



Conceptualising the Phenomenon of Femicide as an Embodiment of Symbolic Violence

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Abstract

The following paper intends to employ and consider Pierre Bourdieu's notion of Symbolic Violence as a theoretical avenue to examine and conceptualise the phenomenon of femicide. The primary goal here is to conduct a philosophical investigation into the gender-biased practice of femicide in order to eventually construct and exhibit the affinity between the generally deemed elementary-physical and the complementary-symbolic facet of this category of violence. To be precise, by categorically alluding to Bourdieu's notion of habitus and field, the paper attempts to demonstrate how the issue of femicide is substantially embedded in the symbolic schema. I centrally argue for the importance of re-conceptualising femicide as a continuum of symbolic form of violence in order to demonstrate that femicide does not solely necessitate and imply the perceptible physical act of the killing of females, rather, it also involves symbolic connotations. I recognise and expostulate that these symbolic connotations denote the prevalence of unfair and unjust state of affairs and the fact that physical violence is an embodied manifestation of these mundane state of affairs. Towards the end, I show that if we comprehend femicide in view of both the elementary-physical and the

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complementary-symbolic constituents, we eventually ensue an analogue between them, thereby breaking the physical-symbolic dichotomy.

Two fundamental questions that shall be addressed here are- "how can we re-conceptualise femicide by giving thematic consideration to the category of symbolic violence?" and secondly, "what does this re-conceptualisation channel about the long-established physical-symbolic dichotomy with regards to the phenomenon of femicide?"

Keywords: Femicide, Symbolic Violence, Physical Violence, Habitus, Field, Qualitative Research Methodology

1. Introduction

It is distinctly observable that the practice of femicide is a considerably widespread and sustained problem. However, what makes this practice prejudiced and vicious is the fact that it denotes "the misogynous killing of women by men, is a form of sexual violence" (Radford & Russell, 1992, p. 3). The very vindication that femicide signifies a one-sided practice wherein females are murdered simply because of the fact that they are female justifies the sexist character of the practice. These sexist murders that are radically perpetrated against the female sex foreground two essential elements that are associated with the practice of femicide; first, that it is a manifestation of sexist oppression of females, and second, that it mirrors patriarchal oppression of girls and women.

In light of the above-mentioned themes of sexism and patriarchy, Dianna Russell, expressly writes about this facet of femicide by making reference to varying types of femicides:

There is a continuum of femicides ranging from one-on-one sexist murders, e.g., a man strangling his wife because she intends to leave him; to one or more males killing a group of women for, say, refusing to wear the correct attire in public; to the other end of the continuum, for example, mass femicides such as when preference for male children results in the killing, or death from neglect, of millions of female babies and girls, as in India and China (Russell, 2011, p. 4).

Having pronounced this, it could be forthwith averred that the practice of femicide could be conceptualised mindful of two integrant themes, namely, patriarchy and sexism. In this milieu, it could further be deduced that even though femicide is essentially a sub-type of perceptible physical form of gender-based violence, however, after discerning the conceptual interrelation between femicide, sexism and patriarchy, we may further contend that femicide highlights intrinsic structural flaws, hence, it could be understood as an embodiment of symbolic* form of gender-based violence. In a nutshell, this description of femicide gives consideration to the compositional social and political nuances of the practice. These inbuilt socio-political undertones seem to co-exist with the physical strand of femicide. It can be promptly said that even though femicide is a perceptible sub-type of physical violence, it can also be identified with certain inherent and imperceptible symbolic connotations.

In this background, this paper intends to employ Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence in order to determine an affinity between the elementally physical strand of femicide and the symbolic messages it suggests. Bourdieu (1979, 1991, 2001) majorly argues that symbolic violence is an invisible form of violence which frames, validates and sustains various other visible and perceptible forms of violence. He firmly interprets the notion of symbolic violence in view of concepts like habitus and fields. Simply put, Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence serves as a foundation and point of departure for other forms of normative violence. Additionally, the fundamental idea behind introducing the notion of symbolic violence was to demonstrate the interplay between real-life violent practices and socio-political themes such as power, control, and domination.

