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BIDS

# **“Das Problem ist das Patriarchat”<sup>1</sup>**

A qualitative Analysis of Framing and Counterframing of  
Femi(ni)cides in contemporary Germany

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<sup>1</sup> Participant 3, 2022: 38; English translation: The problem is patriarchy.

# Abstract

*According to the Federal Criminal Police Office, 139 women were killed by their (ex-)partner in 2020. That year, Germany was ranked second highest in estimated number of femicide victims in Europe. As most extreme form of gender-based violence, femicide or feminicide designate the gender-specific killing of women, related to the maintenance of hierarchical gender relations. The topic is little discussed and researched in the German context. Therefore, the aim of this work is to give a current insight into the understanding of femi(ni)cide from the perspective of activists with different mobilization backgrounds by conducting framing analysis and applying the concept of patriarchy. First, an attempt is made to address and answer how they understand the topic of femi(ni)cide presented and framed in German society in relation to their activism. Building on that, the thesis aims to highlight their views on possible solutions and the methods they utilize to counterframe this understanding. A second focus is on understanding the institutional framework related to femi(ni)cides in Germany.*

*In the present work, it became clear that the topic of femi(ni)cides in Germany is deeply embedded in patriarchal structures. In addition to the lack of data, destructive media coverage and government disregard for the systemic background of femi(ni)cides obstruct the implementation of adequate prevention measures.*

**Key words: femicide, feminicide, activism, Germany, framing theory, patriarchy**

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# List of Abbreviations

BIK	Bündnis Istanbul Konvention
BMFSFJ	Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
EOF	European Observatory on Femicide
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization

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# Introduction

1 in 3 women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their life (World Health Organization 2021). Violence against women is not a new phenomenon and this is demonstrated by the fact that this number has remained largely unchanged over the past decade (ibid.).

*“Violence against women is endemic in every country and culture, causing harm to millions of women and their families, and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.” (Ghebreyesus 2021, WHO Director-General).*

The most extreme form of violence against women and people read as women<sup>2</sup> is femicide<sup>3</sup>, defined as "intentional murder of women because they are women" by the World Health Organization (2012). Accordingly, “most cases of femicide are committed by partners or ex-partners, and involve ongoing abuse in the home, threats or intimidation, sexual violence or situations where women have less power or fewer resources than their partner.” (WHO 2012). Therefore, not all killings of women are femicides, only those motivated by hierarchical gender relations. While the true extent of the violence is unknown due to a lack of global, standardized and consistent data collection, estimates by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) are staggering: 81,000 women and girls were deliberately killed worldwide in 2020, more than half of them (47,000) by intimate partners or a family member (UNODC 2021).

Based on the above, there is no doubt that half of the world’s population is disproportionately affected by forms of gender-specific violence. Structurally anchored male violence is also increasing in Germany (Wolff 2022). In 2020, Germany was ranked second highest in estimated number of femicide victims when compared to other European nations (statista.com 2022). According to the project One Billion Rising Deutschland, a femicide currently takes place in Germany every 72 hours (Mairiedl 2022).

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<sup>2</sup> Women and people read as women are spoken of here in order to make it clear that femi(ni)cides also affect people who may be read as women by others, but who do not identify themselves as women. For reasons of readability, the term woman will be used in the further course, but with the named consciousness.

<sup>3</sup> Femicide, or feminicide, neither is established in the German context. Since there are also different perspectives as to which of the terms is more suitable, the inclusive spelling femi(ni)cide is chosen in the further course. In reference to literature references, the spelling of the respective author will be adopted.

This evidence highlights how topical and urgent the issue of gender-specific violence is in Germany. It is particularly concerning in view of the increase in violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany (Lutz 2022) and the simultaneous 18 percent federal budget cut for measures against violence against women affecting many preventive initiatives and projects (Wolff 2022).

Inspired by the strong public debate about femicide in Latin American countries since 2015, the topic is steadily gaining awareness and attention among activist groups and civil society organizations in Germany and the world (Pardeller, Wischnewski 2018). However, the lack of data and research on femi(ni)cides, destructive and trivializing media coverage and government disregard pose challenges to reaching and mobilizing a broader audience on the issue.

## 1.1 Aim and Research Question

In order to address the topic of femi(ni)cide as a societal, structural problem universal to women, this thesis intends to shed light and raise awareness on the issue by highlighting the perspectives and experiences of activist actors in Germany.

The aim of this work is to give a contemporary insight into the understanding of the topic of femi(ni)cide in Germany from the perspective of activists with different mobilization backgrounds. First, an attempt is made to address and answer how they see the topic of femi(ni)cide presented and framed in German society in relation to their activism. Building on that, the thesis aims to highlight their views on possible solutions or changes necessary and the methods they utilize to reshape this understanding. A second focus is on understanding the institutional framework related to femi(ni)cides in Germany, which I define for this thesis as a system of government, political jurisdictions, judicial systems and legislative bodies.

By examining the above issues to answer the research questions, this thesis attempts to provide a broader view of the invisibility of femi(ni)cide in society and also to raise awareness. In the German context, little is discussed and researched on this topic. The intention of this study is therefore to contribute to this gap in the research field by analysing the current understanding of femi(ni)cides in Germany from the perspective of activist actors.

Against the background of the goals outlined above, the overarching research questions are as follows:

- How do activists understand the current framing of femi(ni)cide in society and what would in their view be required to better address this issue?
- How do activists experience the existing institutional framework in relation to femi(ni)cide prevention in Germany?

The thesis is divided into different sections to deal with the topic. First, I will introduce the conceptual differences of the two concepts femicide and feminicide and provide relevant background information for the German context. After briefly presenting existing research, the next chapter deals with the theory and concept used in this study, elucidating both framing analysis and the concept of patriarchy. The theoretical portion is followed by the presentation of the methodology used in the research. The results of the interviews are presented and discussed in the next chapter, in a structure according to the chosen theoretical framework. Afterward, the main topic of this thesis will be discussed. In the final part follows a conclusion regarding the selected topic.

## Background

### 2.1 Theoretical Classification of the Concepts Femicide and Feminicide

In the scientific discourse, the definitions and understandings of femicide and feminicide have constantly evolved and changed. They are still defined and used differently today depending on the position and perspective of the author. In the following section, the two existing concepts will be discussed in more detail.

The impetus for a scholarly discussion of the concepts femicide and feminicide was given by South African sociologist Diane E.H. Russell. She did so initially through a statement in 1976 at the International Tribunal on Crimes against Women in Brussels regarding the misogynous killing of women and was the first person to use the term femicide publicly in this context (Radford, Russell 1992, p.xiv). While she did not elaborate on her understanding of the term,



she later stated that she had understood femicide implicitly as the murder of women by men for hateful motives (Russell 2011). A concrete scientific examination of the concept took place in Russell and Radford's seminal anthology *Femicide: The Politics of Women Killing* (1992). Together with other theorists, they discuss femicide in the contexts of the USA, Great Britain, and India, with the contributors focusing on different topics. They understand the concept of femicide as the misogynist killing of women by men (Radford 1992, p.3) and as a form of punishment or even social control of women by men within patriarchal social structures (Radford, Russel 1992, p.26). After developing her personal understanding over the years, Russell most recently defined femicide as "the killing of females by males because they are female" (Russell 2011). She uses the term female to emphasize that the definition includes girls as well (ibid.).

