

EDITED BY SHALVA WEIL,
CONSUELO CORRADI AND
MARCELINE NAUDI

FEMICIDE ACROSS EUROPE

Theory, research and prevention



 **cost**
EUROPEAN COOPERATION
IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

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ONE

Research and prevention of femicide across Europe

Shalva Weil

Introduction

Femicide is the intentional killing of women and girls because of their gender. Femicides are usually perpetrated by intimate partners (for example, husbands or boyfriends) or family members (for example, fathers, brothers or cousins), who are usually familiar males; on rare occasions the perpetrators can be women, either lesbian partners or kin. A global study of homicides carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2012 showed that 79% of all homicide victims were male. The global average male homicide rate was, at 9.7 per 100,000, almost four times the global average female rate. However, the majority of homicides in the domestic field were femicides (which the authors called ‘female intentional homicides’) perpetrated by intimate partners or family members. Of 93,000 global femicides reported in 2012, 43,600 women – that is, nearly 50% – were killed by intimate partners or

family members, as opposed to only 6% among male homicides (UNODC, 2014: 53).

Although the killing of women has been rampant in Europe for generations and generations, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first book on femicide across Europe. It has been written by a team of interdisciplinary scholars from different European countries, united in the desire to bring awareness to the phenomenon and thereby eliminate it. It examines comparative quantitative and qualitative data collection, and the impact of culture and prevention programmes aimed at combatting femicide. The subject has become particularly pertinent with the influx of migrants to Europe; although to date it has not been proven that there are more femicide incidents among the migrants than among the more established populations.

While femicide has not been totally ignored in the past, until now, the designation has had various gender-neutral or even male-centred meanings, such as ‘lethal killings of women’, ‘female homicide’, ‘female homicide victimization’ or even ‘manslaughter’; meanwhile related topics, such as domestic violence and intimate partner violence, have been studied while ignoring femicide per se. Thus it was that femicide was included in the category ‘homicide’, while specific forms of femicide were called ‘honour killings’, ‘wife murders’ or ‘uxoricide’. So long as femicide was regarded as an extreme form of domestic violence, the special gender-related features of this social, gendered phenomenon were obscured. Femicide was ‘invisible’ and it had to be made ‘visible’ (Weil, 2016).

A concerted European action

The legitimacy of regarding femicide as a separate social phenomenon changed in 2013 when the authors of the chapters in this book, and many other people listed in it, collaborated on a four-year project initiated by this author and a group of

colleagues. It was funded by an intergovernmental framework, COST (Cooperation in Science and Technology), in association with the European Union, and called COST Action IS1206, 'Femicide across Europe'.¹ Until the establishment of this COST Action, European agencies had never recognized the specific act of femicide, although they had funded initiatives on gender issues and violence.

The COST Action on Femicide across Europe, which began in April 2013 and terminated in April 2017, had several aims (Weil, 2015a):

- to produce an articulated and common theoretical and interdisciplinary framework about femicide through the exchange of ideas by researchers, by means of coordinated network meetings, workshops and conferences;
- to establish preliminary conditions for comparisons of European data on femicide, both qualitative and quantitative, in an attempt to reach the level of other countries, which have been more advanced in the study of this subject;
- to set up coalitions on the prevention of femicide across Europe, bringing together established and early career researchers, women's shelters, police and prison personnel as well as policy makers and advocacy groups;
- to publish academic articles as well as recommendations and guidelines for policy makers;
- to monitor femicide by means of advocacy groups, women's shelters, police and prison personnel through the establishment of a European Observatory on Femicide.

¹ Until 2014, COST activities were run under the European Commission's FP7, but then the COST Association was set up as an international non-profit association under Belgian law (AISBL). This law integrates governance with the scientific, technical and administrative functions of COST, formerly managed by the European Science Foundation through the COST Office.

