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Nechama Brodie

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Femicide: A Need for Orientation

Nechama R. Brodie

Wits Centre for Journalism, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

Correspondence: Nechama R. Brodie (Nechama.Brodie@wits.ac.za)

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ABSTRACT

Femicide can be understood as a political term rather than a legal or medico-legal one—its contemporary use dates back to the late 1970s, when academics began to explore and define terminologies that exposed the gendered nature of violence, and that when a woman was murdered her gender was not incidental to that fact. Over the past 50 years, femicide (and, in some regions of the world, feminicide) has developed specific political, public health, criminological, and social meanings. In each of these contexts, however, the term/s remain contested, particularly when theoretical or scholarly definitions are applied equivocally between regions with relatively low prevalence of female homicides, and those with high endemic levels of fatal violence, such as in the global south. This article provides an introduction to and orientation of overarching themes, clusters and locations of study within contemporary and legacy academic literature and scholarship on femicide, including a discussion of feminicide, through a review of scholarly and institutional works, invoking frameworks of time, place, typology, discipline, and modes of injury and death.

1 | Introduction

Femicide is a global phenomenon with 'no agreed-upon [universal] definition' (OHCHR and UN Women 2015). In its broadest expression, the word refers to the killing of a female person; or, in other approaches, where the 'power relations between men and women result in the death of one or more women' (Souza et al. 2017, 2950). But which deaths are counted, whether or not this includes only killing with intent, killing through neglect, or even the abortion of a female foetus, and who is included for consideration as 'female', vary between national practices and legal codes and 'according to the point of view from which they are examined and the discipline that is addressing it' (OHCHR and UN Women 2015).

As the term femicide—and, later, feminicide, which is used in several Latin American countries, that is, *feminicidio*—advanced from the works of feminist activism and academia, it has crossed over into public health strategies, news headlines and journalism reports (Brodie 2020, 2021, 2023), across the charters of international organisations, and, less evenly, in the statutes and political rhetoric of individual states. In each of these contexts the terms remain imprecise, sometimes contested, contributing to frequent misalignments between how the 'problem' of the killing of women or girls is understood, what data should be collected to understand the problem, and what policies should be recommended or adopted to manage it. These variances are so pervasive that they should, by now, be understood as a feature of studies of gender and violence rather than an anomaly. In addition to manifesting poor or irregular data, these hierarchies of preference also influence how states choose to be informed on femicide policy and violence mitigation, and who is determined to be responsible for (or who is excused from) blame. As Naudi et al. astutely observe, '[d]efining a social problem in a certain way leads to a specific possible solution, which is dependent on the way the problem is defined' (2023, 171).

This article attempts to provide a critical review and orientation of the overarching themes, clusters and applied terminologies within both legacy and current academic and institutional

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scholarship on femicide, exploring the inception, dispersion, diffusion and refraction of the terms using a structured genealogical approach—referencing Foucault's (2004, 8) 'coupling [of scholarly and other works] which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics'. This approach employs not only archaeological-historical methods (Mobayed Vega 2023), but looks at the *effects* of history or the relationships between knowledge and power (Gutting 2005), that is, how these histories have shaped and constituted the present usage of femicide and feminicide. The review also uses narrative framework devices of latitude [referring to place] and longitude [referring to duration, a point in time or change over time], typology and discipline, and modus. Rather than insisting on one or other epistemic primacy of 'what is femicide?', this work emphasises that our understanding of femicide as usually connected to a particular time or a particular place, and suggests only that there *is* an ontology of femicide, and that the utility of the term depends on our orientation within multiple fields and our ability to 'look for the "schema that orchestrates and interprets it"' (Butler 1993 in Fuentes 2023).

2 | Longitude and Latitude: Femicide Over Time and Place

During the 1960s and 1970s, western feminist activism and scholarship introduced a number of semantic shifts that surfaced the role of gender in both the banalities and the extremities of everyday life. Violence against women, often invisible but in plain sight, was a particularly important category in which new names were needed for old phenomena, and language was a significant tool in renaming women's experiences, from creating entirely new words to manufacturing new linguistic compounds, reclaiming archaic terms, or 'expanding the conceptual boundaries of words' (Van Den Bergh 1987, 135). Andrea Dworkin (1974) coined [and, later, Mary Daley (1978) wrote about] what she called a 'gynocide'—the systemic killing and maiming of women as a 'stratagem of social control' (Dworkin 1974, 191). In 1978, Pat Parker published the enduringly powerful poem titled 'Womanslaughter', a play on the legal term manslaughter, about a husband who murdered his wife (based on the killing of Parker's own sister) which contained the line/s: 'Her things were his/including her life' (Parker in Radford and Russell, 1992, 81).