Inspired by the concept, Marcela Lagarde translated the term femicide as feminicidio (eng: femicide) in the context of a series of murders of girls in the early 1990s in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. In her opinion, the literal translation feminicidio would equate to the Spanish term for homicide, thus designating all murders of women without differentiation (Grzyb, Naudi, Marcuello-Servós 2018, p.20). Her concern, however, was to emphasize the patriarchal social construction of certain murders of women - not all murders of women are to be considered feminicides (ibid.). The decisive factor in feminicides is that they occur as the culmination of gender-specific violence against women. Her framing within the language of human rights added the critical element of impunity to the definition, meaning that state authorities fail to adequately enforce justice and thus fail to guarantee the lives and security of women (ibid.).

These theoretical origins of the concepts of femicide and feminicide demonstrate that an unambiguous definite definition is not possible. Luján Pinelo (2015) explains this by saying that both concepts are in turn composed of other theoretical concepts such as patriarchy, sex, gender, women and violence. Since these come from different temporal and historical contexts they are, therefore, dynamic and variable. The concepts of femicide and feminicide are not static either, but constantly develop and change alongside and within these additional concepts (ibid.). The only constant component is the understanding of femi(ni)cides as an expression of a socially patriarchal gender hierarchy (Pardeller, Wischnewski 2018).

In response to the controversy over the concepts, many theorists now use both terms synonymously in order to unite forces against combating the issue instead of dividing them

(Wischnewski 2018). Another possibility, which is listed by Wischnewski (2018) in relation to the German context, is the use of the inclusive spelling of both concepts as femi(ni)cides in order to advocate a synonymous use of the terms.

## 2.2 Femi(ni)cide in German Context

With regard to homicides against women in the German context, only the criminal statistical evaluation of the Federal Criminal Police Office provides an overview. The publication of figures that relate exclusively to violent crimes in partnerships has been realized annually since 2015. The statistics distinguish between the type of crime and the relationship to the suspect, as well as gender. According to the recently published statistics for the 2020 reporting year, there were a total of 359 cases of attempted or completed homicide against women in that year and 139 women were killed by their partner or ex-partner (Bundeskriminalamt 2021). However, these figures should be viewed critically. Cases in which the attacked succumbed to their injuries after the investigation was completed or femicides by German nationals abroad are not included (Wolff 2022), nor are homicides outside of relationship constellations (Pardeller, Wischnewski 2018, p.171). Furthermore, trans women and people who consider themselves female regardless of their officially registered gender are either not recorded or listed as male fatalities (ibid.). Children are not included either, and in cases in which the perpetrators subsequently commit suicide, the background to the crime is often not determined (Wolff 2022). In addition, these statistics are the only official statistics available and are already out of date at the time of publication with a delay of almost a year (ibid.).

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdown measures worldwide, empirical reports from various countries confirm that the global rate of femi(ni)cide increased as domestic violence increased (Standish, Weil 2021). The latest figures from Germany also confirm an increase in domestic violence in the second year of the pandemic of almost 1.3 percent compared to 2020 (Lutz 2022). Two thirds of the registered victims are women (ibid.). It can be assumed that the number of unknown cases is much higher because many individuals were stuck at home and had no opportunity to communicate, get support or report incidents to the police (Standish, Weil 2021; Ferner 2021).

### 2.2.1 Political and Legal Background

To this day, the concepts of femicide or feminicide are not officially used in Germany. The two minor interpellations by the party "Die Linke" in 2018 and 2019 on femicide in Germany, in

which they inquired whether the Federal Government shared the WHO (2012) definition of femicide and adopted it for the German context, received a negative answer. The Federal Government does not find the term clearly defined, which means that there are too many different possible interpretations (Deutscher Bundestag 2018, 2019). The German Federal Government has not yet presented its own definition.

The Istanbul Convention, an important instrument in the fight against violence against women, is an international agreement at European level that has been officially enforced since August 1, 2014 and was ratified by Germany on February 1, 2018 (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend 2017). With the ratification, Germany undertook implementation measures to prevent, intervene, protect against and sanction gender-specific violence in the future. One example is the introduction of the "Stronger than Violence" initiative in November 2019. This initiative bundled access to many nationwide help and advice services and offered information about the various forms of violence experienced in Germany (BMFSFJ 2021). Many different specialist partner organizations, associations, companies and individuals joined the initiative in the fight against violence and took part in the campaigns. During the first COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, the "Stronger than Violence" initiative started the Germany-wide campaign "Not safe at home?" (ibid.). In order to inform people affected by violence about offers of help during the COVID-19 pandemic, the information and assistance for those affected and their social environment were promoted to customers on product packaging, receipts or posters in cooperation with the eight largest retail chains in Germany (ibid). Further, in response to the high numbers of domestic violence cases during COVID-19 and in view of the inadequate range of women's shelters and advice centers to date, the Federal Minister for Family Affairs declared that the government intended to make 120 million euros available from federal funds by 2024 (Lutz 2022). This funding will contribute toward regulating access to protection and advice under federal law and creating a uniform legal framework for reliable financial security of the support system (ibid.). Additionally, a nationwide picture of the situation and suggested solutions are expected for 2023 from the federal-state working group "Combating gender-specific crimes against women", which was initiated in 2021 (ibid.).

Despite these measures, Germany does not yet meet all requirements of the Istanbul Convention. In the alternative report on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Germany (2021) by the Bündnis Istanbul Konvention<sup>4</sup> (BIK), several problem areas are

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<sup>4</sup> English translation: German Istanbul Convention Alliance

documented. After three years, Germany still lacks an overall interagency strategy, effective institutions and the necessary resources to implement the right of all women and girls to a life free of violence (ibid.). The access to prevention, protection, counselling and justice is still inadequate, particularly for groups such as women with a refugee or migration background, with disabilities, diverse gender identities or those who experience homelessness (ibid.). In addition, certain articles are violated. An example is an 18 percent cut in the budget for measures against violence against women in 2021 which violated Article 8 - Financial Resources of the Istanbul Convention (Wolff 2022). As a result, follow-up funding from the state was cancelled for a number of preventive projects, institutions and platforms (ibid.).

Femi(ni)cides do not have their own jurisdiction in Germany. In the context of deliberate homicides, German law differentiates between the elements of murder and manslaughter (Deutscher Juristinnenbund 2021). Murder differs from manslaughter in that the intentional killing of a person must meet other "murder criteria" that characterize the act as socially and ethically particularly reprehensible or as particularly dangerous (ibid.). Further, with regard to the legal consequences, they differ in that manslaughter carries a standard sentence of five to fifteen years imprisonment, while murder carries life imprisonment (ibid.).

### 2.2.2 Activism

In response to the political inaction and inspired by movements in other countries, a growing feminist movement can be identified in Germany in which activists are committed to problematizing and scandalizing femi(ni)cides and publicly demanding systemic change.

Inspired by the strong public debate regarding femi(ni)cide in Latin American countries since 2015, the topic has steadily gained international awareness and attention among activist groups and civil society organizations. Based on the Ni Una Menos movement, the initiative #Keine Mehr was founded in 2017 and, in cooperation with the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation, organized a first conference on the subject of femicide in Germany for autumn 2017 in order to collect and share existing, but isolated knowledge about the collective phenomenon (Dyroff, Pardeller, Wischnewski, Alex 2020). The motive of #Keine Mehr initiative is to connect the debates and mobilizations from other countries, such as Mexico and Italy, to the German context and thereby raise awareness of the femi(ni)cide problem in Germany (ibid.). It serves as an exchange platform make the structural reasons for femi(ni)cides visible without losing

sight of the individual situations of women, and to jointly organize action against this issue (ibid.).