In order to achieve its objectives, the Action set up four European working groups: definitions, data collection, cultural issues, and advocacy and prevention. In July 2015 the Action held the first ever training school on femicide in Rome, Italy. Thirty doctoral and postdoctoral students received a stipend to attend, which covered flight and accommodation at the Rome police headquarters. Throughout the five-day school, early-career trainees were mentored by trainers and policy makers in how to prevent femicide; they interacted with advocates, law enforcement agencies, academics and policy makers. Members of the Action networked at annual conferences on femicide in different European cities, such as Lisbon in Portugal (in 2014), Zaragoza in Spain (in 2015) and Ljubljana in Slovenia (in 2016); a final conference was held in Valletta in Malta (in 2017). All the COST meetings took place within Europe, with an attempt to convene conferences and working group meetings in what were described as ‘inclusiveness countries’,² but keynote speakers and invited guests came from India, the US, South Africa and other countries.

The Action also promoted early career students and researchers in short-term scientific missions (STSMs) to travel to different countries (Germany to Sweden, Italy to UK, Greece to Cyprus and so on) to study at host institutions for short periods in order to compare data, and to receive supervision and gain an understanding of the pan-European situation on femicide. In addition, the Action created the first website on global femicide: www.femicide.net

Thirty countries (28 COST Member States, one Cooperating State and one Near Neighbouring Country) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with COST to work on

² COST Inclusiveness Target Countries (ITCs) include Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Republic of Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Republic of Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey.

combating femicide within the framework of the Action IS1206. Each country chose two management committee (MC) members and a number of substitute MC members to attend meetings and network (Weil, 2015b). The nearly 80-strong members and substitute members of the MC, listed at the beginning of this book, met with politicians, legislators and service providers in order to change realities in their own countries and within Europe as a bloc. This effort exemplified that awareness of femicide had grown and that nearly all European countries today acknowledge that it is an important issue.

It is a truism to state that European issues are part of larger global priorities and that Europe is intrinsically connected to world trends. Attempting to combat femicide is not a new phenomenon, but fighting it has been a low international priority. In the absence of clear governmental policies on femicide, women's advocacy groups and nongovernmental, non-profit organizations (NGOs) have worked for years in different countries to prevent manifestations of extreme violence against women. Until recently, most of them focused upon the prevention of domestic violence, but with growing awareness raised by the COST Action, as well as other important organizations, some NGOs are now focusing upon the elimination of femicide in and of itself. The effort is cumulative, and although the focus of this book is Europe, the phenomenon is global.

Final Action dissemination volume

This book effectively summarizes the workings of the COST Action IS1206, 'Femicide across Europe'. The four chapters following this one are parallel to the working groups that the Action set up in Europe. Working Group 1 grappled with the question of definitions of femicide, and indeed, defining femicide can be a challenge. Diana Russell first used the term 'femicide' in 1976 within a broader critical feminist framework

during the proceedings of the first International Tribunal on Crimes against Women, in Brussels, Belgium. After the initial impetus, when femicide was defined as a misogynist crime (Radford and Russell, 1992), the designation fell into partial disuse. Meanwhile, the study of femicide evolved and was de facto adapted by international scholars, including Campbell in the US (Campbell et al, 2003), R. and R. Dobash in the UK (Dobash and Dobash, 2015), and Fregoso and Bejarano in Latin America (2013). ‘Femicide’ was translated into *feminicidio* by the Mexican feminist Lagarde y de los Rios (2008) and used in the Latin American context. Today, however, Latin American scholars use the terms femicide and *feminicidio* interchangeably (Grzyb and Hernandez, 2015), and even Lagarde calls the phenomenon ‘femicide’ (Lagarde y de los Rios, 2008). Definitional problems are discussed in Chapter 2.

Working Group 2 analysed data collection on femicide in Europe. European countries have databases for homicides, and a few are beginning to disaggregate for femicide too. Chapter 3 reports on the efforts in the working group to compare data collection on femicide from various sources, and to develop recommendations for European countries and organizations on how to improve their femicide data collection.

Working Group 3 focused on culture. Much discussion was placed during the four years of the Action on whether we can talk of ‘honour killings’ as a type of femicide, and whether ‘honour killings’ also reflect mainstream culture. In Chapter 4, the authors address the relationship between culture and femicide based on the relevant literature, including an ecological model, in order to determine appropriate ways to treat and prevent femicide,

Working Group 4 was aimed at prevention of femicide. In Chapter 5, the researchers suggest different strategies for prevention, including demanding national obligations to ensure the human rights of women; the enactment of appropriate legal measures to combat the murder of women regardless of

their social, economic, ethnic, marriage or sexual status; the development of more efficient and effective fatality reviews and risk assessments; and the creation of holistic educational programmes challenging patriarchal culture.