Some time in either 1974 or 1975 (D. E. H. Russell 2008, 2011), South African-born sociologist Diana Russell encountered a novel iteration of the fallow term 'femicide', through an unpublished anthology by American writer Carol Orlock, where the word was used 'to refer to the killing of girls and women by men' (D. Russell 1981, x). In 1976, Russell used the phrase 'as an alternative to the gender-neutral *homicide*' (Radford and Russell 1992, xi) in a presentation to the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women in Brussels, not only to describe female homicide, but 'to suggest that when women are murdered, their femaleness is not incidental to the crime' (Vetten 1995, 78). Although at the time Russell did not propose a specific classification for the term, she would later present several iterations of what she believed was meant by the word. Her earliest published definition, writing in *Ms.* Magazine (Caputi and Russell 1990) with American academic and author Jane Caputi, was described as: 'the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women'. In 1992, in an anthology co-authored with British academic and activist Jill Radford, this was updated to 'the misogynist killing of women by men' (Radford and Russell 1992, xi); and, by 2001, it settled into the form most commonly used today, that is, 'the killing of females by males because they are female' (D. E. H. Russell 2008)—a definition Russell would actively campaign for until her death in 2020.

Gynocide, womenslaughter and femicide weren't just feminised words. They were *feminist* words that attempted to capture a violent gestalt, itself mirrored in parallel activisms that sought recognition of, among other things, the politics and prevalence of rape—Susan Brownmiller (1975) described rape as 'a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear' (p. 15); rape was also the theme of Russell's own first major works on gendered violence—and the often-unrecognised violence that took place within the home. Pizzey (1974) wrote about the need for places of safety for women fleeing abusive spouses; D. Martin (1976) and Roy (1977) described 'battered wives', while Walker (1979) conceptualised the (now considered archaic or misleading) 'battered woman syndrome'—heralds of what was gradually being called 'domestic violence', where the phrase specifically referred to intimate partner abuse in the context of a relationship or family environment. Battered women in particular became a popular phrase in news media, and would remain in prominent use for some decades; but femicide did not. Radford and Russell (1992, xv) later observed that, in her view, it was only after the 1989 École Polytechnique massacre in Montreal, when 14 women were murdered at a university by a gun-wielding misogynist, that use of the term began to grow, as it 'made the existence of the phenomenon of femicide ... impossible to ignore' (1992, xv).

There is, in literature, a tendency to confer on Russell a sort of epistemic primogeniture in addition to an etymological one—of course, Russell's extensive work on femicide, over decades, was and remains formative to the field and its growth, and is certainly not limited to naming rights; but hers was not the only early or pioneering work in this area. Around the time Russell testified at the Brussels tribunal (in 1976), there was already an extant and growing body of criminological and multidisciplinary academic work that explored the features and prevalence of what was often simply termed 'female homicide', or sometimes 'dyadic homicide' (referring to intimate partner killings) or uxoricide (wife killings), and which showed an emerging and explicit understanding of the underlying structures of violence against women.

For example, in 1970, the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies published research on *Homicide in Uganda* (Tanner 1970), using data from 1964, observing:

> Women, on the other hand, are homicide-prone within their own homes (75%), despite the fact that they are not confined to their homes by religious or social conventions. They leave their homes freely and

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> frequently to fetch water, cultivate, go to market and the shops, as well as to attend social and religious ceremonies. The private nature of the female homicide is clear; she is in a directly dyadic relationship with her killer, who cannot be dissuaded from his intention to kill or mollified in his anger by any possible publicity for his actions.
>
> (Tanner 1970, 49)

Margaret Zahn's (1975) study on female homicide victims compared homicides of drug-using and non-using women in Philadelphia between 1969 and 1973, and found that, while drug-using women were exposed to slight additional risks related to drug transactions and illegal activities, 'women, both drug-using and non-using, were likely to be killed within the confines of domestic or love relationships. Over half of the non-users were killed in such situations and a third of the drug-using women were. Traditional domestic, especially marital, contexts, then, still prove the most lethal for women' (p. 413).

