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Abstract

In relation to its small population, Austria records a high number of female murder victims each year. However, the category of femicide is not defined nor is it subject to statistical observation by the government. In this thesis, I investigated several projects dedicated to changing this by counting feminicides. I wanted to understand how the modes of data production influence the final count and therefore the existing knowledge on feminicides. Part of my analysis concerns itself with how the definition of the term is used and what limitations counting practices have. Based on Science and Technology Studies and Critical Data Studies I highlight problems as well as chances of this data. The analysis is based on interviews I conducted with people from both activist and official femicide observatories in Austria and Spain. My results show that the work of observatories is far more complicated than simple counting is often imagined to be. Defining and classifying complex social phenomena can be quite complicated and limited resources or access to information only contribute to this. I further analyse how quantification is leveraged for the purpose of this social justice topic, but at the same time remain critical towards whether more data and information are really the most pressing issues.

Abstract (DE)

Österreich verzeichnet im Verhältnis zu seiner kleinen Bevölkerungszahl jedes Jahr eine hohe Zahl weiblicher Mordopfer. Der Begriff ‚Femizid‘ ist jedoch weder definiert noch Gegenstand statistischer Erhebungen der Regierung. In meiner Forschung untersuche ich mehrere Projekte, die sich dafür einsetzen dies zu ändern. Ich wollte verstehen, wie sich die Art und Weise der Datenerhebung auf die endgültige Zahl und auf das vorhandene Wissen über Femizide auswirkt. Ein Teil meiner Analyse befasst sich damit, wie der Begriff definiert wird und welche Einschränkungen die Zählpraktiken haben. Auf der Grundlage von Science and Technology Studies sowie Critical Data Studies zeige ich sowohl Probleme als auch Chancen dieser Daten auf. Die Analyse basiert auf Interviews, die ich mit Personen aus aktivistischen und offiziellen Femizid-Beobachtungsstellen in Österreich und Spanien geführt habe. Meine Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Arbeit von Beobachtungsstellen weitaus komplizierter ist, als man sich das einfache Zählen oft vorstellt. Die Definition und Klassifizierung sozialer Phänomene sind sehr komplex, und begrenzte Ressourcen oder der eingeschränkte Zugang zu Informationen verstärken dies nur. Außerdem analysiere ich, wie Quantifizierung für die Zwecke dieses Themas der sozialen Gerechtigkeit genutzt wird. Gleichzeitig bleibe ich aber kritisch gegenüber der Frage, ob mehr Daten und Informationen wirklich das dringendste zu lösende Problem sind.

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Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to all the women that are unfortunately not here anymore.

¡Ni una menos!



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Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Abstract (DE)	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	4
1 Introduction	6
1.1. Femi(ni)cide: Evolution of the term(s) and my usage of it.....	7
2 Literature Review	10
2.1 Feminicide in Social Theories and Social Research	10
2.1.1 Feminicide as growing research topic	11
2.1.2 Discussions on Feminicide in Austria	13
2.2 Counting Feminicide	15
2.2.1 Global Indexes and Frameworks	17
2.2.2 Data Science and (Activist) Feminicide Counting.....	20
2.3 Perspectives on Data	24
2.3.1 Critical Data Studies	26
2.3.2 Data and Activism	30
3 Sensitising Concepts	33
3.1 Intersectionality and Feminicide.....	33
3.2 Counts as Indicators	35
3.3 Missing and Counter Data	37
4 Research Questions	40
5 Methods	42
5.1 Thematic Approach and Research Field	42
5.2 Limitations and Ethical Considerations.....	45
5.3 Semi-structured Interviews	45
5.4 Data Analysis.....	47
5.4.1 Coding Process and Theme Development	47
6 Empirical Findings	49
6.1 The Context of Feminicide Data Production.....	49
6.1.1 Feminicide Counting in Spain	49
6.1.2 Feminicide Counting in Austria	52
6.1.3 Global Trans Murder Monitoring	53

6.2	Missing Data, Ignorance and Counter Data	54
6.2.1	Using Counter Data	57
6.3	Complicating the Application of the Femicide Term	59
6.3.1	Intimate and Other Femicides	62
6.3.2	Discriminations Along Multiple Axes	64
6.3.3	Trans Femicide	66
6.4	The Struggles of (Activist) Counting.....	69
6.4.1	Newspaper Articles as Information Source.....	69
6.4.2	A Heavy Workload	72
6.4.3	Other Counting Challenges	74
6.5	Trust in Femicide Data	76
6.5.1	“Official Data Equals Accurate Data”	77
6.5.2	A Protocol to Count Violence	79
6.5.3	Methodological and Scientific Rigour	80
6.5.4	Small Data and Big Data Logics	81
7	Discussion	82
7.1	Classification Categories and Empirical Challenges	83
7.2	Comparing Femicide Rates.....	85
7.3	An Empirical Case for Critical Data Studies	86
7.4	All Counting has its Limits	87
8	Conclusion	90
9	References	93
10	Appendix.....	101
10.1	AI Usage Table	101

1 Introduction

Austria: land of mountains, land on the river... and land of feminicides. This tragic title the country has earned itself over the last years because the rate of female murder victims is continuously higher than the one of male victims (Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser, 2023). The statistic by the Federal Criminal Office (2025) for 2024 reports 40 female and 36 male murder victims. Under femicide we broadly understand the killing of women because of their gender, killings where no misogynist motive can be proven do usually not get labelled as feminicides. During 2024, 29 feminicides were counted in Austria (Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser, 2024), in relation to its small population size the country has quite a high femicide rate.

The Austrian government however has no official definition or specific legal category for femicide. This could be a reason for why the problem of feminicides is still not recognised by wider society. The work of classifying feminicides is done by activist actors. Counting them is one way activists have used to raise awareness for the topic, amongst many other forms of interventions like protests, information campaigns or neighbourhood initiatives (see e.g. Stadtteile ohne Partnergewalt¹). According to Google Trends the topic only gained attention over the last years, both the search term “Femizid” (femicide) and “Frauenmord” (murder of a woman, sometimes still used instead of femicide) really started to be used around 2021-2022. The fact that “developed”, Central-European societies could have a problem with feminicides remains underacknowledged to this day:

I have found that when I talk about my research and activism to nonspecialists in Europe, the most prevalent reactions are puzzlement when I clarify that my focus is Germany and the assumption that femi(ni)cide mainly occurs in Spain or Italy, or among migrants. This common response seems to exhibit a view still prevalent in the European imaginary: that femi(ni)cide, if found in countries of the global North, is mainly due to migration (Luján Pinelo, 2024: 659)

The aspect of this big topic I quickly became most interested in was the work of counting feminicides. It fascinated me how the quantification of such a complex phenomenon works and how the promises of quantitative information are used for a feminist project. I both wanted to see how and where the data can be useful and remain critical towards the limitations data practices can have, even if they are used for the right matter. My work follows other researchers that have

¹ Meaning: City districts without intimate violence, <https://www.stop-partnergewalt.at/>

investigated activist counting work on feminicides (D'Ignazio, 2024) and analysed the seductions of measuring phenomena like human rights violations and gender violence (Merry, 2016).

Concretely, in this thesis I want to answer how the circumstances of the data production on femicide enact the phenomenon and our understanding of it. This can be for instance what crimes are included in counts and what we know about them. I analyse how different definitions used by counting projects influence the data they produce. And I try to understand how the limitations of counting complex, social things affect the produced data and further consider narratives around data that play a role in all of this. For this I interviewed people active in different observatories that count feminicides. I want to contribute to discussions about how we think and speak about femicide and at the same time hope to contribute to a nuanced view on whether quantitative data can be used as evidence for discriminations.

In the following sub-section, I trace the development of the terms femicide and femicide and explain why I chose to use the terminology in this way. I then present relevant literature for my research, spanning from general work on feminicides and their counting to some important perspectives on data. Then I state the main concepts that guided my analysis and introduce my research methods, the wider thematic approach and mode of analysis. In my results I move from general observations of the counting work by each observatory to more specific aspects, like concrete definitional questions implicated in counting feminicides and struggles around information sources and resource scarcity. The final sub-section of my findings spans several aspects of the counts in relation to a critical analysis of the data narratives. In Chapter seven I try to tie my findings back to the literature and further discuss the role of counting in the fight against feminicides, before finally summarising my main points in the conclusion.

1.1.Femi(ni)cide: Evolution of the term(s) and my usage of it

It was famously Diana Russell in 1976 that first used the term femicide with its feminist perspective at the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women. At the time she did not attach any specific definition to the term but later described it as “the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women” (Caputi and Russell, 1990: 34). Throughout the 90ies it was also described as a misogynous killing of women by men or the killing of women because they were women. Jill Radford further categorised it as a form of sexual violence (1992, quoted in Luján Pinelo, 2024).

Expanding and simultaneously translating the term to the Mexican context, Marcela Lagarde (1996) first used the term in Spanish as ‘feminicidio’ (English: femicide). For Lagarde, using ‘femicidio’ (English: femicide) would just refer to any killing of a woman i.e. would be the equivalent to ‘homicidio’ (homicide) for men (Luján Pinelo, 2024). Lagarde stresses that femicide must be conceptualised in a way that includes all the different dynamics that lead to this violence against women.

Femicide involves coercive norms, exploitative policies, and alienating modes of coexistence that, together, constitute gender oppression and, in their radical realisation, lead to the material and symbolic elimination of women and the control of the rest. For femicide to be carried out with social knowledge and not provoke social anger, not even from the majority of women, it requires complicity and consensus that accepts several interlinked principles: interpreting harm to women as if it were not harm, misrepresenting its causes and motives, and denying its consequences (Lagarde, 1996: 99, translated)

Another dynamic of gender-related violence Lagarde highlights is the complicity of state institutions. Governments do not do enough to prevent or punish feminicides, often resulting in the impunity of aggressors. This became an important notion present within the usage of the femicide term. After this work and much more deliberations by other Latin American activists and scholars, femicide as term was re-translated from Spanish into English. Luján describes how „by bringing the term “femicide” into the English-speaking context, they challenge the common belief that “femicide” is the correct word in English and “feminicide” in Spanish“(2024: 667). Luján further recounts how Fregoso and Bejerano (2010 as quoted in Luján Pinelo, 2024) want to highlight the intersectionality of different inequalities, like gender, class, race, sexuality etc. in their understanding and analyses of the phenomenon and therefore use the term femicide.

By now, both versions, femicide and feminicide, are used in English. And while they generally describe the same phenomenon, each version tends to highlight specific aspects of the crimes. The list of influences on the term does by no means end here and I highly recommend the cartography by Luján (2024) for the more extensive version of the discussion around the terms. Both in Spanish- and English-speaking contexts there remain debates on whether to use femicide or feminicide (or femicidio/feminicidio) as term and what the advantages of either version are. Some have since begun to use the combination femi(ni)cide (Biwi Kefempom, 2023; Luján Pinelo,

2018) to acknowledge the theoretical work on both versions of the term and to bring them together.

For this research project, I have decided to use the term feminicide. In my understanding this term highlights the additional conceptual work the term has been undergoing, especially in the Latin American context, since its introduction by Russell. The focus on structural and intersectional aspects of the violence as well as the impunity granted by the state are extremely important for my personal feminist understanding of the topic, as well as for my research focus. Afterall, much of my work revolves around activists and the work they do because they deem the measures of governments to count and prevent feminicide as lacking. I also see the usage of this term as a tribute to the important work on feminicides done in Latin America, especially in Mexico and Argentina. I want to highlight how the work there made many of the current European debates possible.

The database on feminicide in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico developed by Julia Monárrez (2013) served as direct inspiration to one of the data production projects in Europe that I investigate in this thesis. *Ni Una Menos* started as a movement in 2015 in Argentina and since has inspired many groups globally to fight feminicides. Since 2023 Vienna even has a square called *Ni-Una-Menos Platz* to honour the victims of feminicide (Al Kafur, 2023). And finally, the work by D'Ignazio (2024) on different counting projects in Latin America inspired and informed my research project tremendously. So generally, I will use the term feminicide, only sometimes changing to femicide when I indirectly quote interview partners or organisations that use a different term.

Following the work by D'Ignazio (2024) and her collaborators I have decided to not use the more frequent term 'gender-based violence' but 'gender-related violence'. This should highlight that feminicides and other related violences are not only based on gender. Other types of discriminations can have an important influence as well. With this I again want to stress the intersectional perspective on feminicide.

The last terminological clarification concerns trans women and feminicide. In general, killings of trans women must of course be understood as feminicides and should be included within the term. Simultaneously it is important to understand differences in the circumstances and dynamics of killings of trans and cis women (Guerrero and Muñoz, 2018). Sometimes it therefore makes sense to talk about one or the other phenomenon specifically and in these cases, I have decided to talk about 'trans feminicides' or 'cis feminicides' whenever the specification is important.

2 Literature Review

In the following I will explain important literature that relates to my research from different perspectives. I start by continuing the discussion of feminicides from the introduction and name important ways to analyse them from a social science perspective. Afterwards, I focus on work examining the counting of feminicides as a specific practice within the wider context. I then connect this to broad understandings of quantification and its power, to different analytical perspectives from critical data studies add to the topic and relevant literature on data activism.

2.1 Femicide in Social Theories and Social Research

With the explanation of why I have chosen to use femicide throughout my research project, I already discussed the history and evolution of the terms femicide and feminicide (or feminicidio) above. The literature on the terms and how to use them form an important part of the sociological, philosophical and feminist work that this thesis draws on. Apart from this focus on the term itself there exists a wide range of research on the phenomenon. Here I give an overview of important research approaches and try to show their diversity.

Feminicide is analysed within many different disciplines, using various approaches and frameworks to make sense of it. Corradi et al. (2016) analyse how studies using feminist, sociological, decolonial, human rights or criminological frameworks differ and explain what aspects of feminicide these tend to highlight respectively. They further want to show the relevance of theories on feminicide for social research.

The feminist approach focuses on the structural aspect of the violence and analyses the crimes through feminist understandings of patriarchal societies. One problem they identify with this approach is that it can be hard to prove something happens because of the gender of a person:

We either assume that the mere fact of belonging to the female gender makes any woman a potential victim – however, this would amount to a very generic hypothesis with little empirical significance; or we demand further details on the perpetrator's motives, his relationship with the victim and the circumstances of the event (Corradi et al., 2016: 980)

This problem is one of the main tensions when it comes to how feminicides can be identified, classified or counted and frequently appears throughout my research. In a sociological approach to the topic, researchers try to empirically prove that feminicide is different from homicide and try to understand the social situations around it, for example to better understand risk factors.

Criminologically the topic is still rather approached conservatively, many researchers in this discipline prefer to use other terms like ‘female homicide’ or ‘intimate partner homicide’.

The authors themselves bring these theories together and propose to look at the crimes from three different levels of explanation: on the micro level one must understand how psychological conditions and the social and emotional dynamics of individuals play a role. The meso level should consider how the perpetrator and victim are embedded in their network of relationships like extended families and friends. And finally, on the macro level one looks for structural explanations of violence. Overall, this article provides a good first overview of approaches to feminicides in different disciplines and argues why interdisciplinary research is so important on this topic (Corradi et al., 2016).

2.1.1 *Femicide as growing research topic*

It is further interesting to see how research on feminicides has changed in the last years. Just in 2016 Weil published a paper, criticising that femicide is still too invisible in sociological research in comparison to phenomena like intimate partner violence or other gender-related violences. For me, this analysis seems too focused on the English-speaking or European context, considering what researchers like Lagarde (1996) or Monárrez (2013) and many more, have been working on in Latin America before 2016. In the last years this has luckily changed, and the topic gained more attention as well within Europe. In 2018 for instance, Weil and colleagues edited a book on femicide in Europe, discussing the research done on the topic, data collection in Europe and how feminicides in Europe could be prevented (Weil et al., 2018).

From around the same time there exist quite a few studies on specific aspects of feminicide or the situation in a certain region. Though as Weil (2016) criticised many do not use the terms femicide or feminicide. Examples for this are a study on female homicide in a sub-region in South Africa (Meel, 2018), a study on the reports of domestic violence in Hong Kong (Hernández, 2017) or a study on depression amongst the aggressors of intimate partner violence (Cheng and Jaffe, 2019). This is just to show how diverse the research on this topic can be.

Another example showcasing the diversity of research on feminicides even within sociology is the thematic section on *Femicide – a persistent social issue* in the journal *International Sociology* (Di Marco and Dawson, 2024). The section includes contributions with different theoretical as well as methodological approaches and perspectives from Latin America (in a multi-country approach), Canada, and South Africa. The papers present cases like the co-production of data

structures on feminicides in Mexico or research on the more specific attributes of sexual femicide in South Africa. One project concerns itself with the emotions of aggressors and how they are narrated after the crimes and another analyses the statistical framework that the United Nations presented to classify feminicides (Di Marco and Dawson, 2024).

On a much bigger scale than this special issue, *The Routledge International Handbook of Femicide and Feminicide* edited by Dawson and Mobayed Vega (2023) compiles work on the most important discussions on feminicide. Chapters are concerned with how to accurately define the phenomenon, document and count it as well as how preventative measures could look like. It includes perspectives from different countries, institutions and grassroots organisations. The editors further acknowledge that not even the 50 chapters of the handbook are enough to encompass all relevant discussions.

One chapter that is especially relevant for me concerns *a global archaeology of knowledge* on feminicide. It starts by describing the term feminicide as it is used and worked on in different areas or ‘epistemic worlds’ (Mobayed Vega, 2023). Understanding these differences is important because, a person’s „epistemological background, that is, how they know what they know influences and permeates how they assess, communicate, and generate ways of knowing femi(ni)cide“ (Mobayed Vega, 2023: 19). There are differences in whether a person is embedded in an institution, civil society organisation or is concerned with legal, criminological, statistical or theoretical aspects. Here this is relevant because my research sample includes people active in different epistemic worlds which might have an influence on how they relate to specific discussions on the data production on feminicide. Mobayed Vega further understands feminicide as a boundary object (Star and Griesemer, 1989), claiming that this notion can help to understand the variety and small changes the term undergoes depending on its contextual use. Using Google Trends, the author showed that the term ‘feminicidio’ has indeed been searched more often than ‘femicide’ in English, again highlighting how important the inclusion of Latin-American perspectives can be.

Another important chapter for my research project is one on feminicide and intersectionality (Sosa, 2023). The author argues that even gender-related violence cannot only be analysed following the gender axis, other systems of oppression like race or class can play an important role in the murder of women. Especially the killings of transgender women can highlight this because “they require exploring how gender identity and expression in combination with gender shapes their experiences, determines their social positioning, and often results in violence“ (Sosa, 2023: 52). Different categories of oppression intersect, and it is not always clear which

might be the primary source of discrimination affecting a person. In Chapter three on sensitising concepts, I will explain in more detail how this understanding of intersectionality and femicide by Sosa as well as other theories of intersectionality (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1991) guide my analysis.

2.1.2 Discussions on Femicide in Austria

After having considered a wider range of research on femicide above (with a bias towards research focused on Europe) I specifically want to consider some literature discussing the phenomenon in an Austrian context. While my research sample includes projects from a wider range, I still look at them from an Austrian perspective and mostly connect them to the local settings here. Generally, it seems that there is not much scientific literature on the topic yet. For instance, a Google Scholar search for relevant terms returns many master's theses. Without diminishing their importance, it is rather unusual to have them amongst the first results on Google Scholar. This might indicate that while there are many young researchers interested in the topic (like myself) there is no extensive academic debate on the topic within Austria (yet).

Femicide as a term works slightly different in German speaking contexts considering that it is not as easily derived from other words like homicide in English. The more German equivalent that is still sometimes used is 'Frauenmord' (literally the murder of a woman), in comparison to femicide the term lacks however a political and theoretical basis. Over the last years the use of the term 'Femizid' (femicide) has therefore grown in German speaking countries as well and since 2020 the word is defined in the Duden (dictionary of Standard German that is the general reference for orthographical and grammatical rules) as "deadly violence against women or a woman because of her gender" (Streuer, 2022).

One important paper on the Austrian context was published by Haider (2022). She describes the term in general as well as its specific usage in Austria. She highlights that the complexity and multi-dimensionality of the femicide term should be seen as an advantage rather than a point to critique. Others have argued that the discursive potential of the term lies exactly in the possibility to use its definition in varying ways and with that highlights different aspects of the crimes, depending on the specific use case (Streuer, 2022). Haider's work clearly shows how 'femicide' as a term is mainly used by activists and the media in Austria. She criticises that there are no governmental statistics on femicide and that generally the gender perspective of violence is not investigated enough by the police and responsible institutions. For the activist counting project I investigate, this lack was one of the main motivations to start their work and therefore is

a central aspect of my project. According to Haider, governmental projects that investigate gender-related violence further focus too much on individual factors and do not include structural aspects like feminist research would suggest doing.