Chapter 6 represents the culmination of the Action's accomplishments. In this chapter, 26 countries report on their resources, and the authors summarize national attitudes, legal status and programmes instituted to combat femicide. The final chapter in the book both looks back retrospectively to the progress made in the study of femicide in the past few years and looks forward to the establishment of a European Observatory on Femicide (EOF), building on the country reports found in this book.

Global progress

In 2003, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women presented a broad platform aimed at promoting gender equality. It stated:

'Discrimination against women' shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.³

The convention did not specifically mention violence against women (VAW).

A milestone was achieved in 2011, however, when the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating

³ See www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm

violence against women and domestic violence (henceforth, the Istanbul Convention) was adopted by member states. The convention aimed at protecting women and girls from gender-based violence and men and women from domestic violence (Council of Europe, 2011). According to de Vido, the Istanbul Convention ‘must be considered as the most advanced system of protection of women from violence at the international level in force for the time being’ (de Vido, 2016–17). While the convention made provisions encompassing criminal justice responses, awareness-raising and social support measures to victims, it is not a treaty and not legally binding for all states (Mc Quigg, 2012). In fact, by 2017, only 22 out of 47 states in the Council of Europe had ratified it. However, it should be clarified that the Istanbul Convention does not deal specifically with the issue of femicide, and the word is not mentioned even once in the document.

In recent years, with much prompting and encouragement from the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS),⁴ the UN’s Special Rapporteurs on violence against women, its causes and consequences have taken up the cause of femicide. The previous UN Special Rapporteur, Ms Rashida Manjoo, declared in a report to the Human Rights Council on 23 May 2012, based upon the Report presented by the Expert Group on gender-motivated killing of women: ‘gender-related killings are the extreme manifestation of existing forms of violence against women. Such killings are not isolated incidents that arise suddenly and unexpectedly, but are rather the ultimate act of violence which is experienced in a continuum of violence’

⁴ According to its website: ‘ACUNS is a global professional association of educational and research institutions, individual scholars, and practitioners active in the work and study of the United Nations, multilateral relations, global governance, and international cooperation. We promote teaching on these topics, as well as dialogue and mutual understanding across and between academics, practitioners, civil society and students’ (<http://acuns.org/the-purpose-and-organization-of-acuns>).

(Manjoo, 2012: 4–5). Gender-related killing of women is generally understood to refer to the intentional murder of women because they are women, whether they occur in public or in private.

Further progress was made in 2013 when the Vienna Declaration defined femicide as ‘the killing of women and girls because of their gender’. It provided a very broad definition of femicide that included female infanticide, gender-based sex selection – known as foeticide – femicide as a result of genital mutilation and femicide related to accusations of witchcraft.

In the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 2013, Resolution 68/191 noted, albeit in a footnote, that: ‘gender-related killing of women and girls was criminalized in some countries as “femicide” or “feminicide” and has been incorporated as such into national legislation in those countries.’⁵

The current Special Rapporteur to the UN, Dr Dubravka Šimonović, who acceded to her position in 2015, called on all states to prevent femicide or the gender-related killing of women (Šimonović, 2017: 5). On 23 September 2016, she presented a report to the General Assembly on ‘Modalities for the establishment of femicides/gender-related killings’ and recommended setting up ‘Femicide Watches’ globally. The report proposed disaggregating femicide data from general homicide data, and including intimate partner and family member femicides as well as other forms of femicide (Simonovic, 2017). In May 2017, a prototype of such a ‘watch’ was presented at the 26th session of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, in Vienna, Austria (UNODC, 2017). In November 2017, Georgia launched its first European Femicide Watch.

⁵ United Nations Resolution 68/191, on ‘Taking action against gender-related killing of women and girls’, fn. 1., adopted by the General Assembly at its 70th plenary meeting on 18 December 2013.