In 1979, Dobash and Dobash published their groundbreaking *Violence Against Wives*, which, in its chapters, looked extensively at homicide in the context of a marital or spouse-like relationship... At the time, these kinds of framings were new, and they evolved and existed independently of Russell's neologism—although all of these works, in turn, should be viewed within broader academic and institutional moves to position and study violence as a public health problem (Sleet et al. 2012; Brodie et al. 2023), not unlike the ways in which gender studies had started to question the role of society rather than simply 'biology' in the construction of sex and gender.

By the early 1980s, and into the 1990s, a number of female scholars had started to use the word 'femicide' in their own studies of female homicides, usually crediting either Orlock or Russell with the word, but often with different definitions. The term appeared, as *femicidio* (defined simply as a case of homicide 'in which the victim was female'), in Gaetana Russo's (1983) study of femicide in Italy; and in the proceedings of the Australian National Conference on Domestic Violence held in 1985 (Allen 1985), where 'femicide' was used to refer to intimate partner killings. The term [femicide] was also employed in several studies and discussion papers looking at sex pre-selection techniques being used to eliminate female foetuses (see the early work of Hoskins and Holmes 1984; Holmes and Hoskins 1987), particularly in India (Patel 1989), but this usage was not initially endorsed by Russell—who did however include women who had died of botched abortions to be victims of femicide (D. E. H. Russell 2008).

Between 1987 and 1993, American academic Karen D. Stout authored a number of papers focussing specifically on what she labelled intimate femicide—'the killing of women by male intimate partners' (Stout 1991). In Gartner and McCarthy's (1991, 290) work on femicide in Canada, the authors used Russell and Stout as a reference, and said that:

> 'Femicide' refers to the killing of a woman, whereas 'homicide' is typically used as a more generic and gender-neutral term referring to the killing of a person. Neither is a legal term, nor do they indicate anything about criminal responsibility. The term 'femicide' has recently come into use by such scholars as Radford and Russell (1991) and Stout (1989).

Another key figure in the field of female homicide studies was Jacquelyn Campbell, who had started to publish extensively on 'misogyny and homicide of women' in the 1980s (J. C. Campbell 1981; also 1986, 1989), only later adopting the term femicide—including in a special edition of the journal *Homicide Studies* in 1998—but with an explicitly different application, stating that while (by then) Radford and Russell's perspective/definition was important 'for advocacy, we have developed this issue from a more empirical perspective, cautiously avoiding inferences to motive without clear support from available data. Consequently, in this volume, femicide refers to all killings of women, regardless of motive or perpetrator status' (J. Campbell and Runyan 1998, 347–348).

In the early 1990s Russell and Jane Radford published their anthology *Femicide: The Politics of Woman-Killing* (1992), which included contributions from leading feminist/gender and homicide scholars of the time. Many of the chapters still used the term homicide, or used femicide and homicide interchangeably, although the book's introduction was unambiguous about the editors' thoughts, and positioned the term femicide as 'sexual terrorism against women' (Caputi and Russell 1992). What was particularly significant about this work, though, was not just its scope, but the fact that its translation into Spanish caught the attention of Mexican academic and activist (later politician) Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos. The *Femicide* edition was released at around the same time as a large number of female homicides were being identified around the Mexican border city of Juárez, which mobilised feminist activism to demand accountability from the state (García-Del Moral 2020). Lagarde grafted Russell's concept onto her own local context to incept a hybrid term, feminicide (*feminicidio*), which highlighted not only the gender of the victim but the impunity of the authorities (Gutierrez Aldrete 2022) and the state's failure to protect women from fatal violence, which acknowledged femicide as part of a series of '"gendered ... terror practices that culminate in socially tolerated murder" of women' (Carey and Torres 2010 in Fuentes 2023, 70). Julia Monárrez Fragoso, who later published a major study on the 'systematic sexual feminicides' (2009) of Juárez, described feminicide as including 'all policies tolerated by the State that cause the death of women' (Monárrez Fragoso 2005 in the *Latin American Model Protocol*, 2014, 13).