There exist however also more critical voices, regarding the use of the feminicide term in Austria. Katharina Beclin (2022) agrees that the usage of this term could help bring new aspects into political debates and help improve measures against the killings of women. At the same time Beclin criticises the lack of a standardised definition and argues that this renders the data on feminicide less robust and makes them less interpretable. This analysis relates to much of what I want to investigate in my project, I agree that feminicide definitions can be too different, there is no set standard yet which makes uniform classifications harder (Bowker and Star, 1999). For me this could however equally be a chance for activists to find the most meaningful and useful interpretation of the term for themselves. However, I do not agree with another part of Beclin's analysis at all. For her, gender alone is not enough as a criterium of analysis. She argues that because generally men represent around 85% of murder suspects, it would make sense statistically that in heterosexual relationships the woman is usually the victim of intimate partner violence. And she claims that the most frequent reason for the murder of an intimate partner is not gender but the destruction of the self-definition of the aggressor, often in relation to an ongoing or possible separation.

For me this argumentation does not hold up at all. To claim that this dynamic has nothing to do with gender completely overlooks the so important understanding of patriarchal dynamics that the term feminicide wants to highlight. Afterall a separation can be a shock for men and woman alike and still it is overwhelmingly frequent the men that become violent. The fact that men generally represent the majority of aggressors can also be linked, at least in part, to gender roles and patriarchal values. In my opinion this is a perfect example for where a feminist analysis and the term feminicide can add understanding to the situation, not the opposite. I find Beclin's (2022) call for institutions and projects to always specify which definition of feminicide they are applying more convincing. This could help sharpen understandings of feminicide and disclose what crimes are left out.

A book I encountered again and again within the societal debate on feminicide in Austria is *You are the home of dead daughters: why men murder women – and we mustn't look away*² by Yvonne Widler (2022). The book is a journalistic approach to the topic, mixing the research of individual

² original title in German: *Heimat bist du toter Töchter: warum Männer Frauen ermorden – und wir nicht mehr wegsehen dürfen*

stories of victims and their families with chapters on the wider situation in Austria and interviews with experts. The book discusses what feminicides are, frequent dynamics of the killings, talks to victim's families and looks at the police and governmental response to crimes. Widler investigates programs of social work with aggressors and protective measures for victims of gender-related violence. For my research it was an excellent introduction to the topic and very helpful in gaining an overview over discussions. While not necessarily related to my exact approach to the topic it gave me a very useful understanding of the general dynamics around femicide in Austria. Many of the experts and institutions in the book were interesting for my research project and I used this as a first step in recruiting interview partners.

Another interesting book, within the Austrian context especially, was written by a collective of authors, that call themselves *Until we no longer have to politicise a single femi(ni)cide*³ (Biwi Kefempom, 2023). All authors met as activists of the Vienna based group *Claim the Space*, that started to publicly mourn and protest each femicide in Austria beginning in July 2020. In the book they reflect on actions of the activist group while the analysis and opinions they give have only been developed by the authors not the whole activist collective. The book comprises and explains a lot of theory behind feminicides and aims to connect this to their concrete political action. They for instance recap how the current global movement around the topic started in and spread from Latin America and the Caribbean, and re-tell the emerging of the terms femicide, feminicide and femi(ni)cide. They further specifically reflect the usage of the term in the German speaking/Austrian context and consider different forms of protesting feminicide and concrete actions by claim the space (Biwi Kefempom, 2023). One form of action they portray and analyse is the production of feminicide counts that plays an important role in my research focus. Therefore, I now want to present the important literature concerning not only feminicides generally but concentrating on their counting and the problems this can entail.

2.2 Counting Femicide

Early on in discussions around feminicide, the question of how they could be (statistically) recorded was a central point of thought. Julia Monárrez investigated the numerous cases of feminicides in Ciudad Juárez happening from 1993 to 2004 and built one of the first databases on feminicide (Monárrez Fragoso, 2013). In the following I aim to give an overview of the most interesting work on the counts of feminicide. Simultaneously, this is the strand of investigations

³ Originally in German: *Bis wir keinen einzigen Femi(ni)zid mehr politisieren müssen*, Biwi Kefempom for short

of femicide where an STS approach seems most fruitful and where most STS literature has been used to work on the topic. After this specific introduction to data and femicide, in the following section I concentrate more on broader understandings of the terms data and quantification and their influence on my research.

I first encountered the work done with data by activists in an article on 'data activism' (Suárez Val et al., 2023). It shows how data became a central role in how activists draw attention to social issues, in the cases explored in the paper, additionally through artistic projects. Activists mobilize data on femicide in different ways often "mobilizing art and craft as a form of resistance and as a method to visualize data" (Suárez Val et al., 2023: 1). I started investigating how data is used for mobilization in Austria and through that became increasingly interested in the data production itself.

For the Austrian context I have not found much academic work on data production projects. One important perspective from activists is represented in the book by Biwi Kefempom (2023). The authors critically reflect on the production of numbers and the categorisations of femicide needed for the counting. They highlight what crimes are currently counted and invisibilities of the femicide data produced in Austria. They further analyse different types of femicide, why some of them are neglected more than others and how they theorise femicide around these different aspects. They include the phenomenon of femicide-suicide, the killings of lesbians and trans women or underaged girls and reflect on the question if only cis men can commit femicide or not. In the chapter on empirical findings, I regularly relate back to statements of this book, for me it was a very important resource to have an additional activist perspective on the topic, especially because the authors were unfortunately not available for an interview.

Questions around how femicide is counted always include considerations of how to define the phenomenon exactly and how to classify crimes to count them. This includes for instance work on different sex/gender indicators that could be used to analyse femicides (Dawson and Carrigan, 2021). The authors aim to find ways of classifying femicide beyond either counting all killings of women as such, or only focusing on intimate femicide as one of the most common types (Dawson and Carrigan, 2021).

Dawson and Carrigan (2021) therefore took statistical data on femicides and homicides in Canada and compared if certain sex/gender-related motives and indicators were more present in the first than the latter. If one indicator proves to be significantly more likely to be present in femicides this would mean that it could be a useful indicator to identify femicides. Indicators that were present more often in male-on-female homicides were for example: a recent

separation, prior threats, a relationship between victim and aggressor (intimate or familial) as well as sexual assault, a use of excess force or certain types of violence like beating.

The authors however do not only show that these indicators would be useful to identify feminicides but that they are often not available in data on homicides, stressing the lack of enough information around feminicides. They argue that this happens due to a gender bias, “data collection instruments [on homicide] were initially designed to capture what are (and remain) the greater proportion of male-on-male homicide and this continues to put women and girls at risk of male violence” (Dawson and Carrigan, 2021: 695).

Looking at this work from an STS perspective, these struggles to find fitting indicators can be understood as ways of developing standards for classification (Bowker and Star, 1999). Bowker and Star highlight in their book how strongly conceptions of purity and classifications are related even though such pure categories never exist. This reminds me to stay attentive to what remains outside of definitions and what is overlooked. The politization of classifications developed by Bowker and Star shows how powerful technologies of classification can be. While I do not use this directly as a guiding framework, their research still forms the basis of many approaches presented here and their notions were part of my thinking and the questions I asked myself.

2.2.1 *Global Indexes and Frameworks*

In their book *Towards a Global Femicide Index: Counting the Costs*, Walklate et al. (2019) explore what problems global counting efforts could face and how counting the killings connects to efforts of preventing them. The authors only focus on intimate femicide, so the killing done by a romantic/intimate partner or ex-partner. They argue for this because it is the most frequent form of femicide and often the classification of them is easier because one only must know the relationship between victim and aggressor. However, even this data is not always available and involves questions around how to classify relationships. While I understand their argument to limit their focus I do see this critically. Intimate feminicides might usually represent the majority of feminicides but only considering those cases can still exclude a huge number of killings. In 2024 in Spain around 45% of femicide cases reported were not intimate feminicides (according to the numbers by femicidio.net, 2025).

Walklate et al. (2019) still give important insights into challenges of counting femicide, especially on a global scale, while also highlighting its importance:

Measuring or counting violence against women broadly, and intimate partner homicide in particular, will not independently prevent or reduce such violence or address the high level of impunity often attached to these crimes. We argue, however, that the more systematic collection of national data on the number of femicides as part of work towards the establishment of a global femicide index should not be just a technical exercise. It could instead be conceived as the product of political action to make such crimes more visible, as a way of better understanding the prevalence, nature, and circumstances of such killings, and to commit to the type of changes (social, legal, cultural, economic, and political) necessary to ultimately prevent these deaths and end these crimes (Walklate et al., 2019: 3)

The authors explain how the lack of counts of intimate femicides reflects the lack of attention to violence happening to woman. The risks of gender-related violence are far from taken as seriously as other threats, like deaths through terrorism. Walklate et al. therefore call for more attention and counts on the topic themselves but simultaneously pay attention to the many challenges in preventing femicide and analyse the risks of counting. These include questions around who is counted and who is not, as well as what assumptions are embedded into the counting practices. The deaths of indigenous women are e.g. often invisible in official data while they are overrepresented within the group of victims in comparison to the general population (Walklate et al., 2019). Especially when trying to establish a global index these are central challenges. While definitions can already vary from institution to institution, between different countries the risk of misinterpretations and false assumptions rises.

The main risk they see lies in the production of what Walklate et al. (2019) call ‘thin’ counts, so numbers that do not include enough information to actually support the development of preventative methods and that focus too much on individual aspects of gender-related violence. A few years later they expand this work and conceptualise ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ counts of femicide (Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2023). While they understand ‘thin’ counts to lack sufficient context and meaning in the data, ‘thick’ counts do not only focus on the individual aspects of the crimes. Instead, producing thick counts considers the social circumstances of femicide, relates them to daily patriarchal violence and includes what the authors call ‘slow femicide’. With slow femicide they mean to include deaths of woman that do not directly follow an instance of lethal violence. They are however still deaths that come too early as a cause of intimate partner or gender-related violence. For instance because violence can have physical, mental or economic consequences that impact the women’s life’s negatively and can lead to an earlier death, although they are not directly killed.

Further, they highlight how even when feminicide counts are established, marginalised women like indigenous women, older women or trans women are often excluded or underrepresented. The analysed approaches of data production often fail to recognise the violence as a “male resource and a male reserve” (p. 33) and do not include the patriarchy into their understanding of dynamics of gender-related violence (Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2023). To produce ‘thick’ counts they developed six aspects that have to be considered: „the act (of violence), the actors (individuals and/or states), the place (public/private), the object (used to commit violence: from guns to gaslighting), the impact (immediate or slow death) and the context (war, peace, post conflict)“ (Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2023: 34). With context they understand for example that certain world regions still have a high impunity for feminicides and in others post-colonial dynamics can have an impact on the crimes. All these points can influence how feminicides happen in a context and should therefore be considered to make preventative measures better;

Otherwise, what results is ‘thin’ data and as a result ‘thin’ interventions that fail to resonate with women’s everyday experiences of violence, fail to mirror the safety and security options that women experiencing men’s violence want, and further, fail to tackle the underlying drivers and conditions which support the ongoing perpetration of this violence (Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2023: 37)

In another study on a global framework, Dawson et al. (2024) took the data from the Canadian femicide observatory and evaluated how good the categories for femicide released by the UN can be applied to the 169 killings documented in 2018. The statistical framework by the UN identifies 10 variables that indicate a feminicide (UNODC, 2022; variables as cited in Dawson et al., 2024):

1. Women and girls killed by intimate partners (i.e. intimate partner femicide)
2. Women and girls killed by family members (i.e. familial femicide)
3. Previous record of harassment/violence
4. Illegal deprivation of her liberty
5. Use of force and/or mutilation
6. Body disposed of in a public space
7. Sexual violence was committed before and/or after the femicide
8. Victim was working in the sex industry
9. Hate crime motivated by bias against women or girls
10. Victim of forms of illegal exploitation

In total the authors found at least one of these variables present in 76% of cases in their sample, which included cases with women accused of being the aggressor. When only considering cases

with an accused male perpetrator at least one variable could be identified for 84% of cases. This shows that these characteristics can indeed indicate a feminicide. However, indicators concerned with more than individual characteristics on a societal level remain invisible. This includes the understanding that while individual identities like being a woman of colour or indigenous can raise the vulnerability of women it is not because of individual traits and what this means for their life but because of societal responses and the way they are treated because of their marginalization (Dawson et al., 2024). Questions like „how does one measure sexism, racism, and classism in community-level interactions with available data? How can researchers measure ableism, homophobia, and transphobia in societal-level processes?“ remain (Dawson et al., 2024: 325).

Unfortunately, most projects collecting data on feminicides already struggle with the individual categories and availability of basic information. Researchers on the topic cannot find complete data sets, which makes intersectional research approaches harder to conduct, the information for this is simply missing (Cullen et al., 2021). Also activist, NGO or governmental initiatives struggle to collect even the central information on feminicides (Zecha et al., 2023). Some struggle to obtain access to information from governmental bodies; others find that often information on the contexts of data collection is absent. This can mean that projects must contact statistical offices directly to gather enough information and make the data interpretable. Initiatives also report that police data is often incomplete or even incorrect because the officers are not trained in collecting the relevant data.

Many projects therefore use data triangulation to make their information more robust. This means combining multiple data sources to cross-validate the data. Especially information on motives is often not available. Because of this, some projects choose to collect information on all killings of women and like this can still re-classify a case as a feminicide if new information about the motive or circumstances of the killing becomes known. Overall, important information on feminicides remains hard to gather and the authors emphasize the importance of qualitative research to supplement quantitative data with context and additional information (Zecha et al., 2023).

2.2.2 *Data Science and (Activist) Feminicide Counting*

A very extensive research project on activist data production is the book *Counting Feminicide* by Chaterine D'Ignazio (2024). The book was published while I was starting to work on an exposé for my thesis project, still considering many different paths of investigation around the topic of data and feminicide. The work by D'Ignazio was extremely helpful and inspiring in this phase and I cite

her book throughout this thesis, using concepts for my analysis as well as comparing my findings with the ones presented in the book. D'Ignazio's approach is rooted in a critical approach towards datafication and quantification and builds on her previous work on data feminism (D'Ignazio and Klein, 2020). The book follows many different femicide counting projects run by activists in different Latin American countries. The author describes how the counts are created, the conceptions behind them and how they are used for advocating work. Many of the activist practices are further framed as learnings that could inspire better restorative and transformative data science practices. This "restoration involves restoring rights, dignity, life, living, and vitality to the individuals, families, communities, and larger publics harmed by structural violence" (D'Ignazio, 2024: 73).

One important theoretical approach by D'Ignazio is the concept of 'missing data'. She describes how official data is often missing and this missingness is actively produced because topics like femicide do not receive the appropriate attention. Many activists therefore try to produce data to fill this gap left by governments. Because the concepts around this are such an important part of my analysis, I will further explain their meaning and how I use them in the chapter on sensitising concepts.

D'Ignazio stays very attentive to the dilemma of using quantification for social justice purposes. She does not deny that many practices involving big data reproduce and even strengthen existing forms of discrimination. "In some cases where quantification is weaponized against minoritized groups, the path toward justice leads not through more counting but through refusals, bans, and moratoria." (D'Ignazio, 2024: 98). Simultaneously, in the context of femicide, data can become an important tool. Activists for instance use data to counter stereotypical understandings of gender-related violence, like who the most frequent perpetrators are and where this violence occurs. Many activists themselves criticise trends of quantification and very consciously choose how to use their data. They use the inclination towards numbers by those in power for their own purposes.

The analysis follows the activist work in great detail, analysing how many groups find their own conceptions of femicide and adapt definitions to their unique context. D'Ignazio also analyses how the projects gather their information, how they use newspaper articles as a source, data triangulation to make their information more reliable, and how they overall develop expertise on the information sources available and how to interpret them correctly. In my findings I also describe the sources activist projects use and the problems this can entail especially regarding newspaper articles. She further describes how for many activists the numbers they produce are

never only numbers, they always are connected to the victim's life and death and reporting the feminicides involves a lot of emotional work.

The classification of cases and decisions made around this are a further line of D'Ignazio's investigation. Many activists use official versions of definitions of gender-related violence as a starting point but then go beyond these standards according to their political understandings of the phenomenon. The author highlights that while seeing classifications as political in academic discourses is no news, in practice this is much harder to implement. There regularly exists conflict within groups on what to count and what not. Conflicts especially arise along the typical lines among feminist groups, like the inclusion of trans women or the approach to sex work.

The last step in the analysis of a restorative and transformative data science project is to see how activists use the data that is produced and refuse it at the same time (D'Ignazio, 2024). The counter data previously produced by activists can be used to help families and communities affected to repair and heal them and they are a memorial to the lives lost to gender-related violence. They are used to show that feminicides are indeed a structural problem and are a tool used for demonstrations and other protest forms to raise attention to the issue. In an attempt to reform the government's response to feminicides activists sometimes collaborate with official actors to inform new classification practices by the state. The data can be further used to reframe the problem of femicide:

Reframing happens by creating and distributing alternative narratives. Data activists refuse the narrow interpretations of violence coming from the police, the state, and mainstream media; they uplift stories of grassroots and community struggle for justice; and they insert feminist framings of the violence into public circulation, often using their own data as key evidence (D'Ignazio, 2024: 196)

Many of the actions simultaneously involve a refusal of the data. Activists highlight the people behind the numbers; they do not allow that the women are dehumanised by simply turning them into statistics. Quantification is only used as a strategy because they are aware of the legitimacy this gives to their cause.

Besides the extensive examination of activist practices this book is so central for my work because of its deep understanding of data science and its problems. I hope I found a similarly critical approach to these aspects in my thesis. Afterall:

it is important to resist the technosolutionist snake oil from Silicon Valley: data and AI are not going to "solve" matters of social inequality. More data doesn't readily

translate to more action or more justice. On the contrary, the demand for more proof—more data collection, more analysis, more research—is often a terribly effective delay tactic employed by mainstream institutions to avoid taking meaningful action on social justice (D'Ignazio, 2024: 274)

Other researchers have continued this understanding of data science in their own work. Doğan and colleagues (2025) use a reflection on transformative data science to analyse how trans activists use the strategies of resolving, researching, recording, refusing and using data for their own causes. Mobayed Vega used the perspective to investigate how different digital femicide counting projects do a recount of the stories of women rather than a sheer numerical femicide count, creating data stories that are more holistic than a simple database with numbers (Mobayed Vega, 2024b).

In a different paper Mobayed (2024a) investigates two governmental femicide databases in Mexico. She argues that the data on femicides becomes multiple, because it is referenced at various points; in different databases, by different people and organisations or through different tools and techniques that aim to convert femicide cases into data. She reflects on how power dynamics influence why gender perspectives are usually missing from crime investigations. She also shows that governmental bodies in Mexico often lack the resources to correctly process information and how public servants struggle with the emotional implications of handling investigations and data on gender-related violence. Her analyses connects to the work of Mol in that she explains how femicide data comes into being by practices; instead of there being the one real world out there that has to be represented in the data (Mol, 2002 as cited in Mobayed Vega, 2024a).

Data are not 'out there' waiting to be discovered, but instead co-produced in socio-material and techno-political practices. In this way, and building on Mol, attending to how facts, truth and evidence about femicide are enacted has a significant effect: realities multiply (Mobayed Vega, 2024a: 6)

By investigating the specific data structures of the state the author wants to understand why official data on femicide is still so lacking in comparison to other statistical categories even though activists have achieved bringing demands for more data on femicides into governments. Some of the problems she identifies in official data on femicides is that too often the attention for a specific gender perspective is missing, and many agencies do not have enough resources which results in old technology and lost evidence. These limitations also affect other crime documentations in Mexico but patriarchal structures and the gender dynamics of femicides

make them even more complex. Mobayed's (2024a) results show that an effective femicide measurement can only be achieved with the redistribution of material, financial and technological resources which is impeded by scarcity and made worse by patriarchal dynamics. Those investigations of femicides and counting practices are not a complete list, but for me are the most interesting to my approach, be it for their theoretical basis and perspectives, their methodological approach or their relation to my own research findings.

2.3 Perspectives on Data

How the literature on counting femicide has already shown, conceptions around data, counting and quantification are a central part of the topic and often guide the questions that I investigate. Therefore I will leave the specific case of femicide to the side for now and give an overview of the literature around data that is relevant for my project. With this I want to explain how I understand data, numbers and their appeal. All the concepts mentioned here influenced my thinking about this in some form. The more concrete theoretical lines I follow in this project will be explained in the third chapter.

To understand the importance of quantification and the trust we tend to put into numbers Porter's book (1995) is a very useful resource. He analyses the beginnings of statistics on social phenomena, like the census, crime or unemployment rates and highlights what makes quantification so appealing for governments and businesses but also for scientists. He conceptualises quantitative methods as 'technologies of distance' because mathematics follows very strict rules that are rather universal, and numbers are therefore seen as a way to communicate information over big distances and beyond contexts. Put simply, a person does not have to trust in the knowledge or experience of an individual person anymore, it is enough if they can 'proof' their knowledge with numbers. However, this also presupposes trust in numbers. Numbers only work as a way of communication if people agree on how they work, presupposing dominant understandings of mathematics and scientific rigour.

Porter (1995) further describes how numbers are based on contingent categorisations. But while statisticians or scientists might be aware of those circumstances, whoever uses the numbers afterwards does not have insights into how the categorisations shaped the numbers. They become hard to challenge and essentially black boxes in how they were produced. Still quantification is long established as the dominant way to translate our world into objective facts. Of course not every count is automatically trusted, especially in the early stages of statistics the legitimacy of official institutions was needed to lend credibility to numbers.

