

ALMA MATER STUDIORUM Università di Bologna The femi(ni)cide as extreme violence against women: issues of framing and symbolic struggles

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#### **SOCIETY AS A FACTORY OF MEANINGS**

- The various 'departments' constitute the socio-cultural sectors where the equipment of available collective definitions is produced
- Competition / rivalry / conflict
- Power dynamics, size, influence, and different burdens
- ARENAS ISOLATED OR CONNECTED THROUGH SYMBIOSIS, CONFLICT, OR ALLIANCE
- FORMS OF SOCIAL CIRCULATION
   AND DISTRIBUTION

[Hilgartner & Bosk 1988]



PRODUCTS, DISTRIBUTED, EXCHANGED

THEY CIRCULATE AND CAN BE MODIFIED

## **CULTURAL OBJECTS**

### SHARED SIGNIFICATION EMBODIED IN A FORM

- A SIGNIFICANT EXPRESSION THAT CAN BE HEARD, SEEN, TOUCHED, ARTICULATED, AND THAT TELLS US A STORY
- THE CULTURAL OBJECT ENTERS THE DISCOURSE OF A CERTAIN NUMBER OF PEOPLE AND BECOMES A PUBLIC FACT

SWIDLER 1986; 1995 SCHUDSON 1991

## THE «WORK» OF CULTURE

- CULTURE AS A **COLLECTIVE PROPERTY** PROVIDING TOOLS OR INTERPRETATIVE CODES, UNDERGOES **MUTATIONS**
- THEY MUST BE STUDIED IN RELATION TO CONTEXTS AND INSTITUTIONS
- THE POWER OF CULTURE IS NOT IN INDIVIDUALS' HEADS BUT IN EXPECTATIONS OF RECIPROCITY
- I.E., WHAT DO PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT HOW OTHERS WILL INTERPRET THEIR BEHAVIOR? [LEGITIMACY]
- SYMBOLIC BATTLES FOR VISIBILITY, MORE OR LESS RESONANT



## THE FRAME

IF WE NEED CULTURAL TOOLS TO HELP US DEAL WITH SITUATIONS THAT ENGAGE US, HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO ADDRESS FEMINICIDE IN A COUNTRY WHERE UNTIL 1981 THERE WAS A LAW MITIGATING HONOR KILLINGS?

# WHAT IS FRAME?

«definitions of the situation
[that] are built up in accordance
with the principles of
organization which govern
events - at least social ones - and
our subjective involvement in
them»

These definitions helps people to perceive, identify and label events in everyday life



GOFFMAN (1974

# FEMI(NI)CIDE: SYMBOLIC BATTLES AND FRAMES

## DIFFERENTS ARENAS, VARIOUS ACTORS & CROSS-CONTAMINATIONS

VISIBILITY

# «POLITICAL»

#### **CLAIM-MAKING**

1976 - INTERNATIONAL-TRIBUNAL Bruxelles

- Diana Russell
- First élites
- Feminist movements and debates
- Gender research and studies

MEDIA AND COMMON SENSE PUBLIC VISIBILITY

• News stories

• ...

- Investigative journalism
- Fiction, Infotainment
- Campaigns, advertising

# INSTITUTIONS

POLICY MAKERS Politics to combat violence

- Parliament: legislation
- The National Commission
- Official statistics
- Courts of Justice ....

# FÉMI(NI)CIDE

### 1976

**Diana Russell** - International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women - Brussels The first **public** 'political claim'

«We must realize that a lot of homicide is in fact femicide. We must recognize the sexual politics of murder. From the burning of witches in the past, to the more recent widespread custom of female infanticide in many societies, to the killing of women for "honor," we realize that femicide has been going on a long time.

But since it involves mere females, there was no name for it until Carol Orlock invented the word "Femicide»



To kill a woman for being a woman

FEMINICIDE AND FEMICIDE: DEBATE [but the first term is the one that will gain public prominence] Ex.: Dual version in Spanish – Latin America and the debate between Marcela Lagarde and D. Russell

Italy: despite the 'public' version, some feminists proposed two different words, following Lagarde.