Increased efforts on the part of NGO lobbying and advocacy as well as femi(ni)cide prevention projects have led to increased awareness of femi(ni)cide in Germany in 2020 and 2021. Much work on this has been done by the European Observatory on Femicide (EOF), the One Billion Rising campaign (Schröttle et al. 2021) and organizations and activists within the anti-violence field.

Furthermore, activists unite on certain dates and invite others to stand up against patriarchy, gender inequality and gender-based violence. For example, on November 25th the "International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women" takes place annually. Demonstrations, hands-on activities and rallies take place throughout Germany on this day to combat discrimination and violence of all kinds against women and girls. Another global event occurs on February 14th every year. Organized by the One Billion Rising Campaign, people around the world are invited to gather and dance in public places to demand an end to violence against women and girls (Mairiedl).

## Existing Research

The subject of the following chapter is an overview of the current state of research in relation to studies that have specifically discussed femi(ni)cides in Europe and more specifically in Germany.

While domestic violence is a well-researched subject of sociology, femi(ni)cides as their fatal consequences have been largely neglected (Weil 2017). However, inspired by the rise in activism and social mobilizations, research into femi(ni)cides is slowly increasing (ibid.). The studies are mainly quantitative in nature, as qualitative research on femi(ni)cides is made more challenging due to the lack of perspective that can be provided by survivors (ibid.). In addition, there is a large research deficit related to femi(ni)cides of displaced, refugee or migrant women, who are disproportionately affected (ibid.). The study *'Hearing their voices': Exploring femicide among Migrants and Culture Minorities* (Nudelman et al. 2017) is, therefore, particularly relevant. Based on the assumption that migrant women and women from cultural minorities in Europe are more frequently affected by violence in their immediate social environment, the aim was to focus on the perspectives of femicide survivors with a migration

background (ibid.). For this purpose, a culture and gender-sensitive guideline for in-depth interviews was developed, which can be adapted to local socio-cultural contexts and used as a basis for further comparative studies across Europe (ibid.).

The European Observatory on Femicide (EOF), founded in 2018, confirms the tendency to increasingly focus on femi(ni)cides as a research subject at a scientific level. The first Europe-wide observatory's mission is "[...] the prevention of femicide through data collection, data visibility, research and awareness raising." (EOF n.d.). Femicide is referred to here as the killing of women because of their gender - this is understood as a unique phenomenon that requires research of its own (ibid.). Key subjects include quantitative data collection on the extent of femicide and qualitative data collection on possibilities of intervention and prevention of femicide in Europe (ibid.). Since 2020, research groups in each participating country have been systematically collecting relevant data in Europe. In 2021, the associated FEM-UnitED project published its comparative analysis of femicide research and data in Cyprus, Germany, Malta, Portugal, and Spain. The stated goal of the project is to create an evidence base to bring about collaborative policy change (Schrötte et al. 2021).

In Germany, femi(ni)cides as a research subject are underrepresented to a larger degree than at the European level. There are individual - now mostly outdated - research projects that focus on different aspects or sub-areas, such as partnership killings or so-called honour killings (see e.g. Oberlies 1995; Foljanty, Lembke 2014; Heynen, Zahradnik 2017). So far, however, there have been no empirical studies that take into account the various social contexts and motives behind the killing of women (Kriminologisches Forschungsinstitut Niedersachsen e.V. n.d.). A first research project, which began its work in March 2022, intends to address this research deficit with a fundamental investigation of femicides in Germany (ibid.). In addition to violence in partnerships, the evidence-based study will also examine previous grey areas in statistics, such as misogynistic murders by acquaintances, colleagues or individuals in the prostitution milieu. The analysis of 352 killings of women in 2017 based on criminal case files from Berlin, Baden-Württemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate and Lower Saxony aims to identify typical risk constellations that seem to facilitate femicides.

# Theoretical Framework

Utilizing a theoretical framework as a basis for research helps to structure the analysis and conceptualize the data obtained. There are different theoretical frameworks to approach social mobilizations from different perspectives and to gain a differentiated understanding of their character and content (Benford, Snow 2000). Since the aim of this thesis is to understand the experienced differentiation of femi(ni)cide-framing in Germany through the perspective of actors from different activist organizations, framing theory is the theoretical framework used.

## 4.1 Framing Theory

Erving Goffman's book *Frame Analysis: An essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974) laid the foundation for framing analysis. His concept of framing analysis was further developed by the sociologists Robert Benford and David Snow beginning in the mid-1980s and its application was expanded to various disciplines. Since then, interest in the framing approach in academic research on social movements has increased sharply and, alongside the theories of political opportunity structure and resource mobilization, is understood to be central to the understanding of mobilization structures, character and course of a social movement (Benford, Snow 2000). Goffmann describes frames as "schemata of interpretation" that allow individuals or groups to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" occurrences and processes within their immediate surroundings and the world in general (Goffmann 1974, p.21). Frames help give meaning to these occurrences and thereby function to organize experiences and guide actions (ibid.).

The framing approach is defined as an "action-oriented set of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimize the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization" (Benford, Snow 2000, p.614). This approach focuses on the production and reproduction of a collective action frame and its effects on the mobilization of social movements (Kern 2008, p.142). The collective action frame is composed of characteristic features in the form of action-oriented core framing tasks. Benford and Snow (2000) distinguish between diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing:

- a) *Diagnostic framing* is the first step in the framing process and identifies the problem to be addressed (ibid.).
- b) *Prognostic framing* refers directly to the diagnostic frames and offers solution proposals and demands as well as strategies and their implementation (ibid.).

- c) *Motivational framing* introduces a call to action for new actors to join the movement and a reason for participation and engagement in the movement (ibid.).

In the context of this thesis, the framing approach allows me to uncover the problems perceived by the activist actors interviewed in relation to femi(ni)cide in Germany. Additionally, by analyzing the characteristic features of the collective framework, the solution-oriented demands identified by the participants can also be considered. In accordance with the purpose and research questions of the thesis, the structure and analysis of the qualitative interviews will solely include the core framing tasks of diagnostic framing and prognostic framing.

## 4.2 The Concept of Patriarchy

The concept of patriarchy has been central to many feminist theories. There are differing ideas about the exact definition of this concept and the extent of its influence. Many nuances and refinements took place as feminists went on to theorize it into a coherent system of rule. But at its core, the concept of patriarchy refers to the existence of a male-dominated social structure built on misogyny and female oppression (Hunnicut 2009).

Historically, a patriarchal society was understood as a society in which positions of power and privileges were held and passed on by (older) men. Feminist theorists expanded the definition of patriarchal society to include a systemic bias against women as a cause of their oppression. In her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), Gerda Lerner traces the development of patriarchy to the second millennium B.C.E. in the Middle East, arguing that male dominance and control over women is not rooted in human nature or biology, but is instead the product of historical developments.