Martin and Lynch (2009) call such discussions around counting methods and categorisations, 'numero-politics'. They argue that:

methods of counting often become caught up in the political and epistemic conflicts they are used to address. By making a topic of counting, we call attention to its problematic status not only as a means for knowing about the world, but also as an array of worldly practices deserving of sociological attention in its own right (Martin and Lynch, 2009: 244)

They analyse two types of counting. You can count people, for example, to estimate the size of a crowd, or you can count (non-human) things, such as matching chromosomes in scientific research on human DNA. Their research into very different instances of counting highlights how political contexts and standards within disciplines shape counts. Martin and Lynch (2009) call for attention on questions around counting that are still interesting to me and are present throughout my research. Counts are often involved in controversies around what things should be part of the count and what not, counting something renders it important and transforms it into "a member in a class of relevant objects" (Martin and Lynch, 2009: 246). These sensitivities to the political work that accompanies counts highlight the contingencies of numbers that, as in the case of femicide, can guide political decisions and measures.

The contingencies of counts also play a big role in the work by Merry (2016) on *The Seductions of Quantification*. In the book, Merry studies different global indicators, like numbers on violence against women by the UN Statistical Commission, reports on human trafficking by the US State Department or indicators on human rights violations by the UN. She gained these insights through attending meetings about the specific indicators by those institutions and experts or NGOs on the topic, applying the genealogical method to understand how the indicators are created and developed. The main question is how this development is shaped by global inequalities and power dynamics.

Her research examines three different types of indicators: 'counts', 'ratios' and 'composites'. Counts constitute the, supposedly, simplest of them where the indicator counts the number of people effected by a social phenomenon or the number of some kind of social event. Ratios combine two different numbers to compare them, like for example an unemployment rate given per capita. Composites are the combination of many individual indicators into one more general ranking; they often combine many different sources of data into one. An example for this would

be the Gender Equality Index done by the European Institute for Gender Equality⁴ where many different datapoints are combined into one score for each European country. Numbers or indicators therefore render social phenomena comparable;

Yet the process of translating the buzzing confusion of social life into neat categories that can be tabulated risks distorting the complexity of social phenomena. Counting things requires making them comparable, which means that they are inevitably stripped of their context, history, and meaning (Merry, 2016: 1)

Merry conceptualises indicators as a technology of knowledge and stresses the power they hold, e.g. in influencing decisions through policy reports. The definition of a problem like violence against women does have an important influence on this, because understandings of a phenomenon shape what counter measures are thought of. I elaborate on this understanding in more detail in the chapter on sensitising concepts.

Making a complex thing countable is further always a process of finding certain similarities with other phenomena while ignoring the features that might be different from one instance of a phenomenon to the other. Through this and other mechanisms of definition, “the process of measurement tends to produce the phenomenon it claims to measure” (Merry, 2016: 12). It is not necessarily a problem that this happens but that such ambiguities are not reflected once finished indicators are communicated, a problem of such classifications that Porter (1995) already noted as well.

The fact that the indicators Merry analyses are global make such translations from life into numbers even more complicated, because they must work in many different local contexts that are shaped by their specific culture. Global indicators are usually shaped by the globe’s richest countries and can reproduce power imbalances. All this does not mean that Merry is against all use of quantitative data, she rather advocates for a good combination of qualitative and quantitative data and calls for more democratic processes in the creation and production of indicators.

2.3.1 *Critical Data Studies*

My understanding of data further positions my research within the field of Critical Data Studies. In this section I highlight the most relevant discussions of the field and their connection to my

⁴ See here: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2025/AT>

project. This involves a general introduction to critical data studies, to how data can be analysed, to big and small data and to decolonial data approaches.

Critical Data Studies (CDS) is a broad field that includes a wide range of theories, methodical approaches and use cases. What studies in CDS usually have in common is that they politicise ways in which big data is produced or used as a knowledge basis (Iliadis and Russo, 2016). Boyd and Crawford (2012) were some of the first authors working on critically examining big data and laid the foundations for some important critical lines of inquiry. For them, big data represents new forms of knowledge in that it changes how research can be done and in what ways data is produced and analysed. They further assert that although big data makes many new things quantifiable this does not mean that social research becomes more objective or accurate. This connects to general debates between qualitative and quantitative methods. Just because very big datasets are used in research this does not mean that they have no limitations or are automatically representative. Small datasets or qualitative methods remain important, more data does not automatically make an analysis better (Boyd and Crawford, 2012).

Critical Data Studies additionally understands data as a form of power. This can mean the power to store, sell or manage data, which often lies with big corporations; or the power to not appear in data and stay invisible (Iliadis and Russo, 2016). In this research project, it becomes clear that it can as well be a form of power to be counted.

A very important notion of data in connection to my research questions is that data are never “raw” (Gitelman and Jackson, 2013). Too often data is seen as the given base for research projects without considerations of how the data was produced exactly. But data must be generated in some form. Assuming one works with raw data invisibilises the assumptions, biases, or limitations that can be present in a dataset. According to Gitelman and Jackson (2013) such overconfidence in data could turn into “a faith in their neutrality and autonomy, their objectivity” (p. 9). Questions like what is counted or what things can be reduced to numerical data and what not, are important to ask. A big source of the power of data that Gitelman and Jackson see is the fact that data can be accumulated into datasets, that mathematics can be a source of authority, and that data seems to render things comparable, even though they might not be.

Further, important contributions of CDS are different definitions of big data. Kitchin (2014) defines big data as huge in volume, velocity, and variety. It is also exhaustive in its scope (meaning it tries to portray all instances of, e.g., a population or user group). Another property of big data is that many aspects of our world are recorded and turned into data, that have not been quantified before. This development is called ‘datafication’ (Cukier and Mayer-Schönberger, 2014).

So, while the amount of data is not the only important property, none of the data projects I investigate in my research produce big data. They of course strive for an exhaustion of scope (portray all feminicides), but properties of variety, velocity and volume are all missing. I still mention this literature because it shapes present understandings of all kinds of data, not just big data. With new data infrastructures and technologies being used for big data, also small data is often treated and understood differently. Small data,

will increasingly come under pressure to utilize the new archiving technologies, being scaled-up within digital data infrastructures in order that they are preserved for future generations, become accessible to reuse and combination with other small and big data, and more value and insight can be extracted from them through the application of big data analytics (Kitchin and Lauriault, 2015: 467)

So big data and tools like computational algorithms, machine learning and artificial intelligence shape how data is approached generally. The availability and importance of big data further contribute to rendering everything that cannot be measured easily invisible. During my research I have e.g. encountered calls for machine learning algorithms to be used to analyse femicide data.

For my research project it is interesting to consider big data not only generally but also its application to human rights violations. Patrick Ball for instance showcases the many challenges data in this context entails and argues that having unreliable statistics is in fact worse than having no statistics (2016). In his understanding big data are only “big” regarding their sample size and completeness, meaning big data should encompass all instances that are relevant for the statistic. Especially in data on human rights violations this is however extremely hard to achieve. Often it is not even known how big the total amount of violence e.g. in an investigated conflict is (this being the very subject of the statistic). But still Ball has observed how frequently quantitative evidence is seen as more credible than qualitative analyses of human rights violations. Because of this he argues:

I have come to believe that descriptive statistics of convenience samples are worse than no statistics. No one has the intellectual sophistication to remember that a graph based on a convenience sample might be completely wrong, and that it might be wrong in a nearly infinite variety of possible ways, while simultaneously weighing the graph against qualitative data (Ball, 2016: 437)

Contrary to popular conceptions of data speaking for itself, Dourish and Gómez (2018) show that data is often narrated by the people using it. They employ an ethnographic understanding of what

data can be and how data practices are embedded in social contexts and cultural practices. In their research they examine the case of a program that automatically monitors the location and movement of convicted sex offenders on parole. They use this to show how the collection of data alone is not enough to gain knowledge. The data must be narrated, only then does data give information. With the words of Dourish and Gómez: “data tells stories in the ways in which it is animated, explained, offered, and shared” (2018: 1). The narratives used for data further reflect the frame through which people make sense of the data and give a data output its meaningfulness. With their focus on data fictions they do not suggest that the data narratives are wrong, they simply prove the assumption wrong that data does not have to be interpreted or is self-evident.

Datafication is further analysed not only with a general critical perspective but as well with specific traditions of critical thought like feminism. D’Ignazio and Klein show this in their above mentioned book *Data Feminism* (2020). They show not only how new trends and technologies around data can be understood with a feminist perspective but also how data can be used for feminist activism and to challenge power. Data feminism can be understood as “a way of thinking about data, both their uses and their limits, that is informed by direct experience, by a commitment to action, and by intersectional feminist thought” (D’Ignazio and Klein, 2020: 8). The authors showcase both how feminism can make the discriminatory aspects of data science visible and use data science for bottom-up and feminist projects. One of the best examples for this is of course D’Ignazio’s own later work on *Counting Feminicide* (2024). D’Ignazio and Klein still assert that one must question why the experience of e.g. marginalised groups must first be transformed into data before attention is paid to it. This connects to the case of feminicide as well, why do we need counts to recognize the problem as a problem in the first place? Especially when “the process of converting life experience into data always necessarily entails a reduction of that experience” (D’Ignazio and Klein, 2020: 10).

Another line of critical thought follows calls to de-westernize and de-colonialise big data. To build datafication from the South(s) means building datafication in a way that subsumes not only the geographical “Global South” but, “the different, the underprivileged, the alternative, the resistant, the invisible, and the subversive” (Milan and Treré, 2019: 321). Milan and Treré call to shift attention from datafication towards data activism and justice and to investigate civil society data projects as data practices from the bottom-up. They also criticise data universalism because it places data outside of any historical or sociopolitical context, which is not the case. On the contrary, datafication often reproduces discriminations like race, gender and class. These discriminations can be present on the individual level but also include dynamics between

countries, where only some have certain access to, and power over, data infrastructures (Valente and Grohmann, 2024). Many of the initiatives that I investigate in this research project do in fact deploy data practices from the bottom up and try to use the power of data for their own agenda. Such projects are often called data activism.

2.3.2 Data and Activism

Many people by now have understood the transformatory potential of datafication, among them many that want to use technology and data to shape more just social practices. Milan and Gutiérrez (2015) call such projects ‘data activism’. They have divided the different forms of activism in two groups: re-active and pro-active data activism. The first focuses more on understanding the threats datafication processes can entail, e.g. for minorities, often critiquing datafication generally. They resist data gathering projects, for example by working on encryption methods for private messages or advocate for just and transparent technologies. Pro-active data activism tries to leverage the power of big data for their own agenda. The projects explored in this thesis can almost all be understood as pro-active data activism initiatives, as can many of the projects reflected in the section on counting feminicide. While not all of my research participants would call themselves data activists, the way most of them leverage the power of numbers for their purposes is very similar to data activist groups. So having a broad understanding of the dynamics of such projects, the contradictions, frictions and strategies they often entail can be fruitful for my project.

Another similar example of data activism in the context of gender-related violence is the #NiUnaMenos movement. Chenou and Cepeda-Másmela (2019) show how activists appropriated datafication for their own purposes. The authors analysed press coverage and social media posts, and interviewed activists of the #NiUnaMenos collective in Argentina. Their research shows how activists tried to counter the lack of public data on gender-related violence by the state by starting their own dataset. It further draws a connection to theories of datafication from the south by Milan and Treré (2019). The use of activist data on feminicide was an important part of their work. They mobilised huge protests in the streets, and the data provided the activists with the necessary basis for their arguments, which were then published in media articles and gave the movement the attention it needed. Chenou and Cepeda-Másmela see in this an illustration of how data activism from the “Global South” can work. They formulate “counter-hegemonic imaginaries on big data” (p. 397), use technologies in emancipatory ways and therefore build new sociotechnical imaginaries of big data.

Data activism additionally is a good case to understand the political questions data are involved in. Beraldo and Milan (2019) call the way in which bottom-up data projects can resist dominant data politics the “contentious politics of data”. Their work on data activism highlights the agency activists have when engaging with data infrastructures, their conceptions of data as an opportunity or problem (and a mix of both) and the important role data infrastructures play for many activist endeavours. One way this is done is the fight against state monopolies on information, “resistance and reappropriation of data represent even more so central mo(ve)ments of tension between civil society and the state and/or corporate power” (Beraldo and Milan, 2019: 5). Examples for this could be the analysis of publicly available data to prove activist claims or to report counter data on phenomena, again like in the case of counting femicide. Activists can struggle against the power of data or against the control of data by those in power; they can also struggle using data to fight for a more just world. The authors therefore show how data activism lies somewhere between techno-enthusiasm and techno-scepticism.

Crooks and Currie (2021) see the potential in data activism rather sceptical and claim that “Numbers will not save us”. Their research focused on different grassroots actions in marginalised communities. A participant of their study reflected the dilemma of producing numbers that are decontextualised from the stories of the victims of police violence: “Data is just numbers. It’s more important to have stories with the numbers. Numbers and stories together are closer to the truth” (p. 202). With their analysis the authors want to show the dilemma many activist projects of minoritised communities face. While data for activism can have its positive aspects, the need for ‘hard evidence’ that e.g. proves discrimination or police violence is happening, responsabilises the affected communities to document the harm inflicted on them. This can happen even though the general problem is known by the state already. Following the logics of data to address the struggles of different communities and to empower them while minoritised groups are often oppressed by these same logics, produces a paradox the activists must navigate.

Simultaneously, Crooks and Currie do see the affective potential data can have and how this can make collective action possible, they use the term ‘agonistic data practice’ to describe this potential. The term is based on agonistic pluralism, meaning the importance of antagonisms and clashes of power within democracy (Mouffe 2000, as cited in Crooks and Currie, 2021). In this theory a more just distribution of resources is achieved “not through consensus but by opposition to an adversary” (p. 208). The authors understand rationality as something that can only be called for out of a privileged position and Mouffe as well highlights the importance of passion and affect for democratic values. To illustrate how data can transport emotions they introduce climate

countdowns as an example. Tickers that count down the time left to stop climate change displayed in public can provoke both a sense of urgency and fear. Part of this “emotional side” of data connects to the understanding of data as narrative by Dourish and Gómez (2018). Activists working on the topic of femicide use such agonistic data practices, for instance, when they organise artistic performances, vigils, or in general whenever they honour the memory of victims through their activism (D’Ignazio, 2024).

3 Sensitising Concepts

Now that I have discussed the literature framing my research project, I here expand on the central concepts that guided my empirical work. The work presented helped me find a way to approach my topic and guides my analysis. While I do explain two conceptions of data more closely here, much of how I understand the power of numbers and contemporary data production is also reflected in the literature presented in the previous chapter. Here, I introduce intersectionality as a feminist, critical theory and explain how I use it in my research, before expanding on my use of Merry's concept of indicators (2016), and D'Ignazio's (2024) understanding of missing and counter data as well as non-knowledge and ignorance (Aradau and Canzutti, 2025; Kleinman, 2024; Tuana, 2004).

3.1 Intersectionality and Femicide

Many of the questions I pose on the production of femicide data are connected and based on Haraway's work on positionality and the "god trick" (1988). Criticising the notion that scientific knowledge is neutral and objective, she showed how in fact position and perspective always play a role in any analytical work (Haraway, 1988). This means that scientific knowledge is more biased than is often assumed and it also influences what knowledge is produced. In my research this connects to questions why femicides have been an understudied phenomenon for so long and why attention for the topic is still fought for. Haraway's work also makes clear how important it is to understand who can do the counting of femicides and what this means for the numbers. Simultaneously it reminds myself to stay attentive to my own positionality, to consider my own biases while analysing and to openly reflect on the choices I have made in this project.

Feminist literature in STS has a long history of looking at the ways in which technologies can perpetuate forms of discrimination, like white supremacy (Benjamin, 2019) or showed how feminist understandings can shape for instance our understanding of care in a technoscientific world (Puig de La Bellacasa, 2017). What I consider most important for my approach in this thesis is the feminist understanding of intersectionality; "Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there" (Columbia Law School, 2017).

Kimberlé Crenshaw was the first to coin the term 'intersectionality'. In her work (1991) she criticised how the identity politics at the time fail to account for differences within one identity group, for example how women of colour experience discrimination differently because they are

affected by racism and misogyny in comparison to men of colour. The two seemingly separate things of being discriminated as a woman and as a person of colour cannot be looked at separately. The interplay of the two aspects produces properties that cannot be addressed by either feminism or antiracism, only a combination of the two.

One example Crenshaw uses to illustrate this is the topic of violence against women (1991). The circumstances of which are not only influenced by gender but also by race, class and other identity categories. She explains for instance how women of colour might feel even more reluctant to inform the police in cases of domestic violence because due to their experiences as people of colour they do not trust the police. She also criticises a frequently evoked narrative that contrary to popular believe, domestic violence is not only a problem of certain groups but can be found in households of all races, classes or educational backgrounds. Such statements only make sense if one departs from the stereotype that these problems are bigger in poor, uneducated or racialized communities. She further explains that this narrative is not used to address domestic violence in all kinds of households but rather to highlight the violence that is happening in white, middle- or upper-class communities, concentrating efforts to combat it there (Crenshaw, 1991).

In more recent years Collins has investigated *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (2019). She shows how social action is informed by the original theory, expands it and turns it into more than just a set of ideas. In her understanding intersectionality is used as a metaphor, heuristic and paradigm. Intersectionality as a metaphor helps to see categories in new ways, instead of explaining one discrimination using the other, for example: race works like gender here but different there. Naming intersectionality made it easier to see the interconnections between all kinds of different identities. It “facilitates new angles of vision on many topics. It suggests that shifting from seeing social phenomena as separate and distinct to seeing their interconnections would be beneficial” (Collins, 2019: 34).

As a heuristic, intersectionality is used in more practical terms, it is used to understand how social problems can be solved or helps plan political action. It has also helped to understand existing knowledge in new ways. Intersectionality as heuristic can guide our research questions or offer rules and common practices that improve political thinking and action. As Collins explains with the work by Crenshaw (1991) on violence against women, using intersectionality as heuristic can also mean adapting the categories one examines. Crenshaw adapts the race/class/gender heuristic because according to her, class plays a lesser role in the context of violence against women. Instead she e.g. uses the category immigrant status, because for her this better describes the circumstances of violence she investigates and the social problems that lead to this violence

(Collins, 2019). Collins further argues for intersectionality as a paradigm and shows how it might be developed further into a critical social theory, connecting theory to critical social action.

For me, the heuristic use is the most relevant one. It helps me to understand the social problem of gender-related violence in new ways, because feminicides also happen along many intersectional discriminations like race, class, migratory status or being cis gender. My use of the term 'gender-related' violence points to this as well. While gender plays an important role in the phenomenon of femicide, as I show in my empirical findings, it is not the only category that has an influence on who is most vulnerable or considered by counter measures. Using intersectionality as a heuristic can therefore not only mean paying attention to the intersections of class, race and gender but also whether I identify other categories that play an important part in the attention feminicides obtain or that might be useful to explain the (social) challenges in the context of femicide data production.

Other researchers have also shown that feminicides cannot be investigated using only one category of difference (Sosa, 2023). Different categories intersect and all of them can have an influence on a person's life. Sosa explains how seeing a group of people as homogenous always highlights the realities of the most dominant people within this group. Early feminism has shown this sufficiently in its focus on the needs of white middle-class woman that were often very different than the ones from e.g. lesbians or women of colour. When considering what feminicides are counted, where and how, different intersections of oppression are therefore important to consider. The murders of trans women, for example, might be marginalised as a phenomenon within the dominant understanding of feminicides.

Also racist and often Islamophobic narratives around feminicides might play a role in my analysis. Murders committed by non-white men tend to get more attention than other feminicides committed by white men. Narratives that must highlight that *also* Austrian men are a problem can still be encountered, which is why I want to stay attentive to these things. At the same time I also must recognise my own positionality concerning these aspects, which is that I am a white, cis, German woman living in Austria and therefore might not always understand all dimensions to those topics or lack certain sensitivities.

3.2 Counts as Indicators

One conceptual data-related approach that is central to my project is Merry's description of indicators in her book *The Seductions of Quantification: Measuring Human Rights, Gender*

Violence, and Sex Trafficking (2016). A short overview over her work can be found in the previous chapter as well. Summarised, her work defines indicators as data that is produced about different, complex social phenomena, often by highly simplifying them or reducing other 'raw' data to this indicator. They are supposed to render a phenomenon comparable between different countries, institutions or over time. Often, they are used in various areas at the same time: within research they are supposed to produce scientific knowledge, when used by businesses or governments they can monitor the success of measures, e.g. using unemployment numbers. Or they can be used by advocacy groups to make social problems more visible (Merry, 2016).

In my project the type of indicator I focus on are *counts*. I talk to different people that produce data on feminicides, counting how many women are killed each year. While on the first look this might seem trivial, Merry explains how even counting events involves at least three questions: "(1) What is important to count? (2) What characteristics are diagnostic for identifying these countable things? (...) (3) What are the appropriate criteria for aggregation and disaggregation?" (Merry, 2016: 14). For my case all these questions are relevant. The importance of femicide counts is long acknowledged by many activists and receives more and more attention from governments, but data on the phenomenon are still scarce. Presumably, because these counts are not deemed important enough. I will elaborate further on this in the next section when presenting the concept of 'missing data'.