Casa delle donne per non subire violenza di Bologna (some years ago):

"The word femicidio concerns all killings of women for gender reasons (...) to distinguish this extreme outcome from those that fall under the general category of femminicidio, which includes every socially violent practice, both physical and psychological, that harms the integrity, psychophysical development, health, and freedom of women, aiming to annihilate their identity through physical and/or psychological subjugation"





WHAT IS THE DISTINCTIVE CHARACTER?

- The search for "objects" giving concrete meaning to the word
- The difference with homicides
- The demand for official data

[In Italy, until a few years ago there were no statistics distinguishing the sex of homicide victims]

(Source: UNODC 2018)

### DISTRIBUTION IN THE WORLD Homicide rate of women within the family per 100,000 women (UNODC 2020)



### THE SITUATION IN ITALY



# VICTIMS OF MURDERS IN ITALY BY SEX 1999-2005 PER 100.000 CITIZENS (ISTAT, 2017)

### THE DATA SHOWS WHAT IS SPECIFIC: THE VICTIM-KILLER RELATIONSHIP

Predicted probabilities according to the relationship between victim and killer and the gender (Source: Barbagli & Minello 2017)



## THE COMMON BELIEF

THE FRAME WITH WHICH FEMICIDE CLAIMS MUST CONFRONT (In a country where the "honor crime" existed until 1981)

- The murder of a woman mostly occurs within the home and must therefore be considered a "private matter"
- It is framed as a crime of passion or even a pathological aberration



## **TRACES OF THE 'HONOR CRIME'...**



« The homicide is not motivated by passionate reasons, which might elicit a certain human understanding, sometimes because of the provocative behavior of the victim [...] »

Killing a woman for being a woman in the end, is it a less "despicable" act than a "real" crime?

#### 2014 Court of Justice ruling in L'Aquila



# **KEY LEGAL MILESTONES**

- **1975**: Family law reform
- **1978**: Law supporting maternity and abortion rights
- **1981**: Abrogation of "honour" mitigation for homicide crime and of the "reparatory marriage" ( or "shotgun marriage")
- **1996**: Rape becomes a crime against the person (no longer against public morality)
- 2003: Measures against human trafficking
- 2013, 2014, 2015 and following:
  - Ratification of the Istanbul Convention (2011)
  - Measures against domestic violence, harassment, and female genital mutilation
  - Defined resources and standards for anti-violence centers and shelters
  - Prevention, education, protection of victims at work
  - Harsher penalties, coordination between civil and criminal systems
  - Obligation to collect gender statistics
- 2017: Internet explicitly included in the crime of spreading deceptive communications
- **2024**: Prevention and prosecution of cyberharassment and cyberbullying
- 2025: Presentation of a controversial project of law on «femicide crime»

### THROUGH VARIOUS CONTAMINATIONS, THE WORD FEMINICIDE GAINS PUBLIC AND INSTITUTIONAL VISIBILITY



CALL

FOR

«Femminicide: on the Miss Italia stage, Vera Squatrito, mother of Giordana Di Stefano, 20 years old, killed in 2015 by her ex, speaks as a witness to social engagement against violence toward women" » (fanpage, 6-9-2019)



(Delibera del Senato della Repubblica 16/10/2018, pubblicata nella G.U. n. 249 del 25/10/2018; proroga del termine con delibera del 5/2/2020, G.U. n. 32 dell'8/2/2020) XVIII Legislatura (dal 23 marzo 2018)

#### Composizione attuale Composizione storica Presidente VALENTE Valeria PD Vicepresidenti LEONE Cinzia M5S **RIZZOTTI Maria**



FIBP-UDC

# Courts of Justice are faced with a new kind of public visibility



Senza volersi qui dilungare su un tema estraneo e non pertinente al processo, basterà ricordare che uxoricidio e femminicidio non sono termini equivalenti e fungibili, perché il primo contrassegna la mera uccisione di una donna, mentre il secondo, avente contenuto criminologico, si riferisce all'uccisione di una donna in quanto tale per motivi legati al genere, e ciò a causa di situazioni di patologie relazionali dovute a matrici ideologiche misogine e sessiste e/o ad arretratezze culturali di stampo patriarcale.