The introduction of 'feminicide'—although less-noticed and less widely adopted in other geographies—went on to inform significant regional scholarship, which contributed to multiple local initiatives incepted at a similar time, such as the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (the Convention of Belém do Pará), adopted in 1994, which was the world's first legally binding instrument that criminalised violence against women. These approaches also transformed data collection and

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initiated extensive localised legislative changes across Latin America (which, together with Africa and Asia, represents the largest numbers of women and girls being killed (UNODC 2019)). Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano's 2010 anthology *Terrorising Women: Feminicide in the Americas* (Duke University Press) includes cross-disciplinary contributions from a number of leading regional activists and scholars, including Rita Laura Segato, Patricia Ravelo Blancas, and Montserrat Sagot, looking at violence against women from the 1990s into the new millennium. More recently, Dawson and Mobayed Vega's (2023) *Routledge International Handbook on Femicide and Femininicide* includes multiple chapters on conceptualisations and applications of feminicide, although the literature on feminicide remains under-represented in English-language press.

The same period (the mid-1990s) was also significant in terms of the debut of the term 'femicide' in South Africa, a country with one of the highest rates of femicide in the world. Following a small local study on intimate femicide (Vetten 1995), which was presented at the 1995 Beijing Conference, together with the work of forensic pathologist L. J. Martin (1999), the country began to produce the first in what would become a groundbreaking series of autopsy-based national femicide studies, helmed by scholars including Naeemah Abrahams, Shanaaz Mathews and Rachel Jewkes (Mathews et al. 2004; Abrahams et al. 2008, 2012, 2024).

As an addendum: Russell herself was ultimately less enthusiastic about the word feminicide. In a speech at a UN Symposium on Femicide in Vienna in 2012, and reproduced on her own website, she explained how she had initially given 'consent' to Lagarde to translate the term, but disagreed with crediting Lagarde for 'coining' the word [feminicide] rather than merely redefining it [the word 'femicide' of course existed in language before Russell, and was even occasionally used in 19th century literature to refer to the murder of a woman]. D. E. H. Russell (2012; online) believed it was 'vitally important to adhere to only one term, namely femicide, regardless of the languages spoken in non-English-speaking countries'.

This again exposes a problematic conflict between Russell's static (and generally western-centric) approach regarding not only the inclusion of *feminicidio* but many other terms for the same phenomenon, to describe not just 'women killing', but the killing of women in a local context and local language [as just two examples, *kobietobójstwo* in Polish (Grzyb 2014); or *Kadın Cinayetlerine* in Turkish].

As prominent femicide scholar Shalva Weil (2018) observes, over time, the 'study of femicide evolved and was de facto adapted by international scholars'. If femicide is understood as a continuum—a 'progression of violent acts that end in death' (Monárrez Fragoso 2002 in Sosa 2023, 50)—then it should also be no surprise that the same features are reflected in terms of discipline-based practices. Mobayed Vega (2023, 19) describes femi(ni)cide as an 'episteme', a set of relations at a particular time, linking diverse practices and ways of knowing; these worlds, she continues 'are not fixed but rather open for crafting, contestation and negotiation'.

3 | Typologies of Femicide

Typology is an approach that constructs and groups cases or participants by identifying shared characteristics (common features), or relationships between identified types (Sokal 1962; Stapley, O'Keeffe and Midgley 2022). Because femicide remains primarily a socio-political term, with only a handful of countries that have developed specific legislation to define the term/phenomenon for official (medico-legal or legal) purposes, many countries and researchers employ a variety of broad type-classifications which are typically a synthesis of legacy academic and institutional literature. This process is, again, an artefact of wider socio-political changes that have taken place over the same timeframe, and which should be considered in terms of their role in propagating later types or typologies of female homicide.

Violence against women was not part of the agenda for the first UN World Conference on Women, held in Mexico in 1975, and was specifically excluded from the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 (Ertürk and Purkayastha 2012). It was only at the second UN Conference on Women, in 1980, that a resolution was adopted on battered women and violence in the family (United Nations n.d.). By the third Conference on Women, in 1985, violence against women was recognised in specific terms, with a recommendation to develop a set of measures to combat this type of violence. This culminated in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted in 1993 at the World Conference on Human Rights. The following year, the United Nations established a formal post of a Special Rapporteur on violence against women [later women and girls]. 1994 was also the first time the term 'femicide' appeared in UN documentation (Mobayed Vega 2023, 20).

Violence against women featured prominently in the Beijing Declaration and its platforms for action (which were adopted by 189 nations), following the fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995. A 5-year progress review (Beijing +5) was conducted at a special session of the UN General Assembly in 2000, leading to an in-depth study 'on all forms of violence against women' (UN 2006) and the development of a set of indicators to measure violence against women, including femicide (UN 2007).