Additionally, following Merry (2016), I understand indicators, and therefore the data on feminicides, as technologies of knowledge production. Similarly to the production of scientific knowledge, indicators do not just reflect some numerical truth that is already present in the world. The making of the indicators themselves shapes what is counted and what not, what phenomena can be reflected and what stays invisible. Depending on the institution producing a count, understandings of who is a woman or not could differ (meaning e.g. are trans women included or not), this in turn influences what the resulting femicide count describes. Maybe it is only the killings of cis-woman, or the killings of all women but only if the aggressor is a (ex)partner. Decisions like these shape what we know about femicide, which in turn influences what counter measures to the crimes can be imagined.

Referring to Foucault's work (1979, as quoted in Merry, 2016), Merry explains how this production of knowledge is tied to power. She argues that it is crucial to reflect on the power relations that influence the production of indicators and therefore the knowledge they create. This is relevant to my project because in my data there are very different power dynamics at play, considering that I investigate governmental institutions as well as projects run by a few individuals. Furthermore,

the data production takes place within a patriarchal system, where huge structural power dynamics influence how cases of feminicides are handled.

Analysing the production of counts in this way includes considering the definitions the counting is based on, “the criteria for aggregation” as Merry called them (2016: 14). This means the criteria by which two events both get labelled as feminicide and are therefore counted under the same category. This also involves theories of classification and their politics; classifications can be very powerful technologies and at the same time become invisible easily (Bowker and Star, 1999). The choices involved in the counting are not reflected by the number as a final product. Numbers are often understood as reflecting facts, even though “making things commensurable (...) means specifying points of similarity and ignoring other features, unbundling the whole entity under consideration into discrete, countable parts” (Merry, 2016: 27). This theoretical background on indicators informs my analysis as to what different aspects to consider, where to look at and dig deeper and how to understand the structural and power aspects that are at play in their creation.

3.3 Missing and Counter Data

The first question Merry (2016) asks regarding simple counted indicators is what is important enough to be counted. This connects to the second main data-concept relevant for my project, ‘missing data’. Missing data as defined by D’Ignazio (2024) is a fairly straightforward concept; it describes a type of data that is not collected or published. Some actors might not deem it important enough to produce it or simply overlook this lack, while other groups advocate for this data to be gathered. Not all kinds of data that are not produced are understood as missing data, there must be a demand for the data by, for example, activists while the responsible institutions do not act on this demand.

Furthermore, this concept includes cases where some data might be gathered and made available, but the information is not complete, unreliable, not publicly accessible or considered misclassified in some instances. Politics influence what phenomena are considered “worth” counting (D’Ignazio, 2024). D’Ignazio’s book explains how activists in Latin America started private projects of data production on feminicide because they deem them important, while institutions or governments are not, or only slowly, reacting to their demands for official statistics.

The activists started what D’Ignazio calls ‘counter data’ projects to combat the missing data. However not all activists D’Ignazio worked with in her research agree to the term ‘counter data’. For example, because they do not want to define their work in opposition to a settler state whose

legitimacy they call into question. Many indigenous people see their counting work as important on its own, without the addition of using the numbers to monitor the state.

My own research focuses on data projects by activists but also considers official forms of data production on feminicides. The concept of missing data helps me to stay alert to where official data is missing completely or what aspects of the data production are lacking in comparison to activist's demands. I consider what stays hidden because of missing aspects and what political influences might be at play regarding what kind of data are produced and how. This includes analysing what kinds of data are produced in which contexts, what stays hidden because of the context of their production or because of restrictions like lacking access or resources.

As D'Ignazio (2024) explains an important part of missing data is that people or groups recognize the lack of data and advocate for making it available. In the case of femicide data that I look at, this is also an interesting aspect. Understanding where the data is incomplete can reveal many aspects about the politics around this data. With the words of D'Ignazio:

In these framings, ignorance is not an individual question - knowledge that a single individual does or does not possess. Rather, ignorance is a social and a political phenomenon whereby dominant groups and dominant institutions render the experiences of minoritized groups invisible – outside the realm of knowledge (D'Ignazio, 2024: 59)

The data is therefore not necessarily missing because of oversight or a lack of sensibility for the topic. Often the production of missing data is an active process due to the systematic oppression of marginalized groups. For me, this concept adds important nuances to Merry's (2016) understanding of indicators that are crucial for my work. It informs my awareness for structural influences on the topic that are especially relevant for the context of data production on feminicides.

Another reason why the missing data concept is important for my work is that I cannot always study existing indicators because in some contexts as they may not be produced at all, which can transform them into missing data. Even if indicators are made, they still might lack important parts of the social phenomenon or condense the circumstances of the events they count in a way that strips away too much context.

Connected to the notion of missing data are discussions around non-knowledge and ignorance. Just like Haraway (1988) argues that knowledge is shaped by the position from which we investigate things, so are the things we do not know. Ignorance is just as situated as knowledge

(Kleinman, 2024). Ignorance can, like knowledge, be understood as something actively constructed and produced. While oppression is not always the reason for why we do not know something, the two phenomena of ignorance and oppression are linked and often work together (Tuana, 2004). For my topic it is not hard to imagine that patriarchal oppression plays a role in the lack of knowledge and the missing data on feminicides. It is no surprise that a crime resulting from misogyny like femicide, in misogynist societies has not been paid attention to for a long time. Inspecting what we do not know or maybe cannot know can further be important to counter narratives of objectiveness and certainty whenever quantitative data is used, also in relation to new technologies like machine learning and AI (Aradau and Canzutti, 2025).

4 Research Questions

In my research project I want to answer the following questions:

RQ: How do the practices of data production on femi(ni)cides enact the phenomenon?

SQ1: How does the usage of different femi(ni)cide definitions affect the counting?

SQ2: What limitations of counting can be found in each case, and how does this affect the production of data?

SQ3: How is the data used by observatories, and how does it legitimize different feminicide counts?

My main research question broadly considers the different ways of data production by the observatories for feminicides I investigate. I want to understand how the data is produced but especially what impact this has on our knowledge of femi(ni)cides and our understanding of the phenomenon. Merry explains how these two things relate to each other:

The process of measurement tends to produce the phenomenon it claims to measure. An indicator is labeled as measuring, for example, rule of law or corruption. It then specifies a series of measures that constitute this concept. It defines the concept by linking it to specific criteria and measurements (2016: 12)

Contrary to my general choice of terms (see section 1.1), in the formulation of my questions I use the dual form of femi(ni)cide to highlight how in different contexts, different forms of the terms are used. The ‘data’ in this case is the quantification of cases of feminicides that happen throughout the years in one country. To understand the circumstances of data production for me entails considerations around who counts, the institutional setting and why a specific project produces counts on femi(ni)cides, e.g. activists that started doing this because governments do not. I also want to understand how the specific practices of counting look like, for instance what information sources are used, how the data is stored or who has the authority to label an event as femi(ni)cide.

Another important aspect of the practices of counting femi(ni)cide is the definition the observatories employ. This aspect is highlighted by my first sub-question. Just like some projects use femicide while others use feminicide, the exact definitions that are applied to count the phenomenon might differ. The definition counting projects use is however significant in rendering the killings of women into countable things, things that can be aggregated (Merry, 2016). I consider how the definitions might differ from each other and for what reasons. Such theoretical choices of what is considered a femi(ni)cide and what not have, through the counting, an influence on

what we know about the crimes and what measures can be imagined to combat them. It further influences who gets to be counted and what population groups might still be overlooked. Additionally, femi(ni)cide can be seen as an academic term, as a political, activist term but has also started to become a legal category and therefore might change according to its context.

Understanding how the phenomenon is enacted by the data includes an analysis of the limitations many counting projects face. I therefore want to focus on the struggles of different observatories in my second sub-question. I relate the limitations of counting both to the specific case of counting femi(ni)cide as well as to general counting practices. For the former, limitations might include a lack of resources because femi(ni)cide is not seen as important enough for sufficient funding. It however also concerns more general limitations of counting, like the struggles of categorising complex phenomena into distinct boxes (Bowker and Star, 1999; Star, 2016). I expect this to influence the data output produced, e.g because some aspects of the crimes remain invisible.

With my third sub-question I investigate why having quantified knowledge on femi(ni)cides is seen as so important. For this I place the projects in a wider landscape of datafication and analyse different conceptions of data. This includes questions like what is imagined to be good or accurate data and why having such data is important. I analyse how the data is used as arguments and evidence for the existence of a femi(ni)cide problem. To do this successfully some kind of authority or legitimacy must be granted to the femi(ni)cide counts.

5 Methods

In this chapter I explain what methods I use to find answers to my research questions. I describe the wider field my research is located in and how I gained access to it, as well as limitations and ethical considerations. I further explain how I chose my participants and what this implies for my findings. I employed qualitative interviewing as a research method. I describe how I conducted the interviews and why in the second section, before explaining my analysis process.

5.1 Thematic Approach and Research Field

Early in the process of developing a thesis research project my interest landed on feminicides, activism around the topic and the statistics around them. I began exploring possible lines of investigation and first focused on grassroots activist groups and protests against femicide in Vienna. I still focused more on the strategies activists employed to argue for their case but was already interested in the role numbers play in this. For example, I was interested in the memorial-mural painted by activists that was showing the current count of feminicides in Austria (Payer, 2021). Through exploring more information on the numbers, I gradually became more interested in how the feminicides were counted in the first place, especially when I discovered that there do not exist official femicide data. The choice to focus on Austria was straightforward, not only because I live and work here, but also because feminicides are a comparatively big problem and it is a focus for feminist activist groups here. To expand my scope to Spain was then both a thematic as well as a practical decision.

Within Europe, Spain is one of the countries with the most regulation, laws and measures on gender-related violence. This promised to be an interesting contrast to Austria. I hoped that considering contrasting cases and differing perspectives will help me gain more insights into the data production. For instance by comparing the official data in Spain with the activist numbers in Austria. I further had already planned a stay in Madrid for an internship during the early phase of my research project and hoped that this would make access easier. In the end I did not have any in person interviews while in Spain, because most people where in other cities and some interviews I conducted once I was already back in Vienna. I speak Spanish and therefore was able to talk to my interview partners in Spanish and use Spanish language literature without having to rely on translations or the fewer English articles about the context in Spain.

At the beginning of my stay in Spain my research interest was still not as focused, so I explored different directions that seemed interesting to me. I spent quite some time reading about an automatic risk assessment tool for gender-related violence the police uses, called VioGén. I still

think that considering how algorithmic decision making systems or AI can assess risks of being victims of gender-related violence (maybe even with femicide data as a base) is an important line of investigation. For me, both access to the specifics of this system, as well as the struggle to relate it to similar technologies in Austria was what finally made me go in a different direction.

The first two interviews I conducted for this thesis were focusing on VioGén and its wider connection to the context of gender-related violence measures. I talked to one Spanish legal researcher that had published an article on how the system works and some biases and limitations that had been identified. I also spoke to one judge at the General Council of the Judiciary (CGPJ, for its name in Spanish) that was working on gender equality issues, about VioGén, because judges use the information of the system as first information on a case. We also discussed how courts specialising in gender-related violence work. Because later I decided to not include this aspect into my research project these two interviews remained interesting first conversations and informed some of my background knowledge of the topic and the Spanish context, but I did not include them in my analysis sample. They are not part of the material with which I will answer my research questions in the next chapter.

Over the course of my investigation I encountered many projects, researchers and activists active around the topic of femicides. In the following I will present the context of all the interviews I did conduct in the end and why I chose to do these specifically. As in every research project part of the selection of course was done by the circumstances of who had the time to talk to me and who I was able to contact at all. Especially in Austria I would have liked to conduct more interviews but the pool of people I could find working on femicide data was already not too big and additionally many people I contacted were not available to participate in my project.

Talking to someone in Vienna with any official government capacity like a ministry or the police was not possible, my interview requests were denied. I did however contact a researcher that has been working for quite some time on the topic of gender-related violence and femicides in Austria. She has conducted studies on femicide cases in Austria and therefore is an important expert not only for the situation in the country but also on what information is available. This allowed me to ask about requirements for useful data production and statistics on femicide. Whenever I cite this interview directly in the empirical chapter, the label 'researcher A' will be added to the quote.

In Austria there was one other organisation where it was clear from the start that I want to talk to them. To my knowledge they are the only organisation producing and publishing femicide data. Generally this interview was very important to understand the central aspects of the femicide

numbers of Austria that are used in most public discourse. One minor problem with this interview was however that I did not speak directly to the person doing the actual media screening and counting. My interview partners did however know enough about the data production and relating topics to answer my questions (quote label 'activist observatory A').

As said, the situation of official data on feminicides in Spain is quite different from that in Austria. In Spain the ministry publishes yearly feminicide counts and the General Council of the Judiciary (CGPJ) has its own observatory for reporting many different statistics around gender-related violence. Because I had already conducted an interview with someone from the CGPJ it was easy to again ask for a contact of someone from the observatory. This allowed me an important insight into how the official data is produced in Spain. I chose to conduct this interview not only because of the unique chance to get insights into the official observatory but also because I wanted to understand what official data can look like, whether the Spanish system would be possible in Austria and where limitations of it lie (quote label 'official observatory S').

To contrast the official numbers I additionally wanted to talk to somebody from an activist counting project in Spain. This should also make more comparisons possible between the activist project in Austria and the one in Spain. I interviewed a person from an activist data production project active since 2010. They therefore could not only speak to the current situation but to how e.g. public consciousness and yearly cases shifted over the years (quote label 'activist observatory S').

From my interview partner at the activist observatory in Spain I was referred to another researcher working on the topic of feminicides, mainly focusing on Germany. They for example based their database and fields on the Spanish project, adapting them to their needs and the German context. For me this adaption was interesting to see. While they focus on Germany and not Austria, I think that the situation and discussion in German speaking countries is still similar. Germany also does not have any official data on feminicides. As a researcher they were further working on the definition of feminicide and the usage of the term which are also central points of my project (quote label 'researcher G').

One line of investigation that was important to me from the beginning of the project was to understand whether trans women are considered in feminicide counts. To not only hear about this by cis people or people with no specific expertise I wanted to talk to someone from an organisation doing trans murder monitoring. This conversation helped me understand important parallels between the killings of cis and trans woman. We however also discussed the central differences and how these can be best accounted for. Including this in my sample further allowed

me to compare an additional activist counting project to the others (quote label ‘trans murder observatory’).

5.2 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

My interviews provide me with a vast array of insights into different contexts and different perspectives on data about feminicides. The circumstances and dynamics of each organisation or projects where my interview partners work at, are very different. This allows me to consider diverse perspectives and to identify commonalities. An important limitation of this approach is that in combination with the limited number of interviews I conducted, I often only have the opinion of one person on a certain aspect and national context and cannot compare issues or opinions between several similar activist groups in the same country. Furthermore, I analyse similarities and differences between projects but for a direct comparison between e.g. Austria and Spain the projects in my sample are too different.

I speak Spanish and conducted some interviews in Spanish, however I am not a native speaker which might have hindered my understanding sometimes. I have further only lived a few months in Spain and a few years in Austria and might not have the detailed insights into national contexts and political systems as someone living in either country their whole life.

I further want to acknowledge that my research is foremost useful to myself. I am not sure if the activist projects I investigated, will have any added value from this thesis. And as mentioned in the previous chapter, I am white and cis gender. While I hope my analysis remains sensitive to discriminations like racism and transphobia, I recognise that my own positionality might limit my understanding of these topics sometimes.

5.3 Semi-structured Interviews

Over the course of my research project I conducted 8 semi-structured qualitative interviews of which I coded and closely analysed 6. Now that the context within the research field of each interview is clearer, I here explain why I chose qualitative interviews as my method, what speaks for this decision and what disadvantages interviews might have in comparison to other methods.

I understand my interview material both as a resource and as a topic (Bryne, 2018). While I am interested in how information on femicide is gathered by the projects and therefore take the accounts as a knowledge resource I also analyse how participants talk about their work. I for

instance investigate how they give legitimacy to their numbers by using narratives of trust in quantitative methods. Depending on my interview partner the conversation was held in either English, German or Spanish.

Following Silverman's (2006) recommendations I considered whether interviews are the best method for my project and research questions. As I refined my research interests, the method to choose also became clearer. Because I am interested in the practices of counting and their prerequisites, documents for instance would not have provided me with enough insights. I want to understand processes and while a document can provide information on the outcome of data production, the previous working steps are mostly obscured. The definition of femicide many projects state in their reports are for instance very short and broad. The boundary cases I was interested in only became visible in conversation.

On some occasions an ethnographic observation would have maybe helped to gain deeper insights into how the counts are produced. To understand how the projects work or how their databases and information infrastructures look like. Access to this information was however very restricted. Furthermore, many decisions and steps of classification are invisible and to understand them interviews are necessary. Even in conversation getting the desired details on how classifications are done was not easy.

An aspect that was still rather challenging in many of the interviews is that data production and decisions around this can be a very abstract topic. It was not always possible to talk about this extensively. I sometimes had the feeling that the counting itself is seen as trivial and that people struggled to explain the detailed aspects of their decision-making and information gathering process. With this I do not want to claim that silences and struggling to talk about something cannot also hold meaning, like Bryne (2018) suggests. Analysing silences is, however, not easy. And sometimes, it was hard to continue the conversation and gather enough information.

To prepare for the interviews, I designed a slightly adapted questionnaire for each. The adaption mostly regarded the specific work of the person/organisation and the national as well as institutional context. A few times the interview participants asked to receive the questions beforehand. This made it slightly harder because I felt like I needed to pay even more attention to the exact formulation of my questions. I tried to ask very detailed questions about the specifics of counting and their data as well as more open ones about their general work and attitude towards femicide activism or governmental measures. Once again, I also experienced how hard it can be to adapt to each interview partner in the moment, at times I struggled to keep them on topic

and talking about what I was interested in and at other times it was harder to enter a conversation flow.

All interviews, but one, were held online via Zoom. This can certainly have some disadvantages on interpreting body language etc. (Byrne, 2018) but I do not think that this had a big impact on the conversations I had. After the Covid pandemic everyone is much more accustomed to videocalls. I recorded all interviews and used the AI-tool noScribe⁵ to create a verbatim transcript which I then checked for errors.

5.4 Data Analysis

With the analysis of my material I mainly wanted to identify similar struggles, ways of producing data, as well as shared understandings and assumptions across the contexts of my different interviews. For this, thematic analysis seemed to be a very fitting approach. Afterall, “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82).

Using thematic analysis instead of e.g. grounded theory was an explicit choice I made once I had gathered all my data and started considering different analysis approaches. As Braun and Clarke (2006) explain, thematic analysis can be paired together with a wide range of theoretical frameworks and still deliver a rich and complex account of the analysed data. Grounded theory shares these properties, has however the expectation to produce new theory with one’s research data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Considering how my research questions are constructed but also factoring in the scope of my master thesis project I cannot fulfil this claim for producing new theory.

5.4.1 Coding Process and Theme Development

After having prepared and read through all my transcripts I started my first, initial round of coding. I did not do an explicit line-by-line approach; however I still tried to consider every paragraph and find at least one initial code for each. Having my research questions in the back of my mind, I was still mainly guided by what sparked my interest in the moment, important aspects the interviewee talked about, or things that I already knew related to other interviews. To stay close to my material many of my initial codes were also in-vivo or shorter more pointed expressions of what was being

⁵ <https://github.com/kaixxx/noScribe>

said. In my whole analysis approach I followed many of the tips Jensen and Laurie give in their work on how to analyse qualitative data (2016).

Additionally, I started a document for each of my interviews and took notes on whatever came up during the coding, this could be elaborations on a quotation that I found especially meaningful or notes on connections to other interviews or articles and papers that I have read. Because of this rather loose and intuitive coding process, I afterwards had many very specific individual codes, most of them only related to one specific quotation.

In the second round I started clustering codes for each interview, building broader categories with my initial codes as subcodes. I strived to find no more than approximately 10 categories for each interview. At this stage the first connections between interviews already became more reflected in my code structure. I defined and structured categories, combining matching codes from all interviews. To stay consistent with this categorisation I took notes on category definitions.

My third analysis round consisted of re-reading the subcodes and categories for each interview, thinking about how they could connect even more and what the most interesting aspects are to me. I read all quotations associated with the same category to reflect on the decisions I made in the second round. With these considerations I then worked on finding bigger sub-themes (organised as code-groups) that spoke to these aspects. My goal was to establish at most 4 sub-themes per interview. Once my first sub-themes for one interview were established, I continued with the other interviews, seeing if they included codes that could be attributed to some of the already existing sub-themes or if I should establish a new one. Parallel to this work in my coding software I also drew mind maps by hand to organise my thoughts on each interview. Once this was more polished, I transferred it to a digital mind map. There, I gathered all my sub-themes still loosely ordered around in which interview I saw them reflected the most and established connections between them. This helped me a lot to see where different data points are related to each other.

This process delivered around 17 sub-themes, marked as code groups as well as organised in the mind map. For each sub-theme I wrote a short definition like Braun and Clarke propose (2022). Further reading through my material, taking notes and working with digital mind maps, I finally organised these sub-themes into 4 themes. All of these themes are in some way present in all of my interviews although the extent varies.