In her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Sylvia Walby (1990) recognizes women of varying social, economic or ethnic backgrounds as well as those of different sexual orientations experience patriarchal structures in a different way. While allowing this, she argues that there are six areas of patriarchal structures which maintain male dominance and restrict women:

1. Paid Employment: There are significant differences between men and women with regard to gender relations in employment. Women earn less than men, have less access to paid employment and are more likely to work part-time (ibid., pp.25-29).
2. Household Production: Women's labor is exploited. Since household chores and childcare are not considered, men benefit from women's unpaid work. (ibid., p.89)



3. Culture: There are different norms and values for men and women in a patriarchal culture (ibid, p.104. The 'male gaze' encourages the degradation of women by men and promotes sexual violence. (ibid., p.108)
4. Sexuality: Society has a 'sexual double standard' for men and women in sexual behavior and relationships. Women are criticized for sexual desires and behaviors for which men are positively accepted (ibid, p.109).
5. Violence: A feature of a patriarchal society is the threat of violence against women as a form of male control (ibid, p.128).
6. State: The structures of the state are patriarchal, racist, capitalist and violate the principles of equality (ibid, p.171). Women are underrepresented in the public sphere.

Hunnicut (2009) summarizes various criticisms of the concept: "(a) The concept simplifies power relations; (b) the term patriarchy implies a "false universalism"; (c) the ways in which the concept of patriarchy has been employed have ignored differences among men, casting men instead as a singular group; (d) a theory of patriarchy cannot account for violence by women or men against men; and finally (e) this concept cannot help us understand why only a few men use violence against women in societies characterized as patriarchal." (ibid, p.554).

However, she argues that despite these arguments, the concept of patriarchy is useful for theorizing violence against women because it keeps the theoretical focus on dominance, gender, and power as well on social contexts, not individual attributes (Hunnicut 2009).

## Methodology

This section will present the methodological choices of this thesis, including the research design, data sampling, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, as well as my position as a researcher and limitations to the study.

### 5.1 Research Design

Following the methodology outlined by Johnston (2002), I determined that a qualitative method is the most appropriate for conducting frame analysis in this thesis' research. One of the challenges of this process is the elaboration and verification of frames (ibid, p.64). Frames are established by the actors of the studied mobilization and become visible to the researcher through verbal or written language. Therefore, the frame analysis should work as closely as possible with the transcription obtained and the researcher should be able to justify their

interpretations in text passages (ibid, p.66). According to Johnston, qualitative methods are predominantly used in framing (ibid, p.69). This allows the researcher to better include the context of an interview in the analysis. Despite poorer reliability when compared to quantitative methods, this is offset by their increased validity (ibid, p.69). The quantitative method was deemed disadvantageous for this study as it would require any text to be transformed into numerical data in order to measure frequencies in predefined categories (ibid, p.75). Based on these arguments, I elected to use the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews.

## 5.2 Data Collection

To gather empirical data, I used both primary and secondary sources. According to the research goals and questions, four qualitative interviews with suitable participants were conducted online. In order to triangulate the primary data and achieve a more comprehensive, precise and complete data presentation within the research topic (Robson & McCartan 2016, p.179), secondary sources were additionally examined. These ranged from documents related to and provided by the activist groups and organizations, their websites and online appearances on social media and academic papers, government reports and newspaper articles addressing the broader topic of femi(ni)cide. I do not claim completion, but intend to contribute to an initial consideration of this academically interesting and relevant topic.

### 5.1.1 Sampling

In this thesis, purposive sampling is used as a technique to identify and select interview partners based on particular characteristics. According to Robson & McCartan (2016), “[...] the principle of selection in purposive sampling is the researcher’s judgment as to typicality or interest.” (p.281). This way I could ensure that the participants are suitable to contribute with their perspectives and experiences to my research focus. All participants are mobilized against femi(ni)cides and have specific knowledge and experience in the field of gender-based violence and femi(ni)cide in Germany.

The process of locating interviewees was challenging and time-consuming. While it was manageable to identify German-based activist groups and organizations with a focus on gender-based violence, it was more difficult to locate those that explicitly addressed femi(ni)cide. In addition, these groups face challenges such as a lack of financial and personnel resources. This resulted in a majority of negative responses. However, I would like to note that many expressed their interest in the thesis and, when possible, referred me to other potentially suitable interview

partners. While I appreciated this method of snowball sampling (ibid, p.281), it ultimately did not lead to an interview.

### 5.1.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data source for this research. This type of interview has certain advantages, such as providing a unique and personal insight into the thoughts, feelings and perspectives of the participants (Kvale 2007). Semi-structured interviews help to answer how the participants experience, understand and describe their lived world, their behavior, their experiences and their beliefs about certain topics, phenomena or problems (Robson, McCartan 2016, p.286). The interview process is versatile, which allows the interviewees to express their knowledge, thoughts, personal experiences and reflections on femi(ni)cides in Germany and the work of their organizations to prevent it in an open and interactive dialogue.

The first step was the preparation of an interview guide in the form of a list of pre-set questions (see [Appendix](#)). This served as a tool to navigate the interview by providing a checklist of the topics to be covered (Robson, McCartan 2016, p.285). Simultaneously, I contacted several potential interview partners via email or social media with a brief description of my research topic and relevant information related to the interview process. With those who confirmed their interest and availability to participate in this research, I scheduled four interviews to take place in early/mid-May. Although I had planned to collect the data on-site in Germany, this was not possible due to health reasons and other challenges related to COVID-19. For this reason, the interviews were conducted online via platforms such as Zoom and Jitsi Meet. Table 1 shows the main details of the interviews conducted with the four female participants. The interviews lasted between 35 minutes and 61 minutes. Each interview was recorded after obtaining the interviewee's express consent.

<b>Who</b>	<b>How</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Focus</b>
<i>Participant 1</i> Volunteer, Feminizidmap	Zoom Video Call	04.05.2022	work of Feminizidmap, activist experiences, role of media
<i>Participant 2</i> Employee, Zentrale Informationsstelle Autonomer Frauenhäuser (ZIF)	Zoom Voice Call	05.05.2022	work and activism of ZIF, political and juridical approach to femi(ni)cides, proposed prevention measures

<i>Participant 3</i> Activist Femplak Frankfurt am Main	Jitsi Meet Video Call	09.05.2022	activism of Femplak FFM, society's reaction, intersectionality, comparison to activism experiences in Ecuador
<i>Participant 4</i> Member, Notruf und Beratung für vergewaltigte Frauen - Frauen gegen Gewalt e.V.	Zoom Voice Call	10.05.2022	organized actions, femi(ni)cides in Cologne area, political approach to femi(ni)cides, proposed prevention measures

*Table 1: Description of the four Participants*

## 5.2 Procedure for the Data Analysis

After completing the primary data collection, I started the transcription process using the tools Descript and Trint. While this greatly eased my workload, I still checked and corrected each transcription for errors. This process helped me familiarize myself with the data and deepen my understanding of the answers. After the transcription process was complete, the transcripts were uploaded to MAXQDA, a software program I used to organize, code, and analyse the data.

For the thematic coding analysis of the generated data I was influenced by the Miles & Huberman model, which consists of the following three iterative main activities: data reduction, data display and drawing and verifying conclusions (Punch 2005, p.198). Data reduction aims to reduce data without any significant loss of information (ibid.). In the early stages of analysis, this was accomplished by editing and summarizing. Based on this, the middle stages utilized coding, which is the systematic process of categorizing the collected data in order to identify significant themes and patterns (ibid.). In later stages, the analysis then took place through conceptualization and theoretical explanation (ibid.). Data display is the activity of organizing, condensing and assembling the information in a variety of creative ways (ibid.), which, due to the nature of the data collected in this study, was not required. Following the activities mentioned, first conclusions were drawn and reviewed over the course of the iterative analysis process (Punch 2005, p.199).

