying, graduating, working, traveling or simply dreaming.

I dream of a world where the word "femicide" no longer exists.

Noemi Mazzon