6 Empirical Findings

In the following, I present the findings stemming from the conversations with my participants and their analysis. To clarify the surroundings of each data project in the first sub-section I describe how femicide data is produced in the contexts I analysed. I explain the different steps included in the counting and the actors involved. I then highlight why having activist projects doing this work is so important and what makes them different from official observatories. In section 6.3 I look at the details of defining femicide and how this influences the practice of counting, before then examining several struggles for many counting projects, like insufficient sources of information. Towards the end I highlight what data is seen as accurate, why, and how narratives are built around this.

6.1 The Context of Femicide Data Production

In this section I describe the practical steps of data production my interview partners explained to me. For a better overview I present the data available on femicide split according to national context as well as in the categories of official (governmental) data and activist data. The third subsection explains the particularities of the trans murder monitoring project in my sample.

6.1.1 *Femicide Counting in Spain*

6.1.1.1 Official Statistics

In Spain several institutions are involved in producing statistics on gender-related violence. The most important are a delegation of the ministry for equality (*Ministerio de Igualdad*) and the observatory against domestic and gender-related violence (*Observatorio Contra la Violencia Domestica y de Género*) of the General Council of the Judiciary (*Consejo General del Poder Judicial, CGPJ*). The insights I gained during this project are mostly connected to the work of the latter. Spain has legislation defining gender-related violence within intimate relationships since 2004 which lays the foundation for most of the work of these institutions (Ley Orgánica 1/2004). There is therefore a big focus on these crimes while other types of femicides are neglected.

The management of cases of gender-related violence in Spain is handled via a system called VioGén. Its main usage is an automated risk assessment evaluation done whenever a woman reports a case of domestic or intimate violence to the police. Connected to this risk level are then a fixed set of protection measures. The system is further used for communication and information sharing between institutions. As my interview partner explained, whenever the police register the

(potentially) violent death of a woman, they include this case into the VioGén system, and an alert gets sent to the official observatory. Because the observatory is part of the General Council of the Judiciary which overall does administrative tasks, managing all the courts in Spain, appointing judges and so on, they have privileged contacts to all the courts and judges in Spain. So, for every new potential femicide case they contact the assigned judge and send them a specific form that is designed to register the details of the case.

The form is rather simple, it only consists of one page and the data collected is basic information about victim and presumed aggressor, their relationship as well as the crime itself. This includes name, age, sex and nationality of both victim and aggressor as well as what the aggressor did after committing the murder. Was he detained by the police, did he turn himself in, kill himself or other. The relationship can, among others, be categorised as (ex)marriage, (ex)partner, parent, son/daughter or in-laws. It is also recorded where the crime was committed, when and how, as well as if either of the people involved had children. Finally, information is given about whether there were any previous registered cases of gender-related violence involving victim or aggressor and whether a restraining order was in place or not.

Once all the information is gathered and a case can be classified, the observatory is in contact with the ministry for equality. Both entities have information on the respective case and their classification, the ministry for equality however is the institution that confirms the case was an intimate femicide and *declares* the case official. They allocate the case its respective number for the ongoing year and increase the official femicide count.

So the numbers on intimate femicide rely on a very rigid mode of data production and a high interconnection and collaboration between different institutions. While it can still happen that cases are classified differently, regular meetings are held where the information in the different databases is exchanged and any differences in counts are settled. These meetings are also used to update intimate femicide counts for previous years whenever new information on a case surface. As a result, Spain has a state-approved count for their yearly intimate femicides. For all other types of femicide however the data production is much more difficult and uncoordinated.

The data production by official government entities is therefore restricted by the laws on the subject. This restrictiveness is one of the biggest limitations of official statistics, given how slow new legislation can be. My interview partner, for instance, said that they have been advocating for a long time to widen the legal understanding of gender-related violence, so far without success. This distinction is clearly visible in statistics, while legally defined femicides are documented

since 2003, counts for other types of feminicides by the Ministry for Equality only exist since 2022⁶. When comparing this data from the Ministry with data produced by an activist project, many cases are still not reported on by the government. For 2024 the Ministry of Equality reported 16 cases of other types of feminicides⁷ while the project *feminicidio.net* reported 32 (*feminicidio.net*, 2025).

6.1.1.2 Activist Observatory

Concerning activist data production on feminicides I only relate my findings to the one project I investigated, there might be other projects active in Spain that gather their data in different ways. The observatory where my interview partner is active was founded in 2010 and since then aims to report all feminicides and killings of women in Spain. They publish an annual report where they present an analysis of the wide range of data they gather. The initial idea of the observatory was to produce comparable data for Spain and Latin America, but they never obtained enough funding for such a huge project. At the moment, they are again trying to expand the observatory to other European countries, to start an EU wide counting effort and produce comparable data.

Their sources of information are newspaper articles which they regularly scan for reports of violent crimes. They also use different Google alerts to not miss any new events. With the information from the articles they then try to fill their database. The categories they report on are based on the work by Julia Monares-Fragoso, known for her work on femicide in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. While I have been told that some categories have been adapted to fit the Spanish context, the data-fields mostly go back to her work. Among other things this includes information on when, where and how the crime was committed and data on the victim and aggressor, like their age, relationship and social context. This detailed information is then again used in their reports, e.g. by splitting all feminicides according to location or month where they were committed. Like that the observatory hopes to improve the general knowledge on and the measures against these crimes.

⁶ See methodological information on the Ministries website: <https://violenciagenero.igualdad.gob.es/violenciaencifras/victimasmortales/notas-metodologicas/>

⁷ See data here: https://violenciagenero.igualdad.gob.es/wp-content/uploads/Fichas_Otros_feminicidios_2024.pdf

6.1.2 *Feminicide Counting in Austria*

6.1.2.1 Official Statistics

Me: How do you currently view the available data or data coverage? Researcher A:

Useless (researcher A, translated)

The situation of feminicide data in Austria looks very different in comparison to Spain. Feminicide is in no way defined officially, the only governmental statistics that exist are the yearly general police crime statistics. And even there, the murder victims are only split in male and female victims since 2018 (Haider, 2022). By now, it is additionally indicated how many murders took place in a context of violence in the 'private sphere' although it is not further explained how this is defined concretely (Bundesministerium für Inneres, Bundeskriminalamt, 2025). This lack of basically any insights into the specifics of the murder of women is probably what brought my interview partner above to say that the official statistics are not useful at all.

One improvement that I can report on is that with January 2024 the police at least started to use different categories to describe the relationship between victim and aggressor whenever they report some kind of violence. Until then relationship categories have only included family connections or general acquaintances, which especially for the categorisation of intimate feminicide is not useful. The new categories might therefore enable new ways of analysing relationships of victims and aggressors. However, in the public crime statistic for 2024 these new categories are not listed and the information is therefore not easily available to everyone (Bundesministerium für Inneres, Bundeskriminalamt, 2025). The next closest thing to official counts are studies done for the ministry of internal affairs where court records were analysed to identify all feminicide cases of the last years (Haller, 2023). Overall it is however not surprising that the researcher working in Austria deems the available information useless and activists as well as the media use the data produced by the activist observatory instead of an official count.

6.1.2.2 Activist Observatory

We should definitely not be the place counting femicides in Austria. (...) The only one

(activist observatory A, translated)

Even though it should not be the role of associations to produce the only useful data on feminicides in Austria this is unfortunately still the situation. I here call the association I investigated, activist observatory, even though I do not know if the association or my interviewees would call themselves activists. I do this because the motivations for their work and the political

stance behind it make them like other activists in my own and other research (see e.g. D'Ignazio, 2024). The association started producing data on feminicides in 2019 out of the shock of the high number of women that get murdered each year in Austria, as well as the fact that no real governmental statistics on the topic exist. Like the Spanish activist observatory they do daily screenings of different media outlets to catch any reports on the killing of a woman and use Google Alerts as an additional help. They then classify everything as feminicide where a relation to gender becomes apparent, most cases they report are intimate feminicides but the statistics for 2024 also include cases of violence against sex workers and familiarly feminicide (Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser, 2024)

Within their report they explain and define the term femicide as follows: “Femicide is the intentional killing of a woman by a man because of her gender or because of ‘violations’ of the traditional social and patriarchal roles ascribed to women. Femicide is therefore a hate crime. The definition goes back to the South African sociologist and author Diana Russell, who was one of the first to use the term in 1976” (Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser, 2024, p. 12 translated). For each year they publish a list with all the feminicides they reported, including its number in the year, the date and location of the crime, the relationship between the victim and the (supposed) aggressor, the age of both, their nationality (if it is known) and whether children were involved or affected by the crime. They also include a short summary of what happened and the links to the newspaper articles that are used as the sources⁸.

6.1.3 *Global Trans Murder Monitoring*

As already explained it is important for me to include an expert voice on the murder of trans people, or more specifically trans feminicides, because while all feminicide counts should include trans women, some counts remain exclusionary. During the interview with the trans murder observatory it became clear that while in some respects the struggles of reporting trans murders vs. cis-feminicides differ, many problems the activists face are the same, if maybe experienced at different intensities.

Like the Spanish and Austrian activist observatories this project uses newspaper articles to gather information on the murder of all trans people, not just women. Additionally they rely on information from local communities to verify information about the gender expression of a person and to include cases not reported in newspapers, because unfortunately, trans killings are still

⁸ See e.g. the report for 2024: https://www.aoef.at/images/04a_zahlen-und-daten/2024/Frauenmorde-2024_Liste-AOeF.pdf

very underreported. These local communities can be other counting projects like the website trans lives matter⁹, local trans associations or social media groups. I will explore the importance of these information sources more in section 6.4.1. The categories they report on include details like chosen as well as dead name of the person, their gender identity and gender assigned at birth, other personal information like age, their race or ethnicity, if they were disabled, their nationality and so on. On the murder itself they try to report how the crime took place, what killed the person, descriptions of the perpetrator(s) and the bias they analyse was the motive for the killing. So, can they infer that a person was killed because of transphobia or maybe did racism or misogyny play a role? They further list their sources of information and can flag a murder or parts of the information as confidential.

As far as official numbers are concerned, I could not find any official or governmental body that concerns itself with specifically registering the murders of trans people. Whether trans women are included in femicide databases depends a lot on local legislation or the activists doing the counting. Spain for instance passed a self-determination law in 2022 which makes it easier to legally change one's gender on official documents (Blanco, 2022). A person that legally changed their gender to female would be of course included in the femicide count of the official observatories. If such a change has not happened, my interview partner of the official Spanish observatory explained that they leave the decision on how to handle a specific case up to the judge.

6.2 Missing Data, Ignorance and Counter Data

Now that it is clearer what activist data production does entail, I want to focus on the why. Why do activists produce data and why is this so important? Put bluntly, activist data production projects exist because otherwise no one else would do this work. In Austria, for example, numbers on feminicides would simply not exist. This data would be missing (D'Ignazio, 2024) and awareness for the problem might be even smaller.

One aspect of missing femicide data is especially important; it is no coincidence that these statistics are missing, and that little is done to change that. These things as well as what things are reported on are influenced by e.g. patriarchal patterns. This is even at play between statistics on different types of femicide or different aspects of it as for example when it comes to the question whether trans women are included in counts or not.

⁹ <https://tdor.translivesmatter.info/>

As Tuana writes, both “knowledge and ignorance production emerge from values and prior assumptions” (2004: 220). In the case of feminicide this could be the assumption that feminicides are a problem caused by a few jealous and violent men, instead of being also influenced by factors like a wider misogynist society and structural discrimination. Crimes in general have not been analysed with a gender perspective. This is a problem in various contexts but especially for violence experienced by women.

The influence of values on this ignorance becomes also clear when we understand that in the case of feminicide “we do know what we do not know, but do not care to know it” (Tuana, 2006). Many experts and activists have been demanding for years to pay closer attention to feminicides, it is not like we would not be able to gather more data on them or do more for their prevention, it just has never been a big enough political priority. Ignoring the problem can also be a way to avoid accountability (Aradau and Canzutti, 2025). If the magnitude of the problem would be recognized, governments would also have to find new ways to combat it, for example by investing more money in protective measures against gender-related violence like women’s shelters.

On a more individual level one interviewee also found very fitting words as to why the topic of gender-related violence might receive so little attention and general outrage by the mainstream society. We discussed this in the context of studies that show how little many people in Austria now about help offered to victims of gender-related violence and the legal framework already in place:

What I understand is that you don't see what you don't want to know. And I think that plays a big role. I can look away because I am affected by violence. I can look away because I am convinced that I will never be affected by violence. So there are so many good reasons to look away (researcher A, translated)

Gender-related violence for obvious reasons is an uncomfortable topic, and it makes sense that many women think they could never be affected by it. Unfortunately, statistically speaking, the men closest to us are also the most dangerous. Of course no one wants to think that their partner, ex-partner or any other close person would harm or even kill them.

Shocked by the lack of official information in Austria the activist observatory there began their statistics on feminicides in 2019. They recognised the ignorance and lack of knowledge that was present in the field, saw that information was missing that would be important and then decided to take matters into their own hands. With this they clearly tried to produce counter data to fill the gap of missing data produced by the Austrian state (D’Ignazio, 2024). This is a parallel for many activist projects on feminicide, most projects in Latin America that D’Ignazio describes started

out of similar circumstances. The hope for many is that if civil society keeps working on these issues, keeps raising awareness and continuously calls for better countermeasures, then finally the severeness of the problem must be recognised by authorities and actions will be taken.

So, from our point of view, excuse me, we shouldn't be the only place in Austria that counts femicides. That's clear, quite simply. But surprisingly, nothing is happening in this direction. Quite the contrary. (...) We would like this to change but do not feel like we are heard [by political institutions or politicians]. (activist observatory A, translated)

Most activist groups however also recognize the limitations of their work; “they also assert that a fundamental contradiction of this work is that producing data about feminicide should be someone else’s job“ (D’Ignazio, 2024: 69). In my research this is just as much the case as in D’Ignazio’s work, interviewees repeatedly emphasized that they are not the entity that should be doing this work, they do not have enough resources and often not optimal access to information which makes their data less reliable. The activists in Austria feel ignored by the government, and regularly fight for more recognition of their work. They face the dilemma of knowing that they are limited in their production of data and still being the best option that is easily and publicly available, as one interviewee expressed:

But this femicide, according to newspaper reports, makes sense, because no one else is putting this together. So until there is something official, it makes sense. But you have to be aware that these are good figures, but not absolutely reliable figures (researcher A, translated)

The exact problems that gathering data from newspaper sources have will be explained in section 6.4.1, for now it suffices to say that they are less reliable than institutionally produced data would be, but still they are considered better than having no data.

An interviewee active in the German context recollected how they wanted to start a data production project because generally there was not much discussion of femicides as a problem in Germany and they wanted to create a database to “*show the numbers (..) to make a contra argument*”. They saw that Germany had a feminicide problem by hearing about cases in their own environment or hearing about it in activist spaces and wondered how the situation is like more generally for the country. When trying to research this they discovered that Germany did not have any statistical numbers on it, the data again was missing and again this served as motivation to produce the missing data.

In Spain the situation is slightly different because there is not such a big lack of data on the side of the state. Official counts exist, but do not include all cases. Activists therefore still criticise this official count. Indeed, the concept of missing data is also applicable to instances where some, but not enough data exists, a circumstance the activists in Spain criticise. The project started out because at the time the official data production was only reporting intimate femicides but no other cases. For the Spanish activists it is therefore especially important to include all femicide cases in their counting. To this day, I think they are the better available source for a complete feminicide count in Spain. While the Spanish state observatories try to count all instances since 2022¹⁰ all numbers that are outside of intimate violence are a lot less referenced publicly. While I was researching feminicide counts for Spain I often only found the number of intimate femicides reported in newspapers and online articles instead of the higher and more inclusive number. For this, the activist data production serves as a counter data source and control instance for the state.

Another central tension of the use of data by activists is that conceptions around objectivity, quantification and the scientific method have a long tradition in white dominated, patriarchal and capitalist societies (Porter, 1995). They often have shortcomings originating in these structures especially for marginalised people. Here however, I consider projects that want to weaponize this trust in numbers for their own purposes and to gain visibility for an often-overlooked problem.

6.2.1 Using Counter Data

Other aspects of activist motivations to produce counter data can be found in the way this data is used in their advocating work:

Here we demonstrate two things: one, that women in patriarchal societies are murdered by men, and that women in patriarchal societies are murdered mainly because they are women (activist observatory S, translated)

The purpose of the numbers that was mentioned most often is that they should help proof the problem of feminicides exists. Too many countries have little to no active policies in place to work against feminicides, too often they are an overlooked problem that neither gets political nor mainstream societal attention. To produce numbers can therefore be understood as producing “hard facts” that not only show how many women get killed yearly, but also that they get killed

¹⁰ See methodological information on the ministries website:
<https://violenciagenero.igualdad.gob.es/violenciaencifras/victimasmortales/notas-metodologicas/>

almost only by men and in the majority of cases by someone they know intimately. “*This demonstrates that sexism exists, that there is specific violence against women.*” (activist observatory S, translated). It also proves that domestic and intimate violence are a very gendered problem. While there are men that are victims of this type of violence, it mainly affects women. The numbers are seen as an important tool in the fight against people that negate the existence of gender-related violence.

Activists in Austria further strongly believe that applying pressure as a civil society helps to gain recognition for the topic:

And at some point, when civil society is working harder and harder and trying to knock on this door again and again, then hopefully at some point we will succeed in getting it recognised, in making it visible, that these measures are necessary and needed by everyone (activist observatory A, translated)

A regular reporting of the numbers by newspapers can hopefully contribute to sensitising the society for the problem and to raising awareness for the patterns of the crimes. This is of course not only achieved by producing the counts, but they are also communicated by the observatories themselves as well as by the media and are used for advocacy work. Data after all do not speak for themselves, they have to be interpreted and narrated (Dourish and Gómez Cruz, 2018). This can mean for instance, putting feminicides into perspective, conveying why they are a problem and decreasing stereotypes around the dynamics of these killings.

Many projects I investigated take an active part in advocacy, like demonstrations, information events and campaigns. The official observatory in Spain for example regularly organises meetings with woman’s associations, organisations of victims of gender-related violence and exchange information with them. They further organise a bi-yearly congress with experts on gender-related violence to improve what we know about it and build networks among the people working on this topic.

Apart from simply making the problem more visible, many of my interview partners hope to gain more insights into the specific circumstances of the crimes. Are there patterns that can be detected? What are circumstances that could make a feminicide more likely? And ultimately of course, how could one use this information to prevent feminicides from happening in the future? In this regard simple counts however are limited. Looking at numbers and individual risk factors alone cannot sufficiently account for the interconnectedness of many different layers that have an influence on gender-related violence. One prevention theory that is increasingly used “assumes there is no one single cause of violence (against women or otherwise) but rather that

violence is the outcome of how different factors relating to the individual, their relationships, the community, and society interact with one another“ (Walklate et al., 2019: 99).

6.3 Complicating the Application of the Femicide Term

But in the case of if, if, if you're using the term femicide or feminicide, or femi(ni)cide, with brackets, whatever, the point is that you are acknowledging, in my understanding, that this concept comes from somewhere and has a political background or foundation, that is just not to name a phenomenon, just like, yes, the killing of women, just as a different term of homicide (researcher G)

To further understand how feminicide data production works but also what the produced numbers actively express, it is important in a first step to consider what the phenomenon is that is counted. Afterall, the victim being female is, on its own, not enough of a criterium to constitute a feminicide (Corradi et al., 2016). It is important to understand not just in a general way what feminicide is but what specific definition each project uses. Where do they draw the line on what to include and what not? How do they analyse their information to make such decisions? Depending on the answer to these questions the final numbers can express different things. Some counts might only consider intimate feminicide (so the killing of a woman by a partner or ex-partner) while other activists argue for including suicides by women that experienced gender-related violence into feminicide counts. To understand what specifically is counted as feminicide is therefore not only important on a political-theoretical level. The final counts can be highly influenced by these decisions and a transparent usage of the numbers requires examining the details of their production. This relates to the questions on simple counts that Merry (2016) explored. According to her, counting involves decisions around what is important enough to be counted, what properties something must have to be counted and how different instances are subsumed into one number.

Further, I want to highlight why it is indeed important to use the term feminicide and not just consider homicides more generally, without a gender perspective, or even the killings of woman but without the political implications and work of the feminicide term. I explain this by both looking at the theoretical backdrop of the term and the practical decisions taken in the counting practices I investigated. For this, I did not only ask my interviewees what definition they follow for their specific topic but more generally tried to discuss what, for them, constitutes a good definition.

First, it is important to understand that the term femicide has had a clear activist and political intention since its first use by Diana Russell in 1976. It was never only seen as a gendered version of the term homicide, even though it is derived from there. The most important aspect of the term has always been its emphasis on the structural aspects that differentiate the majority of killings of woman from murders of men (Haider, 2022). It is the wide structural violence of the patriarchy, as manifested in gender roles, societal norms and discrimination, that lie behind the phenomenon of feminicides. An indicator for this is that countries with low crime rates generally see a decline in the murder rates for men while for women they stay the same (Haider, 2022). The political and activist use of the term highlights the “mechanisms of a patriarchal social system, for the maintenance of which even the ultimate form of violence against women is accepted” (Haider, 2022: 218, translated).