### 5.3 Ethics and Reflection

Decisions are ethically justified if they ensure that the aim and means of the research are fair, that the local and personal needs and concerns of the participants are taken into account, and that the dignity, privacy and safety of the participants are guaranteed at all times (Scheyvens 2014, p.161). Ethical and moral questions or uncertainties can quickly arise in the ongoing empirical research process, especially in the case of sensitive research objects - such as femi(ni)cides. For this reason, I have always strived for an open, reflective approach and the consideration of basic ethical principles.

For reasons of transparency, when approaching potential interviewees by email, I made sure to include the purpose of my research, the role of the participants as interviewees, the use of the data and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. Prior to recording each interview, I summarized my research purpose, walked them through the included processes and clarified any open questions before getting the participant's verbal consent. To maintain integrity, informed consent is essential and is given when a potential participant voluntarily and with full understanding agrees to participate in the research project (ibid, pp.164, 165). To ensure confidentiality, all interviewees were kept anonymous, the recordings were safely stored and their names did not appear anywhere on the transcripts.

The researcher's biases, principles, beliefs, and social context influence every methodological and analytical decision, from research design, to research methodology and analysis of results (ibid, p.62). The underlying social structures have to be taken into account, as well as the power of the researcher over what is researched and the power of the participants over their participation and provision of information (ibid.). In order to conduct ethical research, it was therefore my responsibility to continuously reflect on this and to recognize and question my position and role in the research process.

### 5.4 Limitations

Several prominent limitations were identified during this study. Since this is a current topic that still receives little attention, the literature and data remain sparse. The research process took place during the global COVID-19 pandemic, which was the reason for conducting the interviews online. I would have preferred to conduct the interviews in person in Germany to allow for more nuanced conversations and to avoid technical interruptions during the conversation. Access to the interviewees was also made more difficult by increased absences

and overwork during the pandemic, which led to a rather small sample size (n = 4). More detailed quality information would have required more participants from more diverse (activism) backgrounds. However, this study sought to include relevant participants within its framework who could expressively and reflectively communicate facts, experiences and opinions. The focus of this work was on developing a current understanding of femi(ni)cides in Germany from the point of view of the people who mobilize against it. Due to the limited scope of the thesis, other potentially relevant actors and perspectives were deliberately not included. Furthermore, this study is limited to the context of Germany and, in line with feminist research methodology, cannot be generalized to the broader context of women at large.

## Findings and Discussion

After the methodological approach of the present study has been explained, the results of the qualitative interview study will now be presented. Diagnostic frames will be introduced first. These are problems identified by the interviewees in relation to femi(ni)cides in Germany. These are followed by the presentation of prognostic frames, the solution-oriented approaches in connection with activist work.

### 6.1 Diagnostic framing

The participants identify different problems in dealing with and framing the topic of femi(ni)cide in Germany. The negation of the systemic background of femi(ni)cides was identified as an overarching problem leading to a lack of use of the term in Germany. This problem can be observed across various institutional levels, which will be discussed below.

#### 6.1.1 Legislation and Prosecution

Femi(ni)cides do not have their own jurisdiction in Germany. Therefore, every offense and its background must be interpreted in court in order to distinguish between murder and manslaughter.

*“We clearly have this impression that, um, murders of women or FLINTA\*<sup>5</sup>, um, are much more often referred to as manslaughter than other homicides.”* (Participant 1, 2022: 47, translated by researcher)

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<sup>5</sup> In German, the acronym FLINTA\* stands for women, lesbians, intersexual, non-binary, trans and agender people.

In this quote, Participant 1 describes the tendency to sentence femi(ni)cides as manslaughter instead of murder - with the consequence of lighter sentences for the perpetrators. While further data and information are needed to verify these observations, this trend was also confirmed within the framework of the FEM-UnitED project (Schrötte et al. 2021). The quote suggests that trivializing crimes in favour of the perpetrators is a form of structural sexism that is rooted in patriarchy. The judiciary and legislation come from a patriarchal era and remain fundamentally based on these patriarchal values. This means that the male perspective dominates laws and values, while women are systematically discriminated against. This is problematic because *“/.../ legal thinking naturally influences our understanding of the world”* (Participant 1, 2022: 87, translated by researcher). This statement suggests that the patriarchal framework surrounding femi(ni)cides and women will continue to be internalized by society and shape the individual understanding of the world. The consequences of this perspective are the normalization of discrimination and violence against women.

The patriarchal nature of legislation is illustrated by the following example:

*“/.../ in the last five years there's been a federal court ruling where it was construed as mitigating that the ex-partner killed his ex-partner because he felt, and that's the quote, robbed of what he believed he possessed.”* (Participant 2, 2022: 64, translated by researcher).

The quote above indicates that Participant 2 understands the current diagnostic framing in this particular court case as founded in patriarchal power structures, more specifically its resulting sense of entitlement. It refers to a judgment of the Federal Court of Justice from 2019, in which it was ruled that if a man kills his ex-partner because she has separated from him, it can be judged in such a way that it speaks against the invalidity of the motive and thus be considered a mitigating sentence. In this instance, Germany is failing to act in accordance with the Istanbul Convention Article 46 - Aggravating circumstances, which highlights that if the offense takes place in a relationship or ex-relationship, an aggravating, not mitigating, consideration must be taken into account. According to Participant 2 (2022; 64), such trivialization of the crime arises from an understanding and forbearance for the perpetrators by classifying it as an exceptional emotional situation. A study of several hundred femicides by British criminologist Jane Monckton-Smith (2020) demonstrates the problem with framing these incidents as spontaneous

reactions, as in most cases the crime is a planned action embedded in a deliberate attempt to gain control and dominance over a woman.

Ultimately, the participants' diagnostic framing indicates that the interpretation and application of the existing law in Germany reflects patriarchal patterns of thought. Femi(ni)cides following a separation are mitigated as manslaughter on the basis of patriarchal ownership construction, objectification of women and toxic masculinity.

### 6.1.2 Government

All interviewees name the lack of recognition of the term femi(ni)cide by political actors as a major problem and, consequently, perceive the measures taken by the government to work towards the prevention of femi(ni)cide as inadequate, inconsistent and ineffective.

As Participant 2 explains, *“/.../ if the fact that women are murdered because of their gender doesn't exist, then nothing can be done about it”* (Participant 2, 2022:32, translated by researcher). She is pointing to the fact that the federal government, which has been in office since 2021, has not yet presented its own definition of femi(ni)cides. In addition, the term does not appear in the 2021-2025 coalition agreement (Participant 2, 2022: 56). In her understanding, this confirms that this government too lacks the awareness and recognition that being a woman in Germany can still pose a danger in life. Participant 4 (2022: 18) explains the hesitant political approach by the fact that violence against women and girls takes place in such large numbers in the private sphere, which allows politicians to shirk responsibility. Additionally, Participant 3 (2022: 30) raises the consideration that in Germany, unlike in countries in South and Central America, the issue is not perceived as violent and frequent enough to trigger political action.