In addition, developing on Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence, Beate Krais (1993), in her article named "Gender and Symbolic Violence: Female Oppression in the Light of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Practice", contends that physical violence can be constructively comprehended by taking note of the schema of symbolism. According to her, physical violence refers to an elementary mode of violence and symbolic violence stands for the complementary mode of violence. In a section dedicated to the

analysis of the interrelation between the concept of habitus and symbolic domination, she precisely writes: “every mode of domination, even if it uses physical violence, presupposes a doxic order shared by the dominated and the dominants” (Krais, 1993, p.169). The notion of doxic order here is founded on the Greek philosophical concept: *doxa*†. In this light, the term doxic alludes to the idea of relating to any popular belief/ opinion and the way this exerts influence on the intellectual processes thereby fostering internalisation. Simply put, a doxic order refers to a state/situation in which there is harmony between the subjective and the objective aspect of a particular habitus. Categorically, Krais mainly highlights the parallelism between the way a doxic order is internalised by agents and how this internalisation determines and structures their actions in a particular milieu. Also, as far as the gendered aspect of doxic orders is concerned, Krais maintains that doxic orders then are preserved by the active presence of gendered habitus.

Mindful of the above-presented conceptualisation of symbolic violence, the following paper intends to present a philosophical analysis of the phenomenon of femicide. It will be argued that when studied along with the schema of the symbolic, we shall be able to cognise the gendered practice of femicide as a more coherent form of domination. The central question that shall be addressed here is: “how can we employ Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence as an effective avenue and a valuable tool for estimating the functioning of femicide in view of subsisting institutional discourses that actuate such forms of physical violence?” In order to answer this question, the paper shall be divided into three sections. The first section briefly examines the practice of femicide with specific attention to the insights of feminist thinkers, Jill Radford and Diana Russell (1992). Moving ahead, in the next segment, I shall engage in a conceptual analysis of Bourdieu’s account of symbolic violence. Accurately, the primary goal here is to undertake the symbolic schema as a conceptual and analytical tool for anticipating the phenomenon of femicide. I conclude by examining two cardinal concepts that were developed by Bourdieu, namely, habitus and fields. By making an allusion to these two concepts, I intend to theoretically evince the proposed affinity between the physical aspect of femicide and the

lodged symbolic aspect of it. It will be eventually capitulated that femicide indicates and involves indubitable symbolic nuances; hidden meanings that echo and accentuate the ingrained and silent interactions between power, control and domination.

2. Assessing the Practice of Femicide: Taking an Analytical Approach

The evolution of the word femicide transpired in the 1970s. As far as its official introduction is concerned, feminist theorists, Jill Radford and Diana Russell (1992) had formally defined this concept as “the misogynous killing of women by men, is a form of sexual violence” (Radford & Russell, 1992, p. 3). In their understanding, femicide is a product of inherent differences between the lives and lived experiences of men and women in a particular social set-up. In general terms, Radford & Russell bracket the concept of femicide with socio-political themes such as power relations, gender relations, control and social domination. In one of the chapters of their book titled, “Femicide: Sexist Terrorism Against Women”, Russell and Caputi identify and furthermore define femicide as a form of anti-female terrorism. According to them:

Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of anti-female terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery (particularly in prostitution), incestuous and extra familial child, sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment (on the phone, in the streets, at the office and in the classroom), genital mutilation (clitoridectomies, excision, infibulations), unnecessary gynaecological operations (gratuitous hysterectomies), forced heterosexuality, forced sterilisation, forced motherhood (by criminalising contraception and abortion), psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, cosmetic surgery, and other mutilations in the name of beautification. Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides (Radford & Russell, 1992, p. 15).

The above stated instances also highlight the different manifestations of femicide. Through these instances, we may also

discern that the phenomenon of femicide involves a range of closeted and covert killings of women. One instance of covert femicide could be the killing of pregnant women due to the attempts made by husbands to have sexual intercourse with them during their pregnancy. Additionally, since it is clear from the excerpt that the essence of femicide is related to male domination and female subordination, we may also maintain that femicide curtly specifies ingrained structural issues and inadequacies. Simply put, at a foundational level, femicide could be understood as a product of sexism, prejudiced state of affairs, gender system, misogyny and patriarchy, and the barbaric acts and behaviours that are executed by men mainly document and showcase these structural flaws.

From here on, let us now consider two central concepts that Radford & Russell associate with the phenomenon of femicide that would help us arrive at a comprehensive and exhaustive understanding of the phenomenon. I recognise and categorise these concepts as:

3. Patriarchy

3.1. Sexism

I shall now reflect on each of the mentioned concepts intricately.