While I strongly agree with this political stance, I also want to acknowledge that such an understanding of these crimes is also possible without using the term. As one of my interviewees said: *“No, probably, for certain communities, it's not going to be as relevant. (...) But it is useful, and it has shown to be useful.”* So while in some contexts the term might be less central and indeed the problem could be addressed without using the word feminicide, for many activist projects in Europe (and beyond) it has proven to be a useful term. This is why I scrutinize its usage by looking at different ways to interpret the definition of feminicide.

I am not the only person to consider these details of the definition; the people and organizations I talked to have their own struggles with and interpretations of what constitutes a feminicide and what not. For them, both the theoretical and political understanding, as well as the practical use and categorisation of crimes are important. According to my participants, a “good” definition of feminicide must be expressive, it must denominate something specific and with that produce knowledge. It cannot be too broad and therefore fuzzy or be too specific and lose its political edge. Similar claims like this were made by almost all interviewees, what this means in praxis however can differ between projects. Some examples of controversial cases that might be labelled as feminicide by some but not by others hopefully help to illustrate this.

One such example is intimate violence happening within lesbian relationships. The research team looking into feminicides in Austria, did not include a case of a woman killed by her female partner in their count, basing themselves on definitions that the European Institute for Gender Equality used (EIGE, 2021). One point of this definition is that the aggressor is male. Other groups also struggle with such examples. While (patriarchal) violence can of course be present in queer or in this case, lesbian, relationships such instances are less prevalent than violence in heterosexual

relationships. Furthermore, activists do not want to strengthen still existing biases and stereotypes towards the LGBTQ+ community and are therefore cautious to equate this violence with violence perpetrated by male aggressors (Biwi Kefempom, 2023).

Another example is a case where a woman killed the new girlfriend of her ex-boyfriend as well as the victim's son (Hagen, 2022). Such tragic killings of course must be politicized, and we can analyse how patriarchal structures have their influence on them, without necessarily declaring them feminicides. Possible motives of this case like jealousy and possessiveness are indeed similar to many intimate feminicide cases. Still, the media and activists have been cautious to call this murder a feminicide. For me, this highlights an important layer of the definition of feminicide that is easily overlooked otherwise: When discussing patriarchal structural violence one does not only refer to individual misogynist motives. Rather, it is the multidimensional aspects of discriminatory, misogynist societies as expressed in institutions and structures that form an important part of what constitutes a feminicide. A misogynist motive could also be part of why a woman kills another woman, but it is the connection of individual misogyny, as well as the wider dimensions of misogynist societies, structures and institutions that play into feminicides. This makes it not the same if a woman kills a woman out of jealousy or if a man does so (Hagen, 2022; Haider, 2022).

This works similarly in classifications of trans murders as hate crimes. While trans murders as well as feminicides fall into this category the term hate crime could again be understood only on an individual level. One person hated another and therefore killed them. Guerrero and Muñoz (2018) explain that this reading on a psychological level conceals the structural dimensions and makes one person responsible for this hate instead of considering the societal hate against trans people within the patriarchy.

Other contested cases are so called extended suicides; these are cases in which typically older couples are found dead with a note explaining their wish to die. Classifying them as double suicides is often problematic because in the majority of cases the man kills the woman before he kills himself. This can lead to doubts as to the woman's free wish to die, especially because a suicide of the murderer is a pattern also observed in many other feminicide cases (Biwi Kefempom, 2023). Another gender aspect present in these cases is that many of them happen when the woman is sick and therefore allegedly chooses death, also because the men would have to care for her and is not able to. Although women are still responsible for most of the care work, inversed cases of such suicides are less frequent. Classifying these cases as feminicides is however extremely complicated, it often requires intimate details about the case. For example

because one would have to evaluate how authentic suicide notes are. Even if there is enough information these cases showcase clearly how femicide classification can involve very difficult case by case decisions. Even supposedly ‘easier’ categorisations like deciding if the violence happened within a relationship depend on what one understands as an intimate relationship and whether the people involved disclose it or not.

Cases of so-called ‘slow feminicides’ (Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2023) on the other hand are not included in any of the examined counts. The term refers to indirect forms of femicide, e.g. suicides by women that have experienced domestic violence beforehand or women dying from badly done abortions following abortion bans. Some interviewees argued that including such a wide range of cases would dilute the term too much and make it lose some of its informative value. Other activists in Latin America however explicitly include such things in their counts to politicise a wide range of violence in their work and often to extend existing legal definitions (D’Ignazio, 2024).

As can be seen throughout my research project the fine-grained aspects of the definition also depend on who counts femicide and why. Official or even scientific counts are much more reliant on institutional and usually narrower definitions like those of the Vienna Declaration on femicide (UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, 2013) or of the European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). This can limit the political layers of the term that challenge societal norms. Sometimes it is also local contexts that influence classification decisions because there are different types of femicide prevalent in different regions.

In the following sub-sections I continue to problematise different aspects of defining and classifying feminicides. I first highlight the issue of focusing only on intimate femicide, before explaining intersectional challenges of the term. In the last sub-section I discuss how the murders of trans women are best included in femicide counts.

6.3.1 *Intimate and Other Feminicides*

A conflation still made too often is equating intimate femicide with femicide more generally. Usually intimate femicide describes cases where a woman is killed by her partner or ex-partner, although some studies also include other relationships like family members into this group (EIGE, 2021). While it is true that intimate feminicides represent the majority of femicide cases generally (EIGE, 2021) as they do in Spain and Austria, an important amount of feminicides do not fall into this category.

Institutions like the UN Office on Drugs and Crime or the European Institute for Gender Equality defend a focus on intimate feminicides. They argue that globally this data is available more easily and the data is standardized enough to be comparable (EIGE, 2021). Though even this standardization raises questions; What constitutes an intimate partner, for example? Do only married couples count or also people that were dating for a short time? And again, who classifies and decides this and how? Other research has further shown that even intimate feminicides are often not counted because official or police-based counts do not record the relationship between victim and aggressor (Walklate et al., 2019). As discussed, up until recently this was also true for the Austrian police statistics.

A look at feminicides in 2024 in Spain reveals how much is lost when only intimate feminicide is considered; 52 out of 92 recorded cases were intimate feminicides which leaves 40 other feminicides out of the count (feminicidio.net, 2025). This is why I criticise the Spanish legal framework for its focus on intimate gender-related violence. As I explained above, the legislation has a direct effect on the official feminicide case recording. Since 2003 the official observatory has very detailed statistics on different kinds of gender-related violence, the number of restraining orders imposed, the number of criminal complaints that have been filed etc., all within the boundaries of intimate violence. Since 2022 the official observatory additionally counts other feminicides, however, my research has shown how different the quality of this information is. There exists an intricate protocol to gather information on intimate feminicides, from being informed by the police to contacting the judges, to frequent collaboration between different institutions to make sure that there exists a *uniform* and *official* feminicide count. While for cases other than intimate feminicide none of this is done. There exists no formalised protocol or collaboration of data gathering and the information on these cases is significantly less reliable. The official observatory even relies on data from the activist project in my sample to compare their information on other feminicides and activist counts are regularly higher than the cases identified by the government.

This is not only a problem because some cases are lost and not counted by officials but also because this qualitative difference of the data is only clear when paying attention to the details of the data production. The lower count of intimate feminicides is further often referred to in public discourse. An article talking about ‘violencia machista’ (machismo or misogynist violence), for example, reports 47 victims for 2024, citing the official count for intimate gender-related violence (Giovio, 2025). This makes sense on the one hand, as those are the officially reported numbers for gender-related violence (as defined legally) but makes the problem look significantly smaller when compared to the 92 cases of feminicide reported for 2024 by feminicidio.net (2025). For

someone not as informed on the topic the formulation victims of gender-related violence may seem like this means all victims, not only those affected in relationships.

This shows that while official recognition of the problem and observatories working on the project can be very useful and important, especially to justify legal preventative measures, they are still more restricted when it comes to taking direct action or changing their data production methods. My interview partner emphasised several times that he and the other people at the observatory know that the Spanish legal framework has to be extended to close this gap and they push for this in statements to the parliament but finally are bound by Spanish legislators. They only have a limited impact on these decision-making processes; *“The first point [for improvement] would be for Spain to finally amend its gender-based violence law to incorporate other forms of gender-based violence”* (official observatory S, translated). Until then, feminicides outside of partnerships remain even more invisible and the underreporting of other types of feminicides remains a central flaw of datasets, not only in Spain (EIGE, 2021a).

6.3.2 Discriminations Along Multiple Axes

As discussed in the theory section an essential part of my approach is to consider the different intersectional forms of discrimination that shape feminicides as well as other social phenomena. During my research, I found that this is an important part of having a “good” femicide definition, in theory and in practice. Not all types of feminicides are equally visible (see above intimate vs. other feminicides) and women belonging to certain marginalised groups might be more vulnerable than others. It is therefore important to analyse how different aspects of power and discrimination are at play (Crenshaw, 1989).

Other studies of activist groups working on femicide have shown how important paying attention to many intersectional categories is to many activists. One coalition D’Ignazio worked with „added various intersectional categories of identity to their database as they came to understand how violence against certain subgroups was under-registered“ (D’Ignazio, 2024: 144). In this context, it was especially Afro-ecuatorian, Indigenous and trans woman that were not as present in general femicide counts and were therefore even more invisibilised. D’Ignazio found that activists with these practices do not only expand definitions of femicide but really focus on the importance of intersectional differences.

Many of my interviewees also highlighted intersectionality when being asked about what they deem important for a good femicide definition. It is important to pay attention to the different

layers of discrimination and consider the various power axes that are influenced by the patriarchy. Many interviewees mentioned different vulnerable groups that they want to pay more attention to. Also to understand why they seem more affected by feminicides. As Haider put it: the “multidimensionality and complexity [of the femicide term] are indeed one of its bigger strengths and not a weakness” (2022: 213, translated).

How well this understanding of intersectionality is reflected in the respective counting practices varies. The count of the activist observatory in Austria seems focused on generally raising awareness for the femicide problem rather than analysing distinct groups. Given the Austrian context this unfortunately seems like the necessary first step. My interview partners have however highlighted that in Austria elderly women are especially affected. In 2024 the majority of femicide victims they registered were over 60 years old. As comparison, according to the numbers by *femicidio.net* (2025) in Spain only 28 out of 92 victims (30%) were over 60 years old in 2024. This clearly shows how national contexts can differ and how important it is to adapt preventative methods accordingly.

Thinking back to the use of intersectionality as a heuristic (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1991) and how this can help us to investigate and find solutions for social problems, we see that in Austria it might make sense to analyse feminicides including the age category as an intersection of different discriminations. Looking at the numbers this potentially could be more important than a classic race/class/gender heuristic. In Spain on the other hand, different categories could be most important. This approach helps to reconsider how we understand already existing knowledge and approach social problems like violence. Collins (2019) explains: “Intersectionality as a heuristic offers provisional rules of thumb for rethinking a range of social problems as well as strategies for criticizing how scholarship studies them” (p. 41).

Other feminist groups criticise the activist observatory in Austria, for their “nationality” entry in the femicide database. According to Biwi Kefempom (2023) a foreign origin of perpetrators was even added in the database if they were Austrian citizens. This can strengthen racist and femonationalist narratives according to which mainly foreign men are a threat to Austrian women. ‘Femonationalism’ denotes the strategy of nationalist or right parties to use feminism as an argument against migrants and especially Muslim men (Farris, 2017). Looking at how racism influences debates on perpetrators of femicide can also be part of an intersectional analysis of the topic. Feminicides where the perpetrator is not white and/or Austrian often spark discussions about cultural violence, meaning: (mainly Muslim) immigrants bring their presumably more misogynist culture to Austria and the killing is a result of these cultural values (Haider, 2022). This

usually ignores other circumstances that might have influenced the crime. Additionally, as Haider explains, such connections to a wider patriarchal and misogynist culture are rarely drawn when the killer is Austrian. The feminicides are constructed as the result of cultures that are less progressive than the Austrian one and are weaponized for racist discourses. This mirrors what the researcher in the German context told me about their motivation to start a femicide counting project. A few years ago, there were several cases of women being killed by their partners with Turkish backgrounds that sparked a lot of public outrage in Germany. Other cases the researcher knew about where the killer was white and German were however not discussed. This led to them wanting to investigate femicide in Germany in general, but they quickly discovered that there were no statistics available and thus decided to start an activist counting project.

Many interviewees expressed the necessity to gather more information on the social contexts of victims and aggressors. This could not only help to analyse more intersections than gender alone but could contribute to understanding structural influences better. Femicides after all are born out of structural patterns of inequality where we have to understand their systemic workings rather than only individual responsibilities for the murders (Merry, 2016).

In Spain, immigrant women form a rather large group within femicide victims. However, reducing this fact to cultural reasons would be short sighted. Again, intersectionally speaking it might be overlaps of different discriminations and their effects leading to this circumstance. Migrants might fear contact with the police, preferring not to report domestic violence or seek help otherwise. Or they might live in financially precarious situations which makes leaving an abusive partner harder.

Sex workers are another group often affected by gender-related violence, nevertheless overlooked, partly because of their already marginalised position in society. In Spain as well because such cases do not fall into intimate feminicides and therefore the official counts. My biggest critique regarding a successful and feminist approach on femicide data production is however that not all projects I investigated include trans women into their count.

6.3.3 Trans Femicide

I mean, I think it's essential to include trans women (...) I don't see any reason why it would be legit to not include them. Yes, I do believe (...) that there needs to be a different way of analysing the data, but I would believe that also for all cis women, that there's so many other categories that impact each and everyone's intersectional

being that (...) there shouldn't be just one way of analysing all cis femicides (trans murder observatory)

While trans women are women and this should therefore be no debate at all I am aware of trans exclusionary discourses amongst “radical feminists” and expected that not all counting projects would include the murders of trans women. Here I argue why this makes no sense in my opinion. Simultaneously this decision stands as an example to the counting choices that influence our knowledge and the data on feminicides.

Trans feminicides exist on a continuum of violence against women and LGBTQ+ people. It is often bodies and people that break out of heteronormative norms that get punished for such transgressions (Guerrero and Muñoz, 2018). How complicated it nevertheless can be to count the killing of trans woman I discuss in section 6.4. The big invisibility of trans women (or trans people in general) in most societies leads to their murder being even further invisibilised than cis feminicides. They often are not a part of media attention or public discourse (Biwi Kefempom, 2023).

Luckily, most of the projects I worked on do include trans women in their counts and deem this important: *“If femicide is about portraying the vulnerability of women and femininity in a patriarchal society, then trans women must of course be included. Otherwise, it is not effective, so to speak”* (researcher Austria, translated). However, one activist counting project in the sample does not include trans women. They claimed that for them this “expansion” of the term femicide would mean that it becomes less sharp and for reasons of methodological rigour they have decided to only look at cis feminicides.

These claims made it important for me to not only investigate this issue myself but speak to an expert on the topic. I want to understand the challenges of reporting trans murders and see where they differ from cis feminicides. Even though I argue for counting them together, it is important to pay attention to the differences in the dynamics of these crimes. Only then, better counter measures for everyone can be possible. This shows that the crimes must be analysed separately for some purposes, but it does not mean that they cannot be reported together. As the quote at the beginning of the section, as well as the section on intersectionality, show, there are generally many different layers to these crimes. It can be useful to look at different subgroups on their own and identify special circumstances, but it is no argument to exclude them completely. This is also what Merry (2016) understands as making things *commensurable* (on commensuration also see: Bernasconi and Díaz, 2022). Counting two things always includes looking for features where they are the same and ignoring features in which they differ. This can be for instance saying that the

murder of a rich upper-class woman and a sex worker fall into the same category while the killing of a trans sex worker does not. Talking about classification, Susan Leigh Star expressed this perfectly:

The marginal person, who is for example of mixed race, is seen as the troubled outsider; just as the thing that doesn't fit into one category or another gets put into a "residual category." I don't know where this originated in Western scientific and political culture, but I do know that the habit perpetuates a cruel pluralistic ignorance. None of us are pure. None of us are even average (Star, 2016: 18)

Similar arguments were voiced by my interview partner at the trans murder monitoring organisation. For them, femicide counts that do not include trans women become less valid, they, like me, see no argument that would sufficiently excuse this decision. While they monitor all killings of transgender people, around 90% of the recorded victims are trans women or trans feminine people¹¹. It seems like also within this group feminine presenting people are targeted more often, many of the victims further are people of colour and sex workers. Other activists argue that murders of trans men are less often detected as such because reports of the crimes tend to read the person as a masculine presenting woman instead of a trans man (Biwi Kefempom, 2023).

Alongside the continuities of the killings of cis and trans women the crimes show important differences. For example, trans women are less likely to be killed by someone they know like a (ex)partner, instead they are more often killed by people they meet at random. As a result more of the murders happen in (semi-)public spaces in contrast to private flats or houses where most of cis femicides occur. Many trans people are forced to work in precarious jobs and in the service industry or as sex workers where they have contact with a wider population and are in greater danger of being exposed to potentially violent transphobic people (Guerrero and Muñoz, 2018). Another characteristic of trans murders is the genital mutilation of the victims, which can be read as a complete erasure of a deviant gender expression. Summed up:

there are so many instances, (...), where it's just the perpetrators do not accept the fact that someone is trans and exists as a trans person and they believe that they have a right or I don't know what, to erase that person and then murder them (trans murder observatory)

¹¹ See the report for 2025 here: <https://tgeu.org/trans-murder-monitoring-2025-reveals-new-trend-in-anti-trans-violence-systematic-targeting-of-activists-and-movement-leaders/>

Official counts registering the murder of trans people are not easily imaginable. On the one hand, given their still frequent persecution, registering trans people could have many negative effects. On the other, the fluidity of gender expressions and queering practices of many trans people fundamentally contrast institutional forms of categorisations and state logics (D'Ignazio, 2024).

6.4 The Struggles of (Activist) Counting

Now that the questions around how femicide is defined theoretically as well as in practice are clearer, I want to move on and investigate other steps in the counting process of femicides. In this section I explain several challenges that make counting projects a complex endeavour. The specific limitations vary depending on whether the counting is done by activists, scientists or official government institutions, some problems are however shared between several contexts. At first, I focus on newspaper articles as a source that many activist counting projects use and the problems that arise from this. Then, I recount various other issues they face; like resource restrictions and the emotional labour poured into such projects.

6.4.1 Newspaper Articles as Information Source

All activist observatories in the sample rely on newspaper articles as their primary source of information. To understand on what information their numbers are based on, it is therefore important to examine this source in detail. My investigation shows that in many contexts newspaper articles remain the only easily available source of information and are therefore used in spite of their limitations.

For all activist projects the resources they have available for data production are very limited, whether it be money, people or time. Because of this, they usually cannot investigate the femicide cases themselves and rely on other people to gather information first hand. In this case, these are journalists writing the newspaper articles and investigating themselves or using police information. This however causes the activists to be reliant on the choices the journalists and news outlets make. The activists cannot influence the framing of the crimes or the type of information that is gathered. Because some newspapers continue to reproduce stereotypes on femicides instead of useful information this can become a problem for counting.

Some media outlets for example still use framings like “relationship crime” (in German) or “crime of passion” in their articles. Such terms and other patterns of femicide reporting can make the crimes look like individual acts of violence or reproduce framings that justify the violence and

blame the victim. For examples of such reporting it is unfortunately not necessary to search long, the latest feminicide in Austria in some papers was again called a “bloody relationship crime” (Hollauf and Brandl, 2025).

Other studies on feminicide data production also observed this problem. D’Ignazio (2024) shows how the media can contribute to the problem of missing data by not writing good reports on feminicides, for instance by simply reproducing the framing of the police or by stereotypical coverage. Again, a racist bias can occur here. One interviewee remembered cases with non-German aggressors that were followed by national outrage while cases where the killer was white and German were almost not reported on.

When not all circumstances of a crime are clear from the beginning, doing an accurate feminicide classification can imply following police investigations or a court trial over a long period of time to gather all necessary information. Both activists in Austria and Spain explained that this following up with cases is simply not possible for them. It would take too much time they do not have. While they would like to include information from the trials, these can happen years after the initial crime and with their resources this much investigative work is not feasible. Additionally, not all events surrounding feminicides are reported on equally by newspapers, even though they might be equally important for the counting of the crimes. Sensationalist logics of media reporting work against them. While brutal killings or trials that turn into legal dramas will be reported on more likely, other investigative developments e.g. when a suspect finally gets released and is not the murderer, do not spark the same attention. This makes it incredibly hard for activists to gather such information and change their databases accordingly. Most groups use tools like Google Alerts to help screen articles daily and miss as little information as possible.

Activists also told me that sometimes articles about killings that seem to be feminicides get published just to be removed again shortly after. They have no way of knowing why this happens. This shows again, how dependent the counting projects are on the external work of newspapers. They are dependent on the accuracy of information but also dependent in the sense that they must trust that all feminicide cases are reported on at all. If a feminicide happens but does not receive media attention they cannot count it. The person at the Spanish activist observatory pointed out that they are confident that every feminicide case gets reported on because the societal awareness has increased so much over the last years, resulting in higher media attention for each case:

And here, as there is a high level of social awareness regarding the murders, and it is a very peaceful society, the truth is that crime rates are very low in Spain, there is a

great deal of information available on all cases, the vast majority of cases, right up to the trial (activist observatory S, translated)

This positive correlation on one hand can also pose a problem for other observatories. In countries with smaller attention to the problem of feminicides media coverage might be less reliable which again makes it harder for observatories to gather reliable information, produce femicide counts, and in turn use them to increase awareness for the topic.