Participant 4 (2022: 26) implies that as a consequence of not recognizing femi(ni)cides as such, it is easy to treat them on a case-by-case basis, thereby ignoring any underlying pattern, so that *“[I]t's difficult to actually anchor it [the topic] at the political level in such a way that it's, um, perceived as a task /.../.”* (Participant 4, 2022: 18, translated by researcher). This suggests that the underlying patriarchal structures are perceived neither as the main reason nor the main problem by political actors. Participant 4 exemplifies her implication with a very recent example: Despite three femi(ni)cides<sup>6</sup> during the Easter holidays in the Cologne area, the topic of violence against women and girls - with femi(ni)cides at the culmination of it - was not

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<sup>6</sup> 13.04.2022 name unknown, 18.04.2022 Zeynep, 23.04.2022 name unknown



explicitly mentioned in the party programs for the state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia in May 2022 (2022: 18). She elaborates:

*“And if you imagine that they should actually have been implementing the Istanbul Convention for years and they should, for example, create more places in women's shelters and support counselling facilities more and so and if you imagine that, then it's really really an indictment of /.../ with how little energy and with how little determination it is actually being pursued.”* (Participant 4, 2022: 18, translated by researcher)

This quote indicates Participant 4's framing of the Federal Government's lack of acknowledgement of femi(ni)cides as a persisting issue that may provide an initial explanation for the deficits in their prevention work. The lack of recognition of femi(ni)cides also results in a lack of research and data on this issue, which in turn, makes it difficult to draw conclusions about possible effective and sustainable preventive measures.

### 6.1.3 Media Framing

All respondents share the impression of fundamentally destructive and limited media coverage of femi(ni)cide. This is problematic, as the influence of the media on public perception is stronger than ever. Their choice of words can (subconsciously) convey certain emotions, values and worldviews to people, and contribute significantly to the formation of their opinions and behaviour in everyday life (Gender Equality Media 2021). In this context, Participant 1 (2022: 26), Participant 2 (2022: 50) and Participant 3 (2022: 29) describe the repeated use of the same, often racist, sexist or trivializing expressions and descriptions to form the narratives around these killings. This often serves to sensationalize, downplay or and in some cases even romanticize them. Terms such as “relationship drama”, “family tragedy” or “murder out of jealousy” are given as examples. These observations are confirmed by Gender Equality Media's media screening (2022), in which they analysed all reporting on (sexualised) violence against women in the German media landscape in 2021. Their results show that 95 percent of media reports use language that downplays violence when reporting on (sexualized) violence against women. Instead of clearly naming femi(ni)cides, terms such as “bloody deed”, “relationship crime” and “family drama” are mainly used (Gender Equality Media 2022). This framing is often deliberately chosen because voyeuristic articles downplaying violence generate more clicks and thus more profit (ibid.).

In this context, Participant 3 describes how *“/.../ such crimes are framed there [the media] is in itself already extremely problematic and often legitimizes violence.”* (Participant 3, 2022: 40, translation by researcher). She argues the language used by the media affects how society perceives such cases. If, for example, an article about a femi(ni)cide mainly focuses on conflict in the relationship or tries to explain the perpetrator’s emotional distress ultimately resulting in murder, the brutality of the crime is ignored in addition to the underlying structural problems (Participant 3, 2022: 40).

*“And I think that's kind of the thing, that it's often so individualized in the media and then there's a story of a personal story and then it's very tragic. But portraying this as a structural problem is something that a lot of media miss.”* (Participant 3, 2022: 40, translation by researcher).

This sentiment, which is shared by the other participants (Participant 1, 2022: 84; Participant 3, 2022: 51; Participant 4, 2022: 26), suggests the media still treats femicides as individual cases instead of framing them as a structural problem. Christine Meltzer's research project (2021) found that nearly 70 percent of the examined articles fail to point to underlying patterns and structures of violence against women. The consideration of patriarchal structures is thus ignored and consequently conveyed to the readers.

## 6.2 Prognostic framing

In the following, the shared problematizations in relation to the framing of femi(ni)cides in German society found during diagnostic framing are linked to the demands and suggestions of the interviewees and their use of various activism methods.

### 6.2.1 Recognition of Femi(ni)cides in Germany

Due to the lack of recognition of the term femi(ni)cide by political actors, the first thing Participant 2 expects from the Federal Government is for them to

*“/.../ say yes we know there are murders of women based on their gender or /.../ which gender they are read. We recognize that this situation exists in Germany and on the basis of this there is a catalogue of measures or an action plan that shows steps how we can prevent these murders.”* (Participant 2, 2022: 38-39, translated by researcher).

In accordance with the cited demand to name the concept politically and to recognize its structural level, a large portion of the ZIF’s work is networking at the political level (Participant 2, 2022: 13) as well as the organization of and participation in congresses, campaigns, and

events dealing with violence against women and girls (ZIF n.d.). For example, a representative of the ZIF was invited to the SPD-organized parliamentary breakfast in 2020 to give a speech on femi(ni)cide (Participant 2, 2022: 14).

Frauen gegen Gewalt e.V. is working towards the same goal of having politicians take the issue seriously, undertaking networking and public relations work, at times together with various alliances and networks they are a part of (Participant 4, 2022: 4). One of these alliances is Lila in Köln, who organized a public panel discussion two weeks before the 2022 state elections in North Rhine-Westphalia with candidates from different parties under the title of “FRAUENPOLITIK GESTERN - HEUTE - MORGEN. Gewalt gegen Frauen und Mädchen - Politik kann mehr tun, Politik muss mehr tun!”<sup>7</sup>,

*“/.../ where, among other things, it was also about femicides, of course, as the culmination of everything yes, but the topic of violence against women and girls in general, because it was about the fact that the topic is hardly mentioned in the election programs /.../”* (Participant 4, 2022: 18, translated by researcher).

The quote implies that the aim of the event was to publicly address political actors’ negation of violence against women and girls - with femi(ni)cides at the culmination of it. This can be seen as a means of raising awareness among the public and, more specifically, the voters.

## 6.2.2 Data Collection of Femi(ni)cides

As a consequence of the lack of recognition of the term femi(ni)cide by political actors mentioned before, there is no Germany-wide database of femi(ni)cides. Consequently, there is little data on these crimes and no precise information on the number and characteristics of them. Disaggregated data however could allow for deeper analysis of contexts and patterns, thereby generating information and understanding from which sustainably effective preventive measures may be derived (Feminizidmap.org n.d.; Grzyb, Naudi, Marcuello-Servó 2018, p.28). Furthermore, by collecting data it will also be possible to raise public and political awareness that femicides are of structural nature (Grzyb, Naudi, Marcuello-Servó 2018, p.28; Ferner 2021). *Feminizidmap* was founded primarily as a response to the limitations of current crime statistics related to femi(ni)cide cases (Participant 1, 2022: 13) and is currently collecting all those crimes from German-language online reports relating to Germany (Participant 1, 2022: 18). The goal is to generate a more accurate picture of this phenomenon with a detailed

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<sup>7</sup> English translation: “WOMAN POLITICS YESTERDAY - TODAY - TOMORROW. Violence against women and girls - politics can do more, politics must do more!”

interactive database that can be accessed online by any interested person (Participant 1, 2022: 14). This way all societal actors, from journalists, politicians, scientists to activists, are provided with useful information to develop strategies to combat femi(ni)cide (Participant 1, 2022: 23).

### 6.2.3 Sensitization and Education

The overarching goal is to prevent femi(ni)cides by increasing the presence of the topic in society and in legislation. A major aspect of achieving this goal is raising awareness in society and institutions, which can be done using various activist methods.

For example, letters are written to specific targets, as in the case where ZIF employees wrote a letter to the Bundesverband Deutscher Detektive e.V.<sup>8</sup> to raise awareness of the potentially lethal consequences of their job for women.

