

SEVEN

Towards a European Observatory on Femicide

Shalva Weil and Marceline Naudi

Introduction

The definition of the term ‘femicide’ has been historically constructed and debated. Femicide is the culmination of different forms of violence against women and failure by the state to protect women from violence (WAVE, 2017b). As opposed to the ‘homicide of women’, or ‘uxoricide’, the term femicide is politically charged to bring awareness to the killing of women due to their gender. Often, but not always, these murders occur within societies structured on and functioning within deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs.

Today, women are still killed by their intimate partners. They are killed in the context of sexual crimes. Women are also targeted in armed conflict. Women die as a result of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. Female foetuses are aborted, where preference for male offspring prevails. Women are killed in dowry-related crimes, as a result of organized crime or due to human trafficking, among others.

As we have seen in several chapters in this volume, in relatively recent years, various institutions and organizations in Europe and beyond have addressed the issue of femicide from the perspective of definitions, prevention, awareness raising, data collection and reporting. Efforts have taken place on national, European and international levels. The organizations involved in the work on femicide include the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE); the European network Women against Violence Europe (WAVE); the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences; and Women's Aid England, among others. The work ranges from gathering information on Europe-wide availability of administrative data and compilation of definitions (EIGE, 2017a, 2017b); awareness raising and information sharing (WAVE, 2017a, 2017b), calling on states to collect and publish annual data on femicide, as well as to establish global, regional and national femicide and violence against women observatories (Šimonović, 2016); to establishing a national data system to collect information on women killed by men (Women's Aid, 2017).

The European Observatory on Femicide

As one of the aims of the COST Action IS1206, 'Femicide across Europe' (2013–17), a group of researchers and practitioners from 30 different countries committed themselves to setting up a European Observatory on Femicide. This was based on the development of new and innovative ideas, as well as taking stock of previous work in the area of femicide and building upon it, in order to effectively continue the prevention and combating of femicide in the future. Funded by the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST), the work of the Action involved discussions and decision making in the area of definitions, reporting, culture and prevention, and resulted in policy recommendations. The project culminated in an international Final Conference on Femicide, which took place

at the University of Malta, 14–16 March 2017. The goal of the conference was to present the findings of the project as well as to commence work on establishing a European Observatory on Femicide, to be hosted initially at the University of Malta, within the Department of Gender Studies.

Establishing an Observatory on Femicide can be seen to respond to the call by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women to establish national and regional observatories on femicide, which will feed into a Global Femicide Watch. Marking the 16 days of Activism on 7 December 2017, Šimonović reiterated her call requesting states to intensify their efforts in this regard, and to publish every year, on the International Day on the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November), the number of femicides under the categories of ‘family or intimate partner-related femicides’ and ‘other femicides’.¹ The European Observatory represents a pioneering step in establishing in Europe a counting and reporting mechanism aimed at disseminating the much needed data and knowledge on femicide, with the ultimate goal of saving women’s lives. As Šimonović stated, this will ‘... enable states to objectively assess where they stand on the regional and global scale and to adopt actions needed to prevent many preventable deaths of women’.

While the project of establishing an observatory contributes to the wellbeing of society, it is nonetheless an ambitious project for a variety of reasons, including the varied definitions of femicide across states, lack of funds, as well as limits to data comparability and quality. Nonetheless, it is a challenge worthy of addressing.

As with the establishment of any new, extensive and long-term project, the development of the observatory relies on past experience and data collection. In this case, it finds its basis in the results of the COST Action IS1206, ‘Femicide

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22510&LangID=E%20>

across Europe'. One of the achievements of the Action is an agreement on how to proceed with the initial act of defining of femicide and a preliminary idea of how to filter femicide data. Most importantly, the Action resulted in a network of national researchers experienced in the field of femicide who are committed to the setting up the observatory.

The goals of the European Observatory on Femicide include monitoring, provision of data, advancing research, promoting comparability across states and gaining understanding of local contexts. Emphasis will also be placed on qualitative data (Weil, 2017; Weil and Kouta, 2017), which has been given insufficient attention to date by other observatories, NGOs and national institutions. Narratives of 'failed femicides' (Weil, 2016) may be of particular use in studying migrants in Europe and understanding cultural patterns. Liaison with a broad community of established organizations already engaged in the topic was started through a round table meeting with stakeholders held in Brussels in 2015 as part of the Action. This created opportunities for cooperation and support, and also widened the scope and outreach of the European Observatory on Femicide beyond Europe. Additionally, as we have seen, existing availability of some national statistics, qualitative data, single case studies, reports and articles provides a starting point for the European Observatory on Femicide, and should enable the collection of baseline data such as age, sex, relationship status, location and time.