Research into femicide in Europe

European countries have databases for homicides, and a few are beginning to disaggregate for femicide too. Eurostat, the European Homicide Monitor (EHM), the European Women's Lobby, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and other NGOs are now aware of the need to provide basic and comparable data on femicide. Some European nations already have their own observatories on femicide, for example, Italy (Piacenti and de Pasquali, 2014), the UK (Smith 2016; Women's Aid/Nia 2017), Spain and Portugal. The COST Action invited representatives of these observatories to a meeting in Brussels in 2015 to begin discussions to set up a European Observatory on Femicide (EOF). This led to the coordination of country resources in which 26 European countries summarized their attitudes, legal status and programmes instituted to combat femicide. The challenge of establishing an EOF is now being taken up by Malta.

While Europe had lagged behind the US, Canada, South America and South Africa in research and the study of femicide, European scholars are now at the forefront of publications in the field. Active COST members Corradi, Marcuello, Boira and Weil edited the first special issue on femicide in sociology in a 2016 issue of *Current Sociology* (Marcuello-Servós et al, 2016). Weil and Kouta edited the first special issue in qualitative sociology in a 2017 issue of *Qualitative Sociology Review* (Weil and Kouta, 2017). MC members did not restrict themselves to publications solely in the English language. In 2016, Sofia Neves edited a special issue of the gender studies journal *Ex Aequo* (Neves, 2016), mainly in Portuguese. COST MC members also wrote academic articles reporting on femicide in countries outside Europe, as far afield as Ecuador (Boira et al, 2017) and India (Weil and Mitra vom Berg, 2016). They also published articles in several of the ACUNS volumes on different aspects of femicide, such as femicide among elderly women (Weil, 2017),

and European initiatives on femicide (Naudi and Stelmaszek, 2018).

Prevention of femicide in Europe

Increasing awareness of femicide among the general public and in the media could be considered a risk prevention factor, although it has not yet been proven that femicide decreases as awareness increases. As the authors of Chapter 3 show, Eurostat data have shown that while homicides in Europe are decreasing, femicide rates remain the same.

Nevertheless, via reports and articles on the extent and nature of femicide, researchers have impacted prevention programmes. Some COST researchers have initiated and launched a prevention tool (Nudelman et al, 2017). Others are personally involved with law enforcement authorities or with projects aimed at reducing femicide and extreme domestic violence at the grassroots level.

Family or ethnic cultures may be key elements in explaining why different ethnic communities have different forms of femicide (Weil, 2016). In some communities, investigations into femicides have shown that, at least in the case of intimate partner femicide cases, recurrent patterns may emerge. In others, it is usually the case that the victim has suffered years of abuse, either at the hands of members of her natal family or at the hands of her partner. Femicides may be classified according to typical cultural risk factors, depending on the status of the victim, the perpetrator and the attitudes of the community. There are a variety of risk assessment procedures targeted at prevention, which can reduce the risk of femicide actually happening. Different management strategies can then be put in motion, depending on the type of risk.

Conclusions

This chapter has surveyed the relatively short history of the COST Action IS1206, 'Femicide across Europe' (April 2013–April 2017), while acknowledging its interdependence upon international movements and the collaboration and cooperation of different NGOs, some of which were already instrumental in attempting to combat extreme forms of violence against women and girls in different countries or across Europe. This book is one of the outcomes of that Action and reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the study of femicide, alongside the breadth of national experiences of all the authors. Four chapters in the book relate the results of four years of labour in defining what constitutes femicide, in data collection, in assessment of cultural patterns and in the prevention of this form of killing. For the first time, representatives from 30 European states have joined together to report on the state of femicide in their countries. These preliminary reports will form the basis for a European Observatory on Femicide, which may eventually mesh with national Femicide Watches.

Finally, now that the COST Action has terminated, we hope that Europe and the world will vehemently reject the killing of women because of their gender, and will acknowledge that there is no honour whatsoever in committing dishonourable crimes against women and girls. Femicide data has to be collected, analysed and understood in order to prevent more cases of murder of females. European countries must pass laws specifically prohibiting femicides and giving the perpetrators the same or more severe sentences than those for homicides. European parliaments must ratify international guidelines concerning violence against women and femicide, and allocate funding for prevention programmes. Femicide *can* be prevented!

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