These processes, and extensive work and reporting by the Special Rapporteurs, contributed to the subsequent Vienna Declaration on Femicide in November 2012, which, in addition to describing femicide as the 'killing of women and girls because of their gender', expanded on previous documents by outlining a broad and inclusive set of potential types or forms of femicide, viz:

> (1) the murder of women as a result of intimate partner violence; (2) the torture and misogynist slaying of women; (3) killing of women and girls in the name of 'honour'; (4) targeted killing of women and girls in the context of armed conflict; (5) dowry-related killings of women; (6) killing of women and girls

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> because of their sexual orientation and gender identity; (7) the killing of aboriginal and indigenous women and girls because of their gender; (8) female infanticide and gender-based sex selection foeticide; (9) genital mutilation-related deaths; (10) accusations of witchcraft; and (11) other femicides connected with gangs, organised crime, drug dealers, human trafficking, and the proliferation of small arms.
>
> (UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice 2013, 2)

The intentionally expansive definitions of femicide were an important step in acknowledging regional and local iterations of violence, but they also exposed some of the challenges in creating a coherent idea of 'femicide': although most female homicides are committed by an intimate partner or family member, this was not, for example, the case in the mass killings of women in Ciudad Juárez; dowry-related killings are extremely common in the subcontinent, but almost non-existent elsewhere; similarly, so-called 'honour' killings (the term is of course contested) exist in some communities but not all; killings on the basis of allegations of witchcraft remain common in parts of the global south (Brodie 2020), but less so in Europe, and so on.

The UN Women *Latin American Model Protocol* (2014), developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for the investigation of gender-related killings of women, suggested further characteristics could be considered, such as whether killings were active/direct or passive/indirect. However, as later UN texts would have it, the broadly applied [Russell-like] description of femicide as 'an intentional killing with a gender-related motivation' (UN Women 2022) would also introduce inherent caveats (i.e., all femicides are female homicides, but not all female homicides are femicides). In the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) *Global Study of Homicide*, which looked at the gender-related killing of women and girls (UNODC 2019), the report observed that the 'notion of gender-related killing, or "femicide", required an understanding of *which* acts are gender-related—something that is subject to a certain degree of interpretation' (p. 8). To avoid the ambiguity of regional definitions, applications, and data collection, the UNODC study thus elected to focus only on female homicides committed by intimate partners and family members (which, in any event, made up the vast majority of all female homicides; and which were also determined to be inarguably gender-related) as a proxy for all 'femicides'.

Similar trajectories in terms of institutional definitions of femicide can be seen in Latin America where most countries that had ratified the Belém do Pará Convention also passed laws to address violence against women in the context of domestic violence; these approaches also assumed greater urgency in the context of widespread and increasingly publicised murders of women in the region (Neumann 2022). Between 2008 (Guatemala) and 2017 (Uruguay), at least 18 countries in Latin America changed existing laws or approved new legislation that criminalised femicide and/or feminicide (Deus and Gonzalez 2018) with most including femicide or feminicide in the country's criminal code. These codes also nominally adhere to the classic (i.e., Russell) use of femicide, in that a gender-based motive or gender-based discrimination must be demonstrated—but also suggest that the crime of femicide or feminicide (the latter is applied in much broader senses than its original conceptualisation) can be implied through the type of murder, or the victim-perpetrator relationship. Crime types that are specified include murders [of female victims] committed by current or former partners and family members, during or prior to sexual violence, murders in the presence of children, or when the victim is pregnant or post-partum; some countries also include contingencies for human trafficking, cases where the victim's body is left exposed/in a public place, or if a woman was held (prior to her murder) without being able to communicate or ask for help (McGinnis 2019). There are, again many divergences in the application/s of the definitions, not only between countries but even within them. Each of Mexico's 32 federal states, for example, adapted the national feminicide law/s at different stages, and is able to interpret and apply the tenets of Article 325 [relating to feminicide] in slightly different ways—this could be in terms of how the motive of feminicide is interpreted, or even through the addition of qualifying criteria. McGinnis (2019) notes, for example, that Jalisco state has included *lesbofeminicidio* (killing a woman for her sexual orientation) and *transfeminicidio* (killing a transgender or transexual woman) in its penal code by including killings [of women] 'when the perpetrator acts for reasons of homophobia'.