Dopo che il PM, diversamente da quanto opinato nell'elevare l'imputazione, ha escluso il movente della gelosia dalle possibili cause scatenati l'omicidio, appare arduo per la Corte - sulla base di quanto emerso in dibattimento - rinvenire una dinamica "femminicida" rispetto ad una vicenda occasionata - nella prospettiva dell'accusa - da un conflitto insorto per ragioni estemporanee e contingenti, e non invece in conseguenza di un atto apicale di prevaricazione nei confronti della figura femminile. Feminicide is denied because it is considered different from individual pathology

#### 2020 –

Court of Assizes ruling in Brescia (FOLLOWING A MEDIA DEBATE)



#### Gender-related killings refer to intentional homicides of women due to gender-related motivations

#### INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Framing femi(ni)cide by proposing the progressive sharing of a statistical apparatus



Gender-related killings are motivated by underlying factors such as the ideology of men's entitlement and privilege over women, social norms regarding masculinity, and the need to assert male control or power, enforce gender roles, or prevent, discourage or punish what is considered to be unacceptable female behaviour.

#### Gender-related killings can occur within different perpetrator-victim relationships



Figure 4: Statistical framework for measuring gender-related killing of women and girls (also referred to as "femicide/feminicide")

The data blocks for collecting and aggregating statistics on gender-related killings



Operational criteria to capture the gender-related factors

Women and girls killed by other known/unknown perpetrator where



# Eige 2021: 12 types of feminicide

KILLED BY PARTNER/EX/OTHER RELATIVES	KILLED BY OTHER PEOPLE	UNINTENTIONAL KILLING
• PARTNER OR EX PARTNER	<ul> <li>SEXUAL VIOLENCE</li> <li>CONSEQUENCEOF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION</li> </ul>	DIED AS A CONSEQUENCE OF VIOLENCE BY PARTNER/EX
• OTHER RELATIVES FOR HONOR / DOWRY	<ul> <li>CONSEQUENCE OF TRAFFICKING</li> <li>CONTINUUM OF VIOLENCE (CARE, AUTHORITY, POLITICAL ACTIVITY)</li> </ul>	DIED AS A RESULT OF GENITAL MUTILATION
• OTHER RELATIVES FOR OTHER REASONS	<ul> <li>• [ AGE OF THE VICTIM &gt; 65 ]</li> <li>• OTHER TYPES</li> </ul>	• OTHER TYPES

COUNTERING THE IDEA THAT WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION CAUSES VIOLENCE



# **OUR RESEARCH: SOME INSIGHTS**

[YEARS 2015-2017, et 2018-2020 preceded by a pilot in 2012]



Extreme violence against women now forces its way into Italian news media



Has visibility turned a private matter into public discourse? Are there differences in the "news value" attributed to the stories? How have the media managed to narrate these events in a country where the honour crime survived until forty years ago?





2015-2020





Val. % (2015-17 = 393; 2028-2020 = 346)

## 2020: 286 HOMICIDES IN ITALY



(Elab. From Istat's Data 2021 data – subject to change )







Percentage out of 706 events with a male perpetrator





Percentage out of 706 events with male perpetrators



Age of the victim
2015-2020
% <b>2015-2017</b>
per 100.000 inhab.:
<b>75+:0,57</b>
35-54: 0,54



Val % N= 739





## Female victims of homicide per 100.000 inhabitants per age Year 2023 (Istat 2024)





### RELATIONS VICTIMES D'HOMICIDE SELON L'ÂGE 2015-2017 VAL % (N +74 = 71; +64 = 119 ; ALL N= 393)

■ 75 et + ■ 65 et + ■ Tout age







Val % N= 374 événements 2015-2017 et 332 en 2018-2020



## RAISONS SELON L'ÂGE 2015-2017

(VAL. % +64 N= 119; +74 N= 71; ALL N= 378)