*“/.../ Well, because we sometimes have the situation, which was the case in Limburg, that the perpetrator hired the private detective to look for the woman, he then found her that way and then ultimately murdered her and so we have written a letter to raise awareness to the detective agencies /.../”* (Participant 2, 2022: 116, translated by researcher).

As the quote describes, this action was initiated because sometimes a seemingly simple search request can result in the killing of a woman who may have been deliberately hiding from someone. The example highlights the importance of creating sensitivity and awareness for all actors in society and how dangerous a separation can be for a woman.

In response to the presentation of the crime statistics for North Rine-Westphalia 2021, Gewalt gegen Frauen e.V. and regional alliance partners

*“/.../ wrote an open letter to politicians and the press /.../ and pointed out or criticized that the topic of violence against women and girls was not an issue at all when the crime statistics were introduced.”* (Participant 4, 2022: 14, translated by researcher).

The open letter drew attention to the fact that, despite the high numbers, the issue of violence against women and girls was not discussed at that presentation. The choice of an open letter suggests that the aim of this action was to reach many actors from politics, media and civil society with this information and thereby create awareness of the current situation.

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<sup>8</sup> English translation: Federal Association of German Private Investigators

Another way to bring the issue of femi(ni)cide more into public focus and to raise people's awareness is to organize and/or participate in actions and protests on international action days.

*“/.../ we always have a protest march here in Cologne on November 25th, the International Day against Violence against Women. It's called “Wir nehmen uns die Nacht” and it's from those “Reclaim the Night” marches. And /.../ in two years there were also speeches on femicide. /.../ and we have another public campaign, One Billion Rising. In February. That's this /.../ worldwide campaign on that day, always February 14th. And there we also already had a speech on the subject of femicide.”* (Participant 4, 2022: 12, translated by researcher).

Participant 4 mentions participation in these international days of action in connection with educating and sensitizing the population about femi(ni)cides (2022: 14). The topic gains presence because the events are widely advertised in various networks and media channels and take place in public spaces. In addition, Participant 4 states that speeches have been held explicitly about femi(ni)cides in recent years, which suggests that the topic is gaining increasing attention from activists. In the same context, referring to the mobilization of the public, Participant 2 describes that *“/.../ we as society, as activists, build up pressure and then /.../ get politicians to act.”* (Participant 2, 2022: 80, translated by researcher). Participant 2 assumes with this quote that the more people mobilize and take to the streets to fight violence against women and girls, the more difficult it becomes for politicians to ignore the issue and the demanded changes.

In order to reach people and encourage them to think about topics that they might otherwise not come into contact with, Femplak's activist approach is *“/.../ to take the public space and very simply glue slogans in the public space with letters on paper, which are simply supposed to irritate, provoke, stimulate thinking.”* (Participant 3, 2022: 9, translated by researcher). The private is political and is therefore made a visible part of the cityscape by gluing important and meaningful messages on house facades, bridges and squares of Frankfurt am Main. The slogans



Figure 1: Example of Slogan - English translation: Man/one does not kill out of love (Instagram @femplak\_ffm)

(see Figure 1 for an example) are placed at strategic points and address a wide range of feminist issues, femi(ni)cides being one of them, with the aim of drawing attention to the social issues and traumatic experiences of marginalized groups (Feministische Plakate Frankfurt am Main 2021). Since the posters are removed quickly, the group also uploads pictures of the

slogans to their Instagram channel, also in the hope of reaching a wider audience (Participant 3, 2022: 9). According to Participant 3, public thematization increases the visibility of the topic and serves to address people directly through exposure to particular slogans (2022: 11). This publicity may result in the initiation of communication with others, information gathering and/or reflection.

Further sensitization actions are organized when a femi(ni)cide occurs. For example, in the case of three femi(ni)cides during the Easter holidays in the Cologne area, Gewalt e.V. as part of Lila in Köln “*.../ held a vigil .../ in front of the house of one of the murdered women. There was also a rally in Cologne on the other side of the Rhine.*” (Participant 4, 2022: 14, translated by researcher). The ZIF’s reaction is similar when one of the women’s shelters in their network is confronted with a femi(ni)cide of their residents or ex-residents. They

*“.../ support them, show solidarity and organize networking. In one case, for example, I was also the contact person for all press inquiries, because the colleagues on site simply could not deal with that yet, there was such a media storm and partly in such a destructive way [...]”* (Participant 2, 2022: 11,12, translated by researcher).

As both statements above illustrate, the only support and recognition for these crimes is coming from the activists who are bearing the entire burden of the aftermath. This can be understood as another reason why the governmental institutions need to be more involved to support this process.

Regarding the media and its framing of femi(ni)cides, sensitive reporting is demanded. The ZIF directed their demands directly towards the government to comply with the Istanbul Convention’s Article 17 - Participation of the Private Sector and the Media (Participant 2, 2022: 52). Although not self-initiated, Participant 2 mentioned the obligation of the Deutsche Presse-Agentur (dpa), one of the world's leading independent international news agencies, to no longer speak of family drama or similarly misleading terms. This success stems from an open letter from Gender Equality Media (2019), in which they called on the dpa to take a leading role and live up to its responsibility not to downplay or misrepresent the murders through its choice of words.

Additionally, the role of media in educational work is addressed. Participant 4 demands

*“.../ better educational work in general in the media or with the help of the media, so that it [the topic femi(ni)cide] is taken up, that information is provided and that more attention is also paid to the gender-specific background in the case of femicide.”* (Participant 4, 2022: 20, translated by researcher)

While the quote indicates that when media portrayals of femi(ni)cides are carried out in a sensitized and appropriate manner, it can help the prevention of femi(ni)cides by informing the public and raising awareness. Participant 3 adds a special focus on children and young adults as addressees. She points out that it is important to actively thematize from an early age on which and how certain content regarding gender-based violence and related topics is conveyed to children and young adults through the various media channels (2022: 38).

In the diagnostic framing of existing legal practice in Germany, the interviewees identified that the interpretation of respective cases and the application of existing laws pertaining to femi(ni)cides is based on patriarchal thought patterns, especially on patriarchal construction of property, objectification of women and toxic masculinity. In view of this, they argue change is required. In addition to demands for the proper implementation of the Istanbul Convention (2022: 97), the ZIF primarily and consciously addresses political actors,

*".../ so that this topic [prevention of femi(ni)cides] becomes much more present at the legislative level /.../, so that we apply the laws that we have, so that politicians legislate in court or tighten those that are already there, to really raise awareness in society."*

(Participant 2, 2022: 21, translated by researcher)

The quote suggests that it is the responsibility of political actors that the prevention of femi(ni)cides is also taken seriously in legal practice. Participant 2 argues that their role is to ensure that existing laws are applied correctly and that laws are amended and strengthened where necessary to provide equal legal protection for all.

Participant 4 adds a new aspect to the prevention of femi(ni)cides in legislation. She suggests the implementation of further training exercises for all actors in law enforcement agencies including lawyers and judges. These exercises would work towards identifying patterns of early warning signs, threats and violence as an effective means of successful prevention (2022: 20). She explains that such training courses are intended to inform participants and raise awareness in order to better recognize and react to the causes and structures of gender-specific violence in a swift and efficient manner.