The criminalisation of femicide and feminicide through statute has, however, yielded ambiguous results in terms of prevention and prosecution. Moraes et al. (2023, 451) found that the 'absolute number of femicides [in Brazil] increased between 2015 and 2019', despite the introduction and amendment of new feminicide laws [there is some ambiguity around whether or not improved codification also led to improved data collection, which may also account for the increase in recording]. Neumann (2022) reports on how femicide laws in Nicuaragua were intentionally weakened amid programmes aimed at restoring 'family unity', and which saw the femicide law changed to only include murders where the female victim had been in a pre-existing relationship with the perpetrator. In Mexico, *El Pais* (Barragan 2023) reporters quote the country's feminicide observatory as saying that while only 24% of murders of women and teenagers are thought to be feminicides, the real proportion is much higher, but it is considered difficult to '[get] prosecutors and courts to investigate and pass judgement with a gender perspective'. Gutiérrez-Romero (2023) also finds that there is a significant misclassification of femi[ni]cides in Mexico, and that the legislation often introduces or perpetuates ambiguities rather than solutions.

There are a number of excellent scholarly works that explore and explain this tension, and the resulting incongruities (Menjívar and Diossa-Jiménez 2023)—between definition, practice, discipline, statute, each of which also produce characterisations related to disciplinarity... Corradi et al. (2016), for example, ask the question as to whether femicide is a *useful* term [for contemporary sociological theory], and describe five thematic discipline-linked research approaches to the field, namely: feminist, sociological, criminological, human rights, and

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decolonial. In a special issue of *Current Sociology*, Walby (2023), quite brilliantly, looks at universalism versus and particularism in the construction of gendered indicators of femicide; and Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon (2023) explain and explore how divergent definitions of femicide that exist in law inform how femicide is 'counted' by respective countries, and that these differences can 'make it difficult to assess the nature and extent of femicide as a global problem'. In the expansive and essential *Routledge International Handbook on Femicide and Femininicide*, Mobayed Vega (2023) suggests 'epistemic worlds' of knowledge, which include the institutional, social, legal, criminological, statistical and theoretical.

Other ways of looking at the field could be to consider it as a simpler triptych: either political, medico-legal, and social; or epistemic, statistical, and ecological. Although these approaches can seem fragmented at times, Dawson and Mobayed Vega (2023, 6) remind us that '[a]ll definitions recognise that these killings are not isolated, sporadic or episodic cases of violence; rather they represent a structural situation and a social and a cultural phenomenon deeply rooted in customs and mindsets'.

4 | Mechanisms of Injury and Cause of Death

Many femicide typologies rely on discerning either the victim-perpetrator relationship and/or the motive for the killing; as this is not always immediately apparent (and sometimes never determined, particularly in countries with high rates of interpersonal violence and under-resourced policing and justice structures, like much of the global south), methods that focus on the victim's gender and which document knowable forensic information—such as mechanisms of injury, the place of death and the cause/s of death—are important, and can supplement ideational typologies of femicide. This is an area of study that remains under-developed, with few countries outside of South Africa publishing detailed and regular autopsy-based femicide data (Abrahams et al. 2024), but which can provide important markers or landmarks of both the act of femicide, and about the victim.

Epidemiological and medico-legal characteristics of female homicides tend to show both regional variance and global correspondence, with multiple, strong correlations between femicide typologies and both the cause/s and (type of) location of death, and the timing of the killing. For example, whether in Serbia, South Africa, Algeria or Turkey, multiple studies confirm that the 'marital home' is the primary location for intimate partner homicides (UN Women 2020; Brodie 2020, 2023; Altinova, Kesen, and Dasbas 2023; Mellouki et al. 2023).

There are also uncommon features that emerge in localised studies, but which are not typically considered in others, for example the observation of female suicides (Fitz-Gibbon and Walklate 2023; Mellouki et al. 2023), which may be related to preceding spousal or familial violence. This represents another area where the conceptualisation of femicide as a criminal act that falls within a continuum of violence is valuable; for example, studies where the death of a woman which has not been categorised as a murder or femicide, but where the decedent is associated with previous reports of intimate partner violence (Bates et al. 2021 in Fitz-Gibbon and Walklate 2023, 242) might suggest the incident/suicide should flagged as a potentially suspicious death.