## ELDERLY WOMEN: AN IMPORTANT BUT LITTLE-VISIBLE PHENOMENON A NEW FRAME? GERONTO-FEMICIDE (?)



## NEWS STORIES AS A FRAMING WINDOW ONTO OUR WORLD

#### OPENING A WINDOW ON SPECIFIC EVENTS





SUGGESTING A VIEWPOINT THAT FITS WHAT IT'S ALREADY KNOWN

### PLACING THE EVENT IN THE AGENDA & FRAMING ITS SCOPE

CONTRIBUTING TO GIVE INTERPRETATION TO THE WORLD WE LIVE IN







# HOW MANY FEMICIDES RECEIVED AT LEAST ONE ARTICLE IN THE FOUR NATIONAL DAILY NEWSPAPERS OBSERVED?





### On line coverage

**Print edition coverage** 

NATIONAL PRESS

CORRIERE DELLA SERA

Percentage based on 387 events (2015–2017)



Murders committed by **partners** are higher in number but receive less coverage compared to murders committed by expartners or occasional partners

The 8 cases of murder by occasional partner or in an extramarital affair receive the most prominent coverage MURDERS OF SEX WORKERS AND VERY ELDERLY WOMEN RECEIVE LESS COVERAGE

> Despite representing a far rarer occurrence, **murders committed by strangers** receive on average a much greater coverage


# Intimate partner femicides QUALITATIVE FOCUS

**THREE DIFFERENT "NEWS VALUES" IN NATIONAL PRESS COVERAGE OF "INTIMATE" MURDERS** (i.e., committed by partner, ex-partner, or lover)





## HIGH-PROFILE FEMINICIDES: THE CRIME-NOVEL TREATMENT

A few femicides draw major attention; the narrative follows the pattern of a "true crime"



#### **VERY YOUNG VICTIM – VERY YOUNG PERPETRATOR (2017)**

«Lecce: the discovery of the body of Noemi Durini, 16 years old »



The spectacle of the forensic investigation

Facebook photo



«Noemi Durini: violence that went unnoticed »

#### **COMPLEX AND SORDID CRIME STORY – 2016**

« Gloria Rosboch: a terrifying crime »

«The case of the missing schoolteacher»



«In the following days, the story adds new characters. There is a young Moroccan woman (...) and especially a 45-year-old woman (...) who had already had an affair with Gabriele »



«A few hours later, it is revealed that behind the body's discovery is the confession of a man (...) who claims to be Gabriele's lover »



IN 2023, ONE OF THESE HIGH-PROFILE FEMICIDES WILL SPARK GREATER AWARENESS AND A MORE SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC DEBATE

Protest in Padua for Giulia Cecchettin : Her voice, silenced by murder, is revived by her sister: «THIS IS A FEMICIDE ROOTED IN PATRIARCHY »



## **2.** THE "TRAGEDIES OF SOLITUDE"

Cases of elderly women killed by elderly partners received the least media attention

At most, a few lines in a very short article

No reference to gender or to the shortcomings of social and care policies

These stories are framed as INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF DESPAIR

## AS IF THEY HAD **NO CONNECTION WITH GENDER**

## 2. « TRAGEDIES OF SOLITUDE » - EXAMPLES



"It is a family tragedy, born of a man's despair, who was also ill."

"Carpi – elderly man shoots and kills his sick wife: 'I could not take it anymore.' She had been suffering from Alzheimer's for a long time. They had been married for over sixty years."

## YET ELSEWHERE, IN ONE OF THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS... A DIFFERENT FRAME (GENDERED)



THE SON MARK, A FAMOUS PHOTOGRAPHER, VISITS HIS PARENTS TO DOCUMENT THE "STRUGGLE OF THE FATHER" WITH ALZHEIMER'S

#### "A GREAT LOVE STORY" (FROM THE SON TOWARD THE FATHER)

Meanwhile, a photo shows the mother shaving her husband, as if this were normal An image reinforcing the supposedly "natural" caregiving role expected by women

# **3.** THE «TYPICAL» FEMINICIDE NARRATIVE OF THE «TYPICAL» FEMINICIDE



#### **RECURRING CASES FITTING TWO MAIN FRAMES:**

- → SICK LOVE
  → LOSS OF CONTROL
- → INDIVIDUAL OR SITUATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS (jealousy, anger, rejection)
- NO EXPLICIT REFERENCE TO STRUCTURAL GENDER ASYMMETRIES
- → YET WE OBSERVE AN INCREASING TENDENCY TO MENTION STALKING AND PREVIOUS COMPLAINTS [this introduces a possible ambivalence]