Structure and the way forward

The European Observatory on Femicide has a scientific coordinator supported by a part-time researcher. They are supported by a steering committee,² country research groups,

² The scientific coordinator of the observatory is Marceline Naudi (University of Malta). She will be supported by a part-time research officer, Barbara

and organizations working in the field of preventing and combating femicide – all of whom have been connected and have shared their work thanks to the COST Action IS 1206, ‘Femicide across Europe’. It is planned to have special interest hubs within the observatory, led by members of the steering committee, so as to enable past and ongoing work to be developed.

For the first two years (2018–19) the observatory will be based within the Department of Gender Studies at the University of Malta, which will be funding the part-time researcher. Part of the researcher’s role will be to seek further funding for the future of the observatory.

The work has begun with setting up a coalition tasked with the establishment of the European Observatory on Femicide as a permanent endeavour, raising awareness of the urgent need for gathering comparable data across Europe; lobbying funders and institutions to allocate appropriate finances to the work on data collection on femicide; and lobbying Eurostat, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and other national statistical agencies to disaggregate homicide data by gender of victim and perpetrator, and to provide data on the relationship between perpetrator and victim. Establishing the observatory to collect, analyse and review data at the regional level while facilitating the gathering of data at the national level will also galvanize the collection of information on good practices, enhancing the protection of women and girls from gender-based killings and violence.

Stelmaszek (University of Malta), and the steering committee: Anna C. Baldry (Università degli Studi della Campania ‘Luigi Vanvitelli’), Santiago Boira Sarto (Universidad de Zaragoza), Consuelo Corradi (LUMSA University of Rome), Christiana Kouta (University of Cyprus), Maria J. Magalhães (University of Porto), Chaime Marcuello (Universidad de Zaragoza), Ksenia Meshkova (University of Erfurt), Monika Schröttle (TU Dortmund University) and Shalva Weil (Hebrew University of Jerusalem).

In order to establish a permanent European Observatory on Femicide, activities such as initial round table discussions to strengthen concepts and methodology, creating a virtual observatory via a website, and organizing visits to relevant institutions are planned. Work on solidifying the structure, mission statement and principles for the observatory, an annual working plan, methods of operation, desired outputs, and an overall strategy have already started. The observatory will be establishing country research groups tasked with feeding relevant data to the observatory. Existing national observatories on violence against women – such as those in Spain and Portugal, among others – with whom contacts have already been made through the COST Action, will be called upon to assist in the setting-up of the observatory and its work. Support will also be sought from Europe-wide organizations such as EIGE, UNODC, WAVE, the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) and other NGOs such as Women’s Aid England, which are already involved in the work in the area of femicide, and again, with whom the COST Action has already cooperated.

Conclusions

Establishing a European Observatory on Femicide is not about kudos. As Šimonović observed: ‘Each case of femicide is an individual woman’s tragic story and there is the urgent need to focus on the prevention of these avoidable killings by undertaking in-depth analysis aimed at identifying shortcomings in the criminal justice system’.³ The CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 and the Council of Europe Convention on Combating and Eliminating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence both recognize data collection

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22510&LangID=E%20>

and its analysis as important tools to prevent gender-based violence against women.

It is therefore about bringing about change. It is about raising awareness of how the most basic of human rights – the right to life – is constantly being violated, on our watch and under our noses, with impunity. While gender-based violence against women has become more and more acknowledged, and steps continue to be taken to prevent and eradicate it, femicide, as its most extreme form, has garnered less acknowledgement. This must be changed. It is about time that we open our eyes to the devastation caused by femicide, not only to the women themselves, and their children and other relatives, but to society as a whole.

Our hope is that by publishing this book and collating the evidence from all over Europe, we can raise society's awareness of this heinous crime, so as to create a significant impact. Our hope is that as a result we can influence policies and legislation, so as to remove impunity and seek justice. Our expectation is that all those affected by the death of the women can find some solace in knowing that their narratives will prevent other women from dying. The ultimate aim is to prevent femicide. It is long overdue.

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Available Open Access under CC-BY-NC licence. This book is the first on femicide in Europe and presents the findings of a four year project discussing various aspects of femicide. Written by leading international scholars with an interdisciplinary perspective, it looks at the prevention programmes and comparative quantitative and qualitative data collection, as well as the impact of culture. It proposes the establishment of a European Observatory on Femicide as a new direction for the future, showing the benefits of cross-national collaboration, united to prevent the murder of women and girls.

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