Medical studies of female decedents who have died due to violence also show that victims often experience substantial perimortem trauma to the abdomen and chest area, with fatal injuries sustained to the head (Mellouki et al. 2023). This is consistent with other studies which connect intimate partner blunt force trauma with such blows (Steyn, Bacci, and Holland 2021). Multi-year autopsy-based studies on female homicides in South Africa (which define femicide as the female homicide of women aged 14 years and older, without any requirement for a proven misogynist motive) have also established differences between what they describe as sexual and non-sexual femicides—the former being femicides that are considered to have a sexual component such as suspected sexual violence or rape, removed underwear, genital injuries with no other explanations and so on (Abrahams et al. 2024). Using data from two large retrospective mortuary-based studies on femicide, the South African study found that sexual femicides were more likely to occur in a public place (non-sexual femicides were more likely to have occurred at the victims' homes), and that strangulation was the most common mechanism of death in sexual femicides—the import of this kind of information is that strangulation and killing in a public place are, reciprocally, potential indicators of sexual violence and that this should inform police and forensic investigations. Sexual femicides in South Africa are also more likely (than all femicides) to be committed by a perpetrator who is not an intimate partner. Studies from India also suggest links between strangulation and sexual assault, and strangulation and female homicide (R. Singh et al. 2015; M. Singh et al. 2019)—with added local features, for example there was an identified correlation between rape, dowry-related deaths, asphyxiation, road traffic and rail accidents for younger females—where 'people accused of such crimes kill the victim by hanging, strangulation or throttling and then they are thrown over railway tracks to mutilate the body. Mutilation may be intentional by the criminals in an effort to destroy all traces of identity or to facilitate disposal of the body' (R. Singh et al. 2015, 338–339).

Dowry-related issues are specifically co-indicated in cases of forged or abetted suicides of women (Belur et al. 2014). In India the deliberate and 'homicidal burning of married women' (Kumar and Kanth 2004) is often reported as a kitchen accident—a burst stove, or clothing catching fire from a wood-burning oven, or even as a suicide. Sabri, Sanchez, and Campbell (2014) studied domestic violence death reports in Indian newspapers and found that the majority of domestic violence murders were committed by burning and strangulation—the former was more common when the husband and in-laws perpetrated the killing, the latter slightly more common when the husband killed his wife on his own. Dowry was the motive provided for more than half of domestic violence homicides.

Studying the mechanisms of injury or causes of death can also reveal patterns of violence that precede the final, fatal act (which is significant for violence prevention rather than only

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detection). Studies show for example that previous (non-fatal) strangulation of women by intimate partners is a predictor of increased homicide risk (Glass et al. 2008; Suffla, Van Niekerk, and Arendse 2008; Sorenson, Joshi, and Sivitz 2014). In countries where men have access to firearms, femicides are often committed with a gun, particularly intimate partner killings (Ortiz-Prado et al. 2022; Souza et al. 2017). Studies and reviews of multi-country data show that the risk of an abusive intimate partner killing his female partner increase substantially when he owns a firearm (Zeoli, Malinski, and Brenner 2020), and that gun control laws tend to decrease all gun homicides including intimate partner homicides (Matzopoulos, Thompson, and Myers 2014). In countries with low rates of gun ownership, however, other mechanisms will be seen—for example, more than half of intimate partner homicides in Spain were committed with a bladed weapon (Santos-Hermoso 2022).

In an innovative approach to these features, Dawson and Carrigan (2021) suggest that a synthesis of 'sex/gender-related motives and indicators' can be useful for distinguishing femicide from other homicide—and, while adhering to the [Russell definition] need for a definition of femicide that includes an element of misogyny, suggest a system of '[s]ex/gender-related motives/indicators (SGRMIs)' which can be used as 'characteristics that signify whether and how the act was rooted in perpetrators' misogynistic attitudes' (p. 6). These include victim, perpetrator, pre-incident and incident characteristics which signal gender-related elements that would indicate a potential 'femicide'—for example, vulnerable female victims (immigrant status, the elderly, the very young); the presence of substance abuse (in either victim or perpetrator); a recent separation or a history of social service contact; and various features in terms of injuries/injury patterns, the place of death, or the use of certain weapons.