## Conclusion

Through the use of a theoretical framework based on the framing process approach and the concept of patriarchy, this thesis conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews to answer the following research questions:

- How do activists understand the current framing of femi(ni)cide in society and what would in their view be required to better address the issue?
- How do activists experience the existing institutional framework in relation to femi(ni)cide prevention in Germany?

The participants in the study consisted of four members from four different German-based activist organizations working against violence against women and girls, including femi(ni)cides. Based on the theoretical framework, the analysis of the study was twofold.

Initially, the participants identified several problems in dealing with and shaping the topic of femi(ni)cide in Germany. A lack of regard for the systemic background of femi(ni)cide was identified as an overarching problem. A major consequence of this is the absence of official use of the term in Germany. This problem can be analysed at different institutional levels such as legislation and law enforcement, government and media. The diagnostic framing of the participants indicated that patriarchal thought patterns are deeply rooted in the interpretation and application of the applicable law in Germany with regard to the sentencing of perpetrators of femi(ni)cides. This includes patriarchal property construction, objectification of women and toxic masculinity. Furthermore, they discerned that political actors show no will to combat the issue in the German political sphere. They do not recognize the term femi(ni)cide and implement insufficient preventative measures accordingly. The understanding and framing of many individual cases reveals that underlying patriarchal structures are not perceived as the main reason or the main problem by relevant institutional actors. In addition, they reference regular instances of problematic framing in the media. This occurs through the media's choice of words as well as their ignorance of the underlying patriarchal structures in which femi(ni)cide is embedded.

Subsequently, the problems found during diagnostic framing in relation to the framing of femi(ni)cides in German society were linked to the demands and suggestions of the interviewees and their use of various activism methods. Building on their dissatisfaction and incomprehension regarding the Federal Government's work on prevention of femi(ni)cides, all interviewees had propositions for more adequate measures of action. Due to the lack of recognition of the term femi(ni)cide, the participants raise awareness of political actors and call on the Federal Government to recognise and name the crime. They voice the need for a official Germany-wide database of femi(ni)cides, for further understanding of femi(ni)cides and potentially sustainable preventive strategies. The overarching goal is to prevent femi(ni)cides by increasing the presence of the topic in society and in legislation. A major aspect of achieving



this goal is raising awareness in society and institutions, which can be done using various activist methods, such as writing open letters, organizing or participating in action days and protests, taking up public space, embracing solidarity and using the networks for support.

In the present work, it became clear that the topic of femi(ni)cides in Germany, embedded in patriarchal structures, is still a marginal topic that hardly receives the necessary attention in society and in politics. The attention and the burden of drawing attention to this lies with women and those potentially affected and has hardly reached the hurdle to a socially relevant overall topic. The interviewees fight with their respective methods to make the structural dimension of violence in gender relations and the killing of women as the culmination of it visible to society as a whole. In order to prevent femi(ni)cides, societies must deal with all areas of patriarchal structures and power inequalities and ultimately detach cultural, social and legal norms from them. In order for a time, when women no longer have to fear for their lives and in which all structures of society are anchored in values of equality, the fight against patriarchy must continue.

Due to the limited scope of my thesis, certain topics that emerged in the interviews were left out as a matter of relevance. I would like to briefly mention them here as they are connected to the debate and could lead to further research investigations:

- The Federal Government has financial resources that flow into the prevention of femi(ni)cides in Latin America, while at the same time the topic is not recognized as such in Germany and funds for German organisations and projects working within the anti-violence field are reduced.
- There is a lack of intersectionality in activist movements. While the awareness about that is present, the question has been raised how German movements can be more inclusive and integrative.
- The exclusion of trans people from all areas of society is highly relevant. They are not visible enough in their experiences, their work and/or their activism. How can this be addressed and changed, especially considering that they are disproportionately affected by (deadly) violence?
- Especially with regard to the double burden in times of COVID-19, investigations into the mental and emotional burden of activists mobilizing against with femi(ni)cides and the consequences on the movement would be interesting.

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## Appendix: Interview Guide

- (1) Wann haben Sie/hast du zum ersten Mal vom Konzept Femi(ni)zid gehört? *When was the first time you heard of the concept of femicide?*
- (2) Wie engagieren Sie/engagierst du dich gegen Femi(ni)zid? *How do you engage against femicide?*
  - (a) Wann haben Sie/hast du damit angefangen? *For how long have you been involved?*
- (3) Was sind die Ziele von Ihnen/dir und Ihrer/deiner Organisation? *What are the objectives of you and your group?*
- (4) Was sind die Strategien oder konkreten Formen von Aktivismus/Widerstand, die Sie/du und Ihre/deine Organisation anwenden um die Ziele zu erreichen? *What are the strategies/concrete forms of activism you or your organization adopt in achieving the objectives?*
  - (a) Wen adressiert ihr und wieso? *Who is/are your recipient(s) and why?*
- (5) Wie würden Sie/würdest du den Einfluss Ihrer/ deiner Organisation auf die allgemeine Situation/auf die Prävention von Femi(ni)ziden in Deutschland beschreiben? *How would you describe the impact of your group/organization on preventing femicide in Germany?*
  - (a) Können Sie/Kannst du Beispiele für Erfolge nennen? *Can you indicate any examples of achievements?*
- (6) Vor welchen Herausforderungen steht Aktivismus gegen Femi(ni)zide in Deutschland? *What kind of challenges does activism against femi(ni)cide in Germany face in particular?*
- (7) Wie würden Sie/würdest du sagen hat sich (Ihr/dein) Aktivismus (Arbeit) seit Covid-19 verändert? *How would you say (your) activism has changed since Covid-19?*
- (8) Wie würden Sie/würdest du die aktuelle allgemeine Situation bezüglich Femi(ni)ziden in Deutschland beschreiben? *How would you describe the general situation regarding femicides in Germany today?*
- (9) Wie beurteilen Sie/beurteilst du die Arbeit der Bundesregierung zum Thema Femi(ni)zide? *How do you assess the work of the federal government with regard to femicide?*
  - (a) Für wie erfolgreich halten Sie/hälst du die Umsetzung der Istanbul Konvention? *How successful do you think the implementation of the Istanbul Convention has been?*
  - (b) Wie beurteilen Sie/beurteilst du den Koalitionsvertrag der neuen Bundesregierung zur Bekämpfung von Gewalt gegen Frauen? *What is your opinion on the new government's coalition agreement in terms of combating violence against women?*
- (10) Welche Art von staatlicher Unterstützung wäre nötig, um Femi(ni)zide in Deutschland zu verhindern? *What kind of support would be needed from the government to prevent femicides in Germany?*

- (11) Welche Erfahrungen haben Sie/hast du bei Ihrer/deiner Arbeit oder Engagement mit der Regierung gemacht? *What have your experiences in your work/engagement been with the government?*
- (12) Wie würden Sie/würdest du die Medien und ihre generelle Rolle/Annäherung an das Thema Femi(ni)zid in Deutschland beschreiben? *How would you describe the media and its general role/approach to the issue of femicide in Germany?*
- (13) Wie sehen Sie/siehst du Aktivismus in Deutschland im Vergleich zu anderen Ländern und sozialen Bewegungen gegen Femi(ni)zide? *How do you see activism in Germany in comparison to other countries and movements against femicides?*
- (14) Gibt es noch etwas, das ich Sie/dich noch nicht gefragt habe, das Ihnen/dir aber im Zusammenhang mit dem Thema persönlich wichtig ist? *Is there anything else that I haven't asked you yet, but in connection to the topic is of importance to you personally?*