## **3. WITHIN THE "TYPICAL" NARRATIVE, A POTENTIAL FRAME INNOVATION**



IF THE STORY ARISES QUESTIONS ABOUT SIGNS OF STALKING, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, PREVIOUS COMPLAINTS, THIS CAN INTRODUCE:



VICTIM BLAMING OR INSTITUTIONAL BLAMING

**OR A NEW EMERGING FRAME:** 

ONE THAT CLEARLY LINKS EXTREME EVENTS TO

**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE** AS A **PUBLIC ISSUE** 

### **3. THE TYPICAL STORY OF THE «TYPICAL» FEMINICIDE: EXAMPLES**



«An uncontrollable rage, perhaps due to intense jealousy. This is how investigators explain the death of Omayma Benghaloum, 33, beaten to death by her husband »



«According to an initial reconstruction (...), the couple had another argument, after which the man grabbed a rifle and shot his wife, killing her »

«Tragedy of jealousy in Sestri Levante, near Genoa. **The man's anger exploded** during an argument **because his wife said she wanted a divorce** (...). 'Another feminicide (...). She wanted to leave me,' he **murmured as if in a trance** »

#### 3. THE «TYPICAL» FEMINICIDE, THE « LITERARY » STYLE AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA

« He could not accept that 'his' Janira had left him. On her Facebook page, the girl had changed her profile According to the couple's friends, jealousy was at the root of the story »

# THE PHOTOMONTAGE: THE IMAGINED AND IMAGINARY COUPLE

«On October 3, 2013, she had reported Luca (...). On her Facebook page (...): 'One of the worst mistakes is staying close to someone who destroys your selfesteem. One must pay attention to words. They are sharp weapons.' Like the knife Luca used to kill her ».





llenia Fabbri con l'ex marito Claudio Nanni



# ROUTINIZATION OF FEMI(NI)CIDE AS CRIME NEWS ITEM



THE CRIME NEWS FRAME TENDS TO:

- INDIVIDUALIZE AND PSYCHOLOGIZE THE
   EVENT
- SEEK BEHAVIORAL ERRORS OR REASONS WITHIN THE COUPLE
- SOMETIMES ALIGN WITH
   LITERARY/CRIME FICTION NARRATIVES

# RARE ARE THE CLUES THAT THE STORY IS THE EXPRESSION OF A SOCIAL PROBLEM

- Except for themes of stalking or previous complaints
- Even here, the narrative can oscillate between victim blaming and institutional blaming

#### INTERSECTIONAL FRAME IS NOT YET AVAILABLE

MUCH HARDER TO GRASP AND NARRATE:

• THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN RELATIONSHIPS, SOCIAL CONTEXTS, AND IMPLICIT EXPECTATIONS BASED ON **GENDER ROLE** (E.G., **FAMILY CAREGIVING**)



8,8% + 12,6% = 21,4% Context of the motive: caregiving and psychiatric disorder [51% AND 65% FOR THE ELDERLY)

#### **GERONTO-FEMINICIDE: AN INVISIBLE CRIME BORN OF SOCIAL GENDER INEQUALITY**

UNEQUAL GENDER EXPECTATIONS REMAIN INVISIBLE BECAUSE THEY APPEAR NATURAL (QUASI-BIOLOGICAL)





## FEMI(NI)CIDE

# PRESENT FRAME'S INDICATORS AND INTERSECTIONS

Male perpetrator Relationship victim-killer Socio-cultural context of the motive Intersecting gender-role dispositifs



In the end, love, anger, jealousy, passions, human drama are merely convenient masks that hide deeper social inequalities

# WHAT CAN BE DONE? femicide is a heinous CRIME concerning gender inequalities • ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES • SOCIO-CULTURAL INEQUALITIES





- WORK POLICIES
- SOCIAL AND HEALTH POLICIES
- WIDESPREAD CULTURAL POLICIES

### THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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