A challenge of this proposed model of course is that it relies on the availability of quite specific and often granular case data, which is not always accessible. Dawson and Carrigan argue that, while previous works (such as J. Campbell and Runyan 1998) highlighted the futility of attempting to determine an advance 'misogynistic' motive in order for a killing to be counted as a femicide, 'this is exactly what criminal justice officials do so it should also be possible for researchers to do so with access to, and improvements in, available data' (p. 2). However, when the researchers attempted to find such data for each of their identified indicators, using cases from a broader Canadian homicide and femicide study, they found that for many of their indicator fields information was simply not available. Dawson and Carrigan reflect that the only way to address these data gaps is to improve data collection on femicide, adding that countries 'are not collecting the right data', or failing to make data available. This is undoubtedly true; however, what is not explicitly considered in this approach is how such data collection might be improved across diverse global contexts. For example, Canada records fewer than 200 femicides annually. If data collection is already inadequate in a low case number, richly resourced country, how would it be possible to achieve such data conformance in countries like South Africa or Mexico, which record around 3000 female homicides a year, and where (in South Africa at least) only a third of cases result in a criminal conviction (Abrahams et al. 2024)?

This is not a contraindication, however, rather a strong motivation for working towards expanded data collection (all female homicides, with motives or indicators to be determined later), and greater inter-disciplinarity instead of siloisation (Zecha et al. 2023, provide a detailed overview of types and challenges of data collection across regions and practices). The indicator model is an extremely strong template for multi-data collection, which could easily be localised, taking broader frameworks into account. For example, Brysk and Moreira (2023) note how male economic stress is a key driver of violence against women, but that this also has distinct expressions in different societies: viz, in the 'least-developed' societies and in emerging economies, the violence consolidates around the boundaries between women's private and public spaces, nominally focused on the disciplinary rules of marriage, honour, family; in 'modernising middle-income' regions, this shifts to violence trigged by the growing proportion of women in the work force; and, in a cyclical return, in 'developed, neoliberal economies', femicide is 'concentrated in disciplining women's private roles' (p. 30). These features have clear links to mechanisms of death, as noted above, and could be more widely explored.

5 | It's Femicide

Corradi et al. (2016) describe Radford and Russell's initial proposal of femicide—'the killing of women by men because they are women'—as being a 'brilliant effort of sociological imagination'; work that, at the time, made the invisible visible (Weil 2016). Indeed, for Russell (in Corradi et al. 2016), *naming* the violence was the key to *mobilising* against it. In this respect, the effort succeeded: nearly 50 years after the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women, there is demonstrable global scholarly, institutional, political, and social mobilisation around describing and ending what is clearly called femicide. And yet, data indicates the *incidence* of femicide/female homicide has remained largely static; or that is has hardened in low overall crime regions (i.e., the femicide rate has remained persistent even as male homicide rates decline; see Brodie et al. 2023); in several locations there are even increases in femicide rates following the Covid-19 pandemic, and particularly in the global south (Brodie, Mathews, and Abrahams 2023).

In this untenable situation, it is perhaps worth returning to and expanding Corradi et al.'s question about 'is "femicide" useful' (2016, 5), and instead asking: *how* is 'femicide' useful? The contested histories of femicide and its taxonomies have served to create a rich bed of literature, in which surely the answers are to be found—most likely from the *synthesis* of its parts. Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon (2022), for example, call for more meaningful approaches to counting femicide, building richer ('thick') data, rather than functional 'thin' data—but in a way that (citing DeKeseredy 2021, online) also '[re-centres] patriarchy in both the theory and practice of counting violence against women'. Sosa (2023) suggests that intersectionality can help to fill gaps in both data and narrative approaches, and reminds us that many authors have 'questioned the capacity of the theoretical notion of femicide and its judicial and legal adoption to recognise women's diversity and the various structures of gender inequality that exist in different geopolitical arrangements' (p.

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50). Lapalus and Mora (2020, online), discussing the implications of femicide/feminicide in law and activism, use the 'history and evolution of the concept in Latin America' as a means to 'highlight the specific nature of male violence and to challenge the legal and political authorities' in Europe.

The ongoing mapping of femicide/feminicide (and all of its synonyms) and femicide studies offers many opportunities for scholars to engage in not only inter-disciplinary but also cross-geographical and inter-language scholarship and theorisation. Expanded approaches, which consider both the universal and the particular, and which actively seek out greater inclusion from literature and research in the global south, and in languages other than English, have the potential to enrich not only the study of the phenomenon, but our ability to determine what strategies might work to move beyond mobilisation and into mitigation.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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