One instance where the problem of media biases becomes especially clear is reporting on trans victims. Many of the activist projects that do include trans women into their counts also had to acknowledge their dependence on external reporting, while *“a lot of media reporting is full of misgendering and dead naming”* (trans murder monitoring). Activists in Austria had no doubts about the importance of including trans women in their counts, the practical implementation though is a lot more complicated. If articles misgender the victim and there are no specific clues pointing to them being trans, the observatories cannot recognise that. This is also a problem for groups in other contexts and it can even be understood as a continuation of patriarchal violence. Even after the femicide is committed patriarchal structures of societies can result in bad reporting, victim blaming and the eradication of the real identity of the victims (D'Ignazio, 2024). In Austria for example, we can therefore not know for sure if or how many trans women were killed in the last years. This non-knowledge is a direct product of the discrimination trans people face. Their identities are not recognized by the state or media and remain invisible. This exemplifies how oppression can produce non-knowledge and ignorance (Tuana, 2004).

In the case of the trans murder monitoring project these circumstances result in an adaption of their information gathering methods. Because the murders of trans people are generally so underreported, they additionally rely on contacts they have with local communities. There, people are more likely to hear about cases even though they are not publicly reported on. They can also refer to these contacts to research the true gender identity of victims. My interview partner explained how using media articles in this case also means having a sixth sense. Often one must read between the lines and know what to look for to understand that the person an article was written about is trans:

You need to have a different lens on to even realize, for some cases, not for all, that it potentially is a trans person we're talking about, because a lot of the reporting is still done with data that is coherent with the gender assigned at birth. So, it would include dead naming, it would include misgendering, and you need to even be, I don't mean

open in the sense of, like, you need to understand enough to think, oh, this maybe is not a cis man that was murdered, right? (trans murder observatory)

In their opinion only trans people could do this reporting well because it takes so much tacit knowledge around the realities of trans people to detect these things in newspaper articles. They could not give me many examples of the type of hints they are looking for; what matters really is the experience of regularly reading such articles and noticing patterns in them. While this seems to be especially the case for detecting trans killings it is an important aspect of femicide detection more generally: „activists develop deep expertise in the information available in their contexts and engage in a vast array of creative informatic strategies to research missing data“ (D’Ignazio, 2024: 114).

While using media sources evidently poses some problems, often they are still the only source that is accessible. In Germany, for example, data from the courts would have to be requested from many individual instances because of their federal organisation. And police data may not always be useful because the necessary information the observatories need to determine whether a case is a femicide is not reported:

The police reports were not useful, because usually the police reports are very brief. (...) Sometimes you don’t even know if it was a femicide or not, if the victim was a man or a woman. So, that was also not usable (researcher G)

Many activist projects do not approve of the majority of the dynamics of media reporting, yet they still rely on this information source. For the data produced in this way, this means that, because the information they are based on is flawed, they must be contextualised. The limitations of the data must be recognized. This again is a struggle shared by many activists around the world:

While all groups use news media as either a primary or secondary source for researching cases, all groups are also deeply critical of media reporting on femicide and gender-related killing. It was variously called sensational, irresponsible, shameful, victim-blaming, misgendering, dehumanizing by design, stigmatizing, toxic, transphobic, lesbophobic, racist, xenophobic, demeaning, trauma porn, misery porn, and poverty porn (D’Ignazio, 2024: 126)

6.4.2 A Heavy Workload

Also, one of the reasons is because doing this work really, it's quite heavy. (...) And you need trans people to do it because there are specifics of trans violence that cis people

can't really notice. It's not something that is very easily learned. And also, there's a level of sensitivity needed looking at the data. But yeah, it does have quite a big tax. So if it would be possible to somehow cut some corners or get some tools to use for this, it would be great (trans murder observatory)

The emotional aspect of the counting work is something that I do not focus on in my research questions. Even my questionnaire did not include this topic specifically but still it came up in several interviews. I was of course aware that this is not an easy topic to work on but did not consider this necessarily a limitation of the data production. Now I do think that it has a significant effect and want to showcase this with input from the interviews, as well as with my own experience of working on this as a thesis topic.

Working on this topic would be emotionally challenging for almost anyone. However I have noticed that almost all activist (and often research) projects are done by people from the “affected group”. I almost only talked to women for my interviews and especially for the trans monitoring the person argued for the necessity of having trans people do the classifications. Even though this might make it more difficult to read about cases. This emotional toll is one reason why the trans murder observatory is working on a web-scraping tool that might reduce the workload involved in finding and reading articles as well as transferring the information into a database. Other projects working on improving femicide counting also look for technological solutions, for instance using AI to analyse texts¹².

Apart from the emotional strain, the political discussions and the hard work involved in advocating for such a neglected topic has its influence on the burden of activists and researchers. An interview participant explained to me why they are taking a break from working on the femicide topic:

I am tired of, not the topic itself, but the heaviness of the topic. And also, after the PhD, I was a little bit tired of the politics around femicide discussions in Germany and in Europe. So, I was like, I need a break (researcher G)

My own experience around this was mixed. Reading the individual stories of victims, especially the brutality of most cases, is indeed hard to bear over a long time. I noticed myself engaging with information like this less and less. The focus on the data production of femicide, however, made the research project easier for me. Others made similar observations. Only looking at the ‘hard facts’ can remove oneself from the stories of the victims, but while this can make it easier to deal

¹² See tools of the data against femicide project: <https://datoscontrafemicidio.net/en/tools/>

with the violence, it also risks dehumanising the victims and only seeing them as numbers (Zecha et al., 2023). The databases created by the very emotional work of reading about individual acts of violence and caring for the story of the victims do not reflect this. The emotional work of activists often stays invisible (D'Ignazio, 2024). While this can have negative effects like Zecha and colleagues argue, sometimes this is deliberately done for the “strategic deployment of the rhetoric of objectivity” (D'Ignazio, 2024: 135). Suppressing individual stories of people and moral feelings to make the knowledge seem more impartial and objective is something that has already been done since the beginning of statistics and quantitative methods. Numbers can remove one from the subject and create a distance from it (Porter, 1995).

The fact that numbers often feel removed from the actual topic therefore has its advantages as well as disadvantages. Continuously working on feminicides is hard enough as it is, and using numbers can have strategic motives, but they can as well put the stories of victims in the background. Remembering their stories is not only important to honour them but also to understand certain dynamics of the violence (Zecha et al., 2023). But the emotional toll this work takes on people is a limiting factor in itself. Data production on femicide involves highly emotional work and not everyone is willing or able to face it. For most activists it takes a strong dedication to the topic to continue doing this work over a long time.

6.4.3 Other Counting Challenges

With my interview partners in Austria I discussed what challenges they see for an official statistic on femicide or what they would wish for. One person was especially sceptic towards useful government statistics. She was mainly worried about how a classification can be done uniformly by many individuals across the country, e.g. by police officers or legal administrative staff that work on the cases; *„But the higher you set the bar in terms of the details you want to know, the higher the susceptibility to error becomes, and then it no longer serves any purpose. Because then I can no longer interpret it“*. Considering this, she prefers to have no data than to have faulty data that cannot be scientifically interpreted. Ball (2016) describes a similar mechanism for human rights data. He observed that qualitative accounts are usually taken less seriously than even the most flawed numbers. This is true no matter how many disclaimers are used to highlight the limitations of the data. At the same time, this researcher and many other participants highlighted the importance of institutions like the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) that strives to gather information on feminicides for all EU countries, reports the reliability of these numbers and works on unifying the way femicide data is produced. The limitations of this standardising work were not really discussed.

Bowker and Star (1999) famously analysed the challenges of big classification systems. They describe how even standards and classification systems that seem very established, in practice, are not uniform. Globally designed systems can be adapted in different ways on a local level and there are always cases that could fit several categories at once or fall out of the system completely. In the case of femicide data production this could be especially tricky because, at least in Austria, there exist no universally defined standards for categorization. This makes all counting projects that do not rely on a small amount of people (like researchers or activists) even harder. As of now, many institutions that could potentially do this classification work do not have the necessary experience or human resources to do this. Finally, every definition runs the risk of excluding certain parts of the phenomenon, as illustrated in section 6.3, and should therefore be constructed very carefully. Rigidly defined standards produce their own problems, as can be seen in Spain's gender-related violence law.

Another challenge specific to Austria is the size of the country. The absolute numbers of femicides per year are rather low (e.g. 29 in 2024), even though in relation to population size they are quite high. This makes it harder to interpret them statistically, for instance because small fluctuations have a big effect on the yearly numbers and are hard to interpret. The small absolute numbers can also make it harder to advocate for the topic and make clear how big this problem really is (Biwi Kefempom, 2023). Afterall, each femicide is one too many. The only advantage for activist data production projects is that it is arguably easier to research information on 26 femicide cases yearly than approximately 10 times as many, like you would have to do for instance in Germany.

The activists in Austria are further by no means sure they really report all femicides, nobody knows how big the number of unreported cases really is. This becomes illustrated by the gap between femicide counts and female murder victims reported by the police. In 2024 the police statistic recorded 40 women being killed (Bundesministerium für Inneres, Bundeskriminalamt, 2025), while activists counted 29 femicides (Autonome Österreichische Frauenhäuser, 2024). Not all murders of women are necessarily femicides, but it is still possible that the phenomenon is still underreported in Austria. Walklate et al. (2019) warn about this. They explain that bad counts could provide a false sense of security and objectivity while the problem in reality stays highly underreported.

Data on femicide of course only depicts this most extreme and final form of violence. Often victims experience a lot more violence before being killed and there are many women that experience less brutal forms of gender-related violence and thankfully are never murdered. The

continuum of escalating gender-related violence can hardly be addressed by data on feminicides alone. Finally, counting feminicides alone will of course not change anything, ultimately better protective measures and societal change are needed.

6.5 Trust in Feminicide Data

Continuing, I want to pay closer attention to the conceptions of data and quantitative methods present in my interviews. They form the backdrop not only to the motivation for producing feminicide data but to how people hope data will help to improve the situation. In this section I elaborate on how data is constructed as “good” and “accurate” and the role “official” data play in this. I then use two specific examples from my data to highlight how narratives around the mode and properties of counting are used to legitimatise the data and construct their accurateness. During my interviews narratives around what is important for collecting good and reliable data arose in subtle, and sometimes not so subtle ways.

For this section it is important to understand where numbers take their power from. Porter (1995) explains this with the rules numbers follow. They put local circumstances into universal boxes and make communication over big differences and contexts easier. This is why he calls quantification a “technology of distance” (p. ix). From categorising things into these universal boxes follow the problems of definitions and classifications described above. For feminicide data, comparisons between countries are still hardly reasonable because local circumstances differ too much. The risk of producing data that do not follow certain standards is that they will still be used as information, even though they do not hold any:

But not being able to interpret [the data] is always a bit dangerous, because then I have figures that look as if it would be possible, and they give a false sense of security, and with that I can basically do whatever I want in any direction (researcher A, translated)

This is especially a problem if we consider how data and quantified knowledge are usually presented. They are seen as objective and scientific and therefore like they provide knowledge that can be relied upon for decision making. Although all quantitative processes and categorizations include compromises and can have hugely varying quality (Merry, 2016). The creators of the data usually acknowledge this and are aware of it but once the information is reproduced such acknowledgements are left out. Even in this small scale the numbers can become black boxes and only someone taking the time to dive into how they are produced would

see their limitations (Porter, 1995). The activist data in Austria, for instance, is the only available count, so newspapers regularly reproduce it. Because they themselves are aware of the limitations of their data my interview partners themselves were not particularly happy about this:

Yes, I mean the newspapers refer to us, that's the problem. Then in their figures, not in the reports about the murders, but in their figures, they refer to us again. (...) On the one hand, that's nice, but on the other hand, it's a disaster. So it's not our job, not alone (activist observatory A, translated)

They clearly see the responsibility of gathering statistics of feminicide with the government, call for that regularly and are only producing the numbers themselves because otherwise no one else would. As a result the topic would have even less visibility. When asked about their expectations or wishes for official governmental numbers they said:

That the statistics are more transparent, that no matter where, in which ministry, there is a place where responsibility is clearly defined, that on the one hand, femicides are counted according to a definition that we can all live with, and on the other hand, serious violence is also recorded and simply tracked clearly every year to see what happened to these women and what the actual figures are (activist observatory A, translated)

In many ways what these interview partners in Austria wished for, in Spain is the standard since around 2002 (for intimate feminicides). Back then the official observatory for gender-related violence was founded and shortly after began registering their first statistics on the topic.

6.5.1 “Official Data Equals Accurate Data”

One of the most interesting things that was mentioned repeatedly in the interview with the official Spanish observatory is how they understand good data. It became very clear that what makes their data on feminicides (and other gender-related violence) so valuable and important, in their eyes, is the officiality and uniformity of the data. Porter explains that although the contested circumstances of categorizations could make them look weak, institutional power can strengthen them. Through this, numbers “become black boxes, scarcely vulnerable to challenge except in a limited way by insiders. Having become official, then, they become increasingly real” (1995: 42). Declaring the numbers official gives them legitimacy, they are a lot harder to critique but their modes of production remain obscured.

My interview partner explained how their data in the early years of the observatory was not complete and they were still working out how to register all relevant information of cases. So their statistics improved over the years and in fact they spend a lot of time not only on doing the current numbers but regularly try to gather more information on past crimes and update their early statistics accordingly. By now they draw parts of their legitimacy from these 23 years of experience.

As said, the more important part however is having *official* numbers. This officiality is given to the numbers by the Ministry for Gender Equality. They, as well as the observatory, count feminicides. Both groups then meet regularly to discuss new cases or see if there are any disagreements regarding the classification of a crime as (intimate) feminicide. For each new case that is brought to the observatory by the police, it finally is the Ministry that confirms it as a feminicide and increases the yearly count accordingly, giving the data their officiality and legitimacy:

In Spain, the counts are official. That means no one disputes them. The number provided by the Ministry of Equality is accepted as official because it is endorsed by the police, by us as the judiciary, and by the Ministry of Equality (...) That information becomes official, is disseminated and presented in reports. And we incorporate it into our studies and reports and into our database (official observatory S, translated)

This system ensures that the Spanish government has one uniform feminicide count. Whenever one institution classifies a case differently, the groups meet to discuss this case and find an agreement as to whether to include the case in the statistics or not.

For my interview partner this is an important advantage Spain has in comparison to other countries where one could more easily challenge the count or disagree on how many feminicides were happening in a year; *“There is a discrepancy; there is no agreement on the figures. In Spain, the figures are official”*. According to him, this discrepancy in other countries is exploited by people denying the existence of gender-related violence to question the truthfulness of the numbers. Having *official* data is therefore not seen as an end in itself, it is a way to narrate the data as robust and make them less susceptible to attacks. Afterall, the facts proven by scientific and objective data cannot be doubted.

Official confirmation by governmental bodies can have an important legitimising effect on data, but how they are collected is important to their legitimisation as well. In the following, I present the two examples from my interviews where these narratives of a good data production were most prominent.

6.5.2 A Protocol to Count Violence

For the official Spanish data production the most crucial aspect to ensure data quality is their “protocol” with which the data is gathered. Again, it is important to note that this protocol applies to cases that are covered by the Spanish law: intimate feminicides. With “protocol” I refer to the whole process of data gathering, from being informed about a case by the police, the contact with the judge, until the confirmation of the case by the Ministry. The information from the judge is collected with a standardized form. Because of the institutional organisation of the information gathering all courts are legally obligated to report their data regularly and the observatory can therefore be sure to receive this information.

How important this protocol is, is illustrated by the contrast with which my interview partner talked about cases that are not covered by it, because they do not fall into the legal definition of gender-related violence:

The protocol I mentioned earlier is for couples and ex-couples. Other situations and cases are handled differently. Each institution operates independently, there is much less coordination, and these areas are much less reliable, so to speak. They are much less reliable because they are not yet sufficiently protocolised (official observatory S, translated)

The protocol is rather rigid and seems reliable but in the end the observatory is still reliant on decisions and information from the court. Similar to the activist projects they mostly do not research data directly. They rely on the courts to make correct assessments of information like the relationship of victim and aggressor. Cases of trans women illustrate this clearly. The right for gender self-determination made it easier in Spain to change one’s gender and trans women that have done that would therefore automatically fall into the category of gender-related violence. If this is not the case, a judge decides if the killing of a trans women will be handled by courts for gender-related violence and integrated in the official counts. For at least one case last year, the murder of a trans woman was not considered gender-related violence although the evidence for her being trans was clear, because she had not changed her gender in the official registry (Garvi Carvajal, 2024).

This highlights the disadvantage of official data production; the established categories are rigid and must follow legal frameworks. There is not much room for a more critical approach to the cases. The people of the observatory, although in many ways the experts, cannot decide to change categories or assessments on their own. The protocol further encompasses mainly an individual approach to the crimes by looking at the relationship between victim and aggressor but not as

much at wider influences on the crimes like economic, political or social circumstances. This aligns with Merry's findings on indicators produced on violence against women (2016). Although my interview partner praised the protocol so highly, he also lamented this. The observatory would like to collect more sociodemographic info on both victim and perpetrator, but so far struggles to do this for all cases.

Still, the belief in the usefulness and accurateness of the protocol and the information produced by it form a big part of the trust in the official femicide data. It is the way through which these governmental institutions want to ensure accurateness and reliability. They want to ensure a uniform classification. The protocol and having a specialised observatory are therefore ways to not face the problem described by the Austrian researcher. The classification is not done by many different people which could make it less uniform, instead all the information is gathered by the observatory and Ministry and there, a small group of experts does the final classification. Through the legal framework all courts should additionally have enough human resources to gather the relevant data and communicate it to the observatory.

6.5.3 *Methodological and Scientific Rigour*

if you lose rigour, you also lose the seriousness of your work, and our work is recognised for its rigour (activist observatory S, translated)

To my surprise, the Spanish activist project invoked beliefs around sound scientific methodology and quantification to lend their project respectability. They further used these notions to defend their decision to exclude trans people from their count. In their opinion, it is important to recognise the situation of trans people but by having a murder monitoring apart from cis femicide, not by including them. In their opinion the two crimes are too different to count them together. I critique this perspective and explain why in more detail in section 6.3.3. However, I believe that this argumentation lends an illustrative example to how perceptions of accurateness and rigour are a part of femicide data production. Afterall Porter already noted that "quantification for public as well as scientific purposes has generally been allied to a spirit of rigor" (1995: 74).

My interview partner ideologically and academically aligned herself with the part of radical feminism that is trans exclusionary and used this as an argument. In her understanding of good academic and methodological practice, following the line of radical feminism implies these choices. It further seems like a rigid understanding of the femicide definition is used to give

legitimacy to their counts. As can be seen in the above quote, it is their rigour that makes their work serious, which in turn is why they are known and respected. The observatory strives to have sound and significant data (Corradi et al., 2016) and has chosen this way of trying to ensure that.

6.5.4 *Small Data and Big Data Logics*

As Kitchin and Lauriault (2015) explain, datafication cannot only be observed in the usage of big data. Changes in how we think about information, and the imagined usage for data influence small datasets as well. Infrastructures for data management have changed and machine learning and AI do not only offer new possibilities but entail new demands. These have indeed already reached femicide data as well. With the VioGén system the Spanish authorities already use an algorithmic risk assessment system to categorise the risk level of a woman reporting gender-related violence. Depending on how likely it is seen that e.g. her husband attacks her again, different protective measures by the police are put in place. For now this system does not yet work with machine learning or AI. It relies on a simpler mathematical algorithm.

The activist observatory, however, was considering starting an AI project at the time of our interview. Together with a Spanish University they were evaluating whether a risk assessment algorithm for femicides could be trained using their data. Their femicide counts would deliver the basis for training Artificial Intelligence on the dynamics and risk factors of femicides. Whether this project will really be done and how accurate such a predictive system would work remains unclear. Although their data does in fact not have the properties of big data (Kitchin, 2014), this idea shows that new advancements still influence considerations about how the gathered data could be utilised.

I remain rather sceptical towards this project for several reasons; first as I explained social and structural factors leading to femicide are hard to capture in distinct categories. Second, while I in no means want to diminish the important work this project has been doing in the last years, I am unsure how some of the limitations of the data could affect predictive systems with AI or machine learning. After all, their data is also sourced from newspaper articles. Training an AI effectively further requires huge data sets and millions of individual data instances. I do not think that even all the femicide data of the last 15 years in Spain would be enough for that.

Mostly, I was surprised about these intentions because I expected my interview partners to be rather sceptical of normative ways to use data. Unfortunately, the belief in quantification and the ability to gain knowledge from data via algorithms is too often discriminatory against marginalised people.

7 Discussion

In this thesis I showcased not only how much the data gathering practices differ between observatories but what it really means to count feminicides. My analysis spans from the definition and classification of feminicides, to the information registered and the use and legitimisation of the counts. I highlighted promising ways of leveraging the power quantitative knowledge can hold as well as the challenges many observatories face. What still interests me most are the contradictions involved in using dominant mechanisms of objectivity and quantification for projects of social resistance and social justice. Especially when this resistance is directed against structures like the patriarchy that, amongst other systems, have a big effect on processes of datafication.

One central study by which my project has been influenced and to which many of my results relate is of course the research on counting femicide in Latin America by Catherine D'Ignazio (2024). My research provides examples from counting projects in Europe for many of her findings. Activist projects exist because they were unsatisfied with the lack of attention paid to feminicides and the information gathered (or better, not gathered) by governments. All activists (or indeed all my research participants) showed big expertise on the information sources they use. They know of the limitations of their work and still deem it more important to have this data than to not have it. What D'Ignazio (2024) further presents in her research, but I do not, are specific ways in which the data is used in protests. She introduced examples like a protest where the names of victims were written on the floor of public squares, an exhibition with pictures of the victims and other artistic interventions that not only inform about feminicides but want to honour and remember the victims.

My sample and the one from D'Ignazio of course differ in terms of local contexts and characteristics of the specific activist groups. Furthermore, the ways of counting as well as forms of protest and resistance can vary greatly between different groups, even within the same region. A limitation of my work is therefore the rather small sample size of projects. I only have insights into one activist observatory per country and can therefore not compare between different groups. In Austria, for example, there exist many large and small feminist groups that actively organise against feminicides in different forms. Depending on their political stance and radicalness opinions of how to combat femicide, as well as how to understand them in the first place, may differ. Due to the focus on data production, the observatory in my sample is however the most important one, as it is those numbers that get reproduced in the media and are therefore the information basis for the wider Austrian public.

7.1 Classification Categories and Empirical Challenges

One insight of the analysis presented in Chapter 6 is how many possibly contentious decisions are part of femicide classification. Corradi et al. (2016) already showed that one problem with using a feminist framework to analyse femicide is the question of how to detect or prove misogynist motives. This is a central challenge of all femicide counting. What motives can be related back to gender clearly enough? What information do we need to assess this properly? Additionally, regarding the question of what information is needed, my findings clearly show that most observatories must work with whatever information is available and cannot influence this directly, especially because they mostly rely on newspaper articles. Assuming, however, that each killing of a woman is a femicide, does not serve the purpose either, this would be a too “generic hypothesis with little empirical significance” (Corradi et al., 2016: 980).

Maintaining empirical significance was very important to many of my interview participants. This manifested in different ways. One person was sceptical even towards the prospect of the Austrian government creating femicide counts, worrying about the accurateness and significance of this data (see section 6.4.3). They prefer having no data than having data that is not accurate and only provide a false sense of security or information. In that, they mirror the opinion by Patrick Ball (2016). He shows in his work how dangerous bad quantitative data can be, especially because we all tend to give them more credit than qualitative accounts, even if the limitations of the data production are clearly communicated. We further saw that an overcommitment to empirical significance and narrow interpretations of gender (or indeed the usage of sex instead of gender) can lead to discrimination within femicide counts. The Spanish activist observatory used a commitment to objectiveness and methodological rigour to defend their decision of excluding trans women from the counts.

Many of the categories reported by observatories mirror the properties that are helpful for identifying gender-related violence. Dawson and Carrigan (2021) propose such indicators that are commonly found in gender-related killings and less frequently present in other murders. Those include, for example, a relationship between victim and aggressor, a recent breakup, the use of access force or prior threats. My interview partners were indeed aware of all these indicators, and report most of them in their databases. Like Dawson and Carrigan have also shown, however, this information is not always available. Observatories strive to gather this data but are not able to do so for all cases. In terms of my main research question this shows that the data, and therefore our understanding of the phenomenon, is sometimes still a patchwork between different, limited datapoints.

Furthermore, none of the projects consider indirect or slow feminicides (Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2023) in their counts to prevent their numbers from becoming too 'fuzzy'. Slow feminicides are deaths of women that have not been directly killed in a violent act. They refer to more indirect deaths resulting from gender-related violence, like early deaths because of the psychological or economic consequences women suffer if they experience gender-related violence (Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2023). The lack of representation of this phenomenon calls into question whether the investigated counting projects produce thick or thin counts. Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon (2023) criticise this about many feminicide indexes. As mentioned in Chapter 2.2.1, according to Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, thick counts should include information on the following six aspects: the violent act itself, the actors involved (apart from victim and aggressor e.g. could also the police), the place of the crime, the type of violence or weapon and the context of the killing (war, peace, post-conflict).

The observatories in Spain (official and activist) and the trans murder observatory at least try to gather data for all these categories, minus the context of the killing. While for Austria and Spain this context usually would be peace, this might not be the case for all people involved in a feminicide. For example, if victim and/or aggressor are immigrants that have experienced war in their life, it could influence the psychological circumstances leading to the crime. The Austrian observatory gathers the smallest number of categories on the crimes, information like weapons used and specifics of the crime are given in a short text within their spreadsheet, not in set categories. In general, I am however sceptical if the information gathered in any of the data efforts is enough to address more than individual motives and circumstances. As we have seen, many observatories struggle to gather broad information, e.g. about socio-economic circumstances. Such things might however help to analyse the crimes not only according to individual motives. My interviewees are all aware of the structural influences on feminicide but struggle to reflect this in their counts, especially because most projects have very limited resources. Understanding feminicides on a more structural level is not only an end in itself, it could help to find better ways to prevent the crimes. If we only consider thin counts, the danger is that interventions to prevent feminicide also stay thin (Walklate and Fitz-Gibbon, 2023). Instead, we need to find measures that can effectively combat feminicides in the long run and can protect women properly.

Through my findings it is further possible to observe the different 'epistemic worlds' (Mobayed Vega, 2023) the observatories are based in. Through the analysis of the work by the official Spanish observatory for example it has become clear how their institutional embeddedness influences their counting practices. On a practical level this is for example reflected through the access to different information sources like the police and court data. Also, their trust in a

formalised protocol and in the importance of *official* numbers stems from the epistemic world they are operating in. Finally, the context of the observatory influences what they can observe and count and what not. We have seen how the legal framework in Spain defines gender-related violence in an intimate setting and how this affects the information available on other feminicides. The official observatory is bound by this framework because they sit within a governmental institution and can only advocate for legislative changes but have limited freedom to choose how they work themselves.

7.2 Comparing Femicide Rates

Although most projects refer to the definition by Diana Russell as the basis of their work, beyond that a lot of big and small decisions influence the classification of feminicides. This shows how classifications and contexts can change not only between countries but possibly between different observatories. Amongst other problems, this makes me sceptical of efforts for global femicide indexes (Walklate et al., 2019). Methodologies for gathering femicide data and the certainty with which counts include all cases vary greatly between countries. And still, comparisons between national femicide counts are already made. We see a huge drive to make data available on an increasingly big scale (see also Merry, 2016). I would argue that efforts are better invested locally. While patriarchal values are a global problem and should be addressed on a big scale, for now, I think it is more important to understand the femicide phenomenon for each country. Local contexts can have a big influence on the nature of feminicides, shaping what motives are frequently present or what group of women is especially affected. In my results, we have seen, for instance, that the age distribution for the victims of femicide in Spain and Austria is very different. This can influence what measures would be most important to take for each country. Instead of focusing efforts on establishing comparative indexes, in my eyes it would be more important to find good, local solutions to the problem (the best would of course be to do both).

Comparisons are drawn either way, even if the definitions for what is counted, and the certainty of the counts vary extremely. To illustrate this: comparing the official femicide rate for Spain with the activist femicide rate for Austria would be comparing apples to oranges. The information is based on very different sources, on the one hand on police and court data and on the other hand on media articles. Further, the activists in Austria try to report all kinds of feminicides they can identify, the official Spanish numbers count only intimate femicide.

While in my study I did not focus on this comparative data, in most conversations we still discussed the topic at least briefly. Having comparative data, for instance within the EU, is seen as important and useful by all research participants. It could help to understand the phenomenon more broadly and maybe even facilitate EU-wide legislation to combat the problem. I observed often how the numbers of other countries are used to make sense of one's own statistics. Austria has a high per capita rate of feminicides *in comparison* to other countries and therefore has a problem. Comparisons can be used to strengthen the argument that we need better protection, but they can also be used for the opposite. Narratives that want to place feminicides as a problem in the "Global South" and far away from western societies often use comparisons, too. For instance, along the line of: "in Austria there is no femicide problem, look at countries like Mexico, there numbers are a lot higher, and a real problem exists".

This is also a good example for a way in which data are (or have to be) narrated (Dourish and Gómez Cruz, 2018). Generally, it does not suffice to count and simply report a number. What does 29 feminicides mean? On its own this number is not as useful as when it becomes narrated, e.g. by comparing the count to other years or other countries (expressed in feminicides per capita). A different narrative would be to say that it does not matter how the number compares to other countries. Every single femicide is one too many and we want to stop them from happening completely. This is for example expressed by the slogan #NiUnaMenos¹³. For me, it was rather surprising that this topic was part of so many of my conversations. This could be an interesting avenue for further research. A further study could focus on how data is specifically used in comparisons and how narratives are built from this.

7.3 An Empirical Case for Critical Data Studies

To the field of Critical Data Studies I contribute an empirical case of how big data logics and the drive for quantification influence a wide range of topics. My analysis shows clearly how data is used as evidence. Many argued that we need data to understand the phenomenon. This underlines a trend to see quantitative data as the only way to see and know things (Kitchin and Lauriault, 2015). It further became clear that big data logics have an influence on what possibilities are imagined for small femicide data. This can be seen for example by the plans to use observatory data to train risk assessment algorithms.

¹³ Not one [woman] less

What my findings further showed is that, even in more activist contexts, trust in numbers is rather high (Porter, 1995). We saw this through the trust in official numbers, the use of data as evidence to advocate for more counter measures and the way supposed objectiveness and strict methodologies can provide the produced data with legitimacy. Through this, the data is additionally seen as a knowledge basis that can possibly inform better protective measures. As Merry constitutes: “Indicators seductively promise to provide guidance through a complex world” (Merry, 2016: 221) and the same is true for femicide data. The promise is that the knowledge gained from them helps us to prevent feminicides. But at the same time, counts can by far not express all the information needed to really prevent gender-related violence or fully mirror the social structures where the violence originates from (Walklate et al., 2019). Both observatories in Spain for example reported that they would like to gather a lot more information than they are currently able to. Especially socio-economic data about the lives of victim and aggressor or information about disabilities, illnesses and addictions are hard to access. They would however help to embed the crime in the social and societal surrounding. This is an example for what I wanted to understand with my research questions. The fact that this kind of data cannot be reported limits the understanding of the crimes, especially because contextual information is missing. The phenomenon is enacted through the counting. Another example for this is how gender-related violence in Spain is defined as happening within relationships only and the impact this has on the numbers and the discourse about it.

Most of the observatories I investigated can be understood as bottom-up data projects. I therefore followed the suggestion by Milan and Treré (2019) to pay more attention to alternative and resistant data projects, even though the projects here are all situated in the “Global North”. We saw how often data on feminicides is missing, how activist data can fill this gap and how important these projects therefore are. Furthermore, like the activists of #NiUnaMenos (see Beraldo and Milan, 2019) the activist observatories utilise the fact that because of their work the state does not have a monopoly on information on femicide. They can reject official narratives if necessary and show how big the problem really is. Of course, activist observatories are still not perfect; they can reproduce discriminations as well (e.g. see the exclusion of trans women).

7.4 All Counting has its Limits

My research further highlights the importance of considering several intersectional categories and how even within femicide counting marginalised groups can be less visible. Additionally, some aspects of the killings are just very hard to report or count and even with huge efforts might

remain hidden. One conclusion from this would be to say that we need to find even better and more precise ways to count and account for all these invisibilities. While I agree, I also see that some things might always stay invisible. Some aspects of our social life and broad societal factors are incredibly complicated to count, especially if they are supposed to fit in a narrow and distinct check box category (Bowker and Star, 1999; Star, 2016). Many people that identify as trans for example do not want their gender expression to fit in a box but want it to remain fluid. They queer the cis-heteronormative system on purpose.

So, instead of always striving for better counts, another conclusion might be acknowledging that we cannot transform everything into data and do not need to do so to solve questions of social justice. Because it expresses this point so well, I here again want to quote Catherine D'Ignazio:

It is important to resist the technosolutionist snake oil from Silicon Valley: data and AI are not going to “solve” matters of social inequality. More data doesn’t readily translate to more action or more justice. On the contrary, the demand for more proof—more data collection, more analysis, more research—is often a terribly effective delay tactic employed by mainstream institutions to avoid taking meaningful action on social justice (2024: 274)

Already now we know enough to improve measures against feminicides. There are mechanisms in place that help many women like women’s shelters. Giving them more funding would be one way to improve the situation.

Transforming any experience of violence into a fact or quantitative data is extremely complex and entails countless decisions. It is inevitable that the lived experience is stripped of complexity, context and the unique details of each case (Bernasconi and Díaz, 2022). One category can combine experiences that are actually incommensurable. As Bernasconi and Díaz explain: „Commensuration entails establishing parameters to bring together a series of experiences and events under a unique criterion, which makes it possible to order them and stabilize an objective evaluation scale“ (2022: 8). In this thesis, I tried to show how events are brought together under the criterium of feminicide.

Bernasconi and Díaz (2022) further show how categorizing a human rights violation in a specific way identifies some aggressors or responsible people while hiding others. The perpetrator that killed the woman is of course identified and included in the databases (if he is known), other people that might be more indirectly involved in the case are not. This could be police officers that did not grant the woman the necessary protection before the crime, although she has sought their help. It could also be politicians that have not acted on demands for better preventative

measures. To comprehend feminicides in this way does not only complicate how we imagine counting them but highlights again how they cannot only be regarded on an individual scale. We also must ask what role the general society plays in this violence.

Within all this it is not easy to find the right balance. Using data can indeed help to fight for more attention for a topic. The discussion in Austria about feminicides has certainly become bigger because of the many activist efforts, most of which use numbers in some form. Still, quantifying social phenomena is not easy. For me, many questions around this remain: How do we find a balance between criticising big data and technosolutionism and recognising the efforts of resistance data projects while simultaneously acknowledging that we cannot quantify everything, even if it is for a good cause? Audre Lorde so famously said that “*the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (2007: 112, italics in original). But how do we find other tools? or escape the house?

8 Conclusion

The goal of my research project was to study data production on feminicides more deeply. I wanted to not only understand in what circumstances this data is produced or how this is done step by step, I was curious to understand how all this enacts the phenomenon that is counted. What do we know about feminicides because of this data and what stays invisible because of their mode of production? A big part of this enactment is done through different feminicide definitions. Decisions around what constitutes a feminicide or what not are a recurring part of counting them. Through exploring the theoretical and practical limitations of counting projects I wanted to understand how this data shapes our knowledge. And finally, to embed my research even more into Critical Data Studies and to further understand dynamics of counting, another question was how different data is used by the observatories and how they legitimize their counts. I was especially interested in how this authority is used to strengthen the impact feminicide data has as evidence that gender-related violence exists. The research was done by conducting qualitative interviews with people active/working at different activist and official observatories as well as with researchers. To find common points between these very different contexts I used a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

The results chapter started with a descriptive section on how the observatories in my sample operate. I presented insights into how their work looks like routinely and how their feminicide counts come to be. Understanding this was an important basis to then analyse the counting work in more detail.

At the beginning of this in-depth analysis I explore why activist observatories exist and are necessary. We saw that sufficient feminicide data is often missing and activists try to fill this void with their own data. This includes an analysis on how the counts they produce are applied in further activist work. Additionally, I explore how this lack of knowledge on the topic might be actively produced through certain values, by drawing on theories of ignorance and non-knowledge (Aradau and Canzutti, 2025; Tuana, 2004, 2006).

A central point of my findings revolves around the question of how we define feminicide in detail. I do not follow the origin of the academic and activist/political term (for this see section 1.1) but look at where the classification is contested in practice and where boundaries of the term are drawn. I analysed shortcomings of some counts regarding the types of feminicides considered, specifically how sometimes intimate feminicides are the only type of feminicide acknowledged by institutions or e.g. the Spanish legal framework. This excludes many other feminicide cases and renders them further invisible. Additionally, many research participants highlighted that a

good femicide definition needs to consider different discriminations intersectionally. I use different examples to highlight what an intersectional approach can mean. One case that I elaborated on is the inclusion of the killings of trans women in femicide counts. Section 6.3.3 explores both some important differences and similarities between cis and trans femicide and explains why an inclusion of trans victims is essential.

Having explored the implications of choices around the definition of femicides, I then analysed some important challenges many observatories face. The main problem is that the activist observatories all must use newspaper articles to learn about new cases of femicide and extract the information for their databases. They cannot research information on their own but must rely on what is reported in the article. It is unclear if really all femicides are reported by newspapers, sometimes important information for the classification is missing and not all new developments in a femicide case attract equal attention from the media. Many news outlets still reproduce stereotypes and sensationalise the killings. Moreover, the counting work is emotionally challenging, here I reflected both on my own experiences and those of my interviewees. Then I reiterated the problem of how to obtain a uniform classification of killings and ensure that the data is sound.

Finally, I explored how my research participants understood the data they produce as being “good” and “accurate”. We saw how, especially for the official institution, having official counts by the government is equal to having correct and uniform data. In their eyes, this makes the data more robust against attacks from people who want to negate the existence of gender-related violence. We saw that this trust in the uniformity is also ensured by a belief in the protocol of data production. In another observatory the accurateness of the data is argued for by claims of methodological rigour and objectiveness. How high the confidence in this data is, can for example be seen in how its use is imagined in future applications for risk assessment.

Although I did not know much about femicide data production before starting my thesis, I expected to find that the daily practice of gathering this data includes many contentious decisions. With my research I contribute to highlighting some of them and expand other research on activist data projects (e.g. see D'Ignazio, 2024) with a case study on activist projects in Austria and Spain but importantly also with the cases of an official and a trans murder observatory. The contrast between the activist and the official project showcases the advantages and disadvantages both observatory embeddings have.

A line of research I would find interesting to follow further, is to see if and how official counts could be implemented in Austria, following the Spanish example. While that question was sometimes

implicitly present in my research, for a detailed answer more work with a different focus would be necessary. Having official data in Austria might help to gain more recognition for the victims and their families and might contribute to better protection. At the same time, I have shown how the rigid organisation around official counts leads to more conservative interpretations of femicide and by shining light on some cases, risks making others more invisible.

Simultaneously, these considerations bring me back to the point I made in the Discussion. Instead of concentrating on having more data and then still doing nothing, it is more important to find better means to prevent femicide now. The biggest hurdle for better measures is not a lack of information on the crimes but the willingness to recognise them and act against them. Instead of asking only how to better count femicides, we therefore should mainly ask how we can prevent them better. There exist some rather simple advancements, like more funding for existing projects like women's shelters or simply believing women more often when they experience gender-related violence, taking their risk more seriously (this is for example showcased in the article by Satariano and Toll Pifarré, 2024).

The recent law on femicide passed in Italy further complicates the question of how to best respond to femicides. The far-right government passed a law that established femicide as a distinctive criminal offence. If a court can prove that a woman was killed based on her gender the prison sentence for the aggressor can now be set to life (Ginz, 2025). Setting a legal framework for femicide can be an important step to really act on them. At the same time, I doubt how much this rule alone will change anything on the current situation. Higher punitive measures will probably not reduce the numbers of femicides. Instead of increasing penalties and sending the aggressor to prison for life once the woman is already dead, what we need more urgently are better preventative measures and help services that can intervene before someone is killed (Ginz, 2025).

Femicides are the final point of less extreme physical and psychological violences, intervening against smaller forms of misogyny could help to prevent the violence from escalating (Waldhör, 2020). We therefore must address the violent behaviour by men as early as possible and cannot tolerate even the slightest forms of misogynist, aggressive or possessive actions. Furthermore, we must find ways to not only punish men for this but help them overcome patterns of violence to really stop it from happening.

Lastly, as I continuously highlighted in this thesis, femicides are rooted in structural problems, completely eradicating them will require large scale societal changes. The most effective thing we can do long term to prevent them, is to smash the patriarchy.

9 References

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10 Appendix

10.1 AI Usage Table

AI Tool	Work Phase	Prompts/How was the AI used?	Reason for Usage	Comment and Reflection on the Results
noScribe https://github.com/kaixxx/noScribe	Interview transcription	Used to automatically produce a transcript of the interview recordings	To make the process faster	The output was usually very good, I of course read all transcripts while listening to the audio to correct small mistakes/make sure everything is correct
ChatGPT	Literature research, writing of the literature review	Used to find more literature on a certain topic, to find new strands of literature to further investigate in (as brainstorming help)	to make search for new literature easier, mostly to gain a starting point (e.g. a book) from where to depart and look for different texts myself	Worked well to gain an overview, the real work of going through the literature to see what is relevant, or to follow up I of course still had to do on my own
Notebook LM	Identify relevant literature, writing literature review	(Providing the AI with texts as a basis) Asking for summaries, queries about the texts, e.g. to explain core points in different words	To help understand difficult texts, find relevant passages/ chapters in books	Helped a lot to understand things better or to find a chapter important to my work that I then also read myself
DeepL	Writing process	As a dictionary, to help translate short sentences, sometimes as grammar check	To improve the language, check the English when I was unsure	Works usually very well, helped to correct small errors and is usually faster to use than a traditional dictionary