3.1.a. Patriarchy

Radford & Russell underline the view that the phenomenon of femicide resonates with patriarchal ideals. In their words: “while the concept of femicide is new, the phenomenon it describes is as old as patriarchy itself” (Radford & Russell, 1993, p. 25). According to them, patriarchy could be employed as one of the constitutive concepts associated with the practice of femicide. Just like patriarchy, femicide could also be investigated as a highly socio-political phenomenon. This means that femicide draws attention to a larger societal issue of male supremacy, domination and command over the very existence of women. In addition, when examined as a form of gender-based violence, femicide and its conceptual interrelation with the system of patriarchy highlight men’s tendency to stimulate and safeguard social relations of

patriarchy§ Furthermore, in their view, the practice of femicide is also structured and shaped by patriarchal principles. In my view, this exposition implies two points; first, that patriarchy could be scrutinised as one of the sub-concepts that defines the practice of femicide and second, that femicide could be recognised as a problem associated with patriarchy wherein women are socially controlled by men.

Marianne Hester (1993) considers the case of witch-craze in the context of 17th century England. Her illustration furnishes support to the argument that femicide transpires as an upshot of patriarchal lineage and foundation. In order to offer an explanation to the interconnection between the phenomenon of femicide and the way such a practice is structured by a patriarchal system, Hester engages in an in-depth grasp of the practice of witch-craze. She writes: “It is my contention that the witch-craze cannot be adequately explained without focussing specifically on the problem of why primarily women were affected, because I believe the craze was-however unconsciously-an attempt at maintaining and restoring male supremacy” (Hester, 1989, p. 27). It is indicated here that the killing of women under the practice of witch-craze spotlights entrenched socio-historical and socio-cultural soul and substance. Even though femicide is a conscious physical act, even so, it presupposes inherent unconscious attempts that fabricate femicide. To be specific, what I gather is that according to Hester, a feminist analysis of this form of femicide communicates two messages about the patriarchal ascent of such a practice. The two messages are: first, femicide in the form of witch-craze is a product of patriarchal proclivity because through this practice, male supremacy is actualised and institutionalised; and second, witch-craze and the killing of women due to this custom extends and asserts women’s inferiority and their social status as being a transactional object**

Moving ahead, there is another facet of patriarchy and its influence on the practice of femicide which is related to the idea of relationality. By employing the notion of relationality, I intend to shed light on the killing of girls/women in their homes and by people who they are related with. This facet of femicide calls attention to the fact that violence occurs even in private; in an

intimate set up and at home. In their book, Radford & Russell have described home as the most lethal and baneful place for women. They write:

It is ironic that the place where women should expect to feel safest- their own home-is the place where they are least safe from lethal sexual violence when they share that home with a man. Also ironic is the fact that it is those men whom women are encouraged to trust and look to for love and protection who pose the greatest risk, be they husbands, lovers or former husbands or lovers (Radford & Russell, 1992, p. 77).

In general terms, this form of femicide could be termed as intimate femicide. For instance, if we refer to cases of dowry deaths which get manifested within a marriage set-up, such deaths could serve as one of the examples of intimate femicide. "Dowry has been in the news for instigating dowry deaths among married women in connection with the groom and his family attempting to extort higher dowry payments, and dowry deaths are likely to be the tip of an iceberg of domestic violence against women" (Bhalotra et al., 2019, p. 3). Talking specifically of the Indian context, we are well acquainted with the fact that acts of dowry giving and receiving are considered to be a normal socio-cultural custom.†† However, what makes this trade damaging and menacing is the over-demanding and insatiable nature of the bridegroom and his family.

Adding to this apprehension, Indian researcher, Anshu Nangia (1997) in her article, "The Tragedy of Bride Burning in India", evaluates the case of bride burning in India as a gendered practice by addressing and evincing a patriarchal explanation of the practice. She writes: "dowry reflects the price that the bride's parents must pay to the bridegroom's family to maintain the woman. The giving and taking of dowry reflect patriarchal values and subjugates women" (Nangia, 1997, p. 647). The persistence of dowry indicates the acutely immersed patriarchal ideology that guides the society and its operations.

The question which surfaces in this background is, 'how can we assert that dowry deaths are associated with the system of patriarchy?' A swift answer to this question would be that just like external or public manifestation of patriarchal ideals encouraged

practices of femicide that transpire and echo male dominance (as discussed in the case of witch-craze), in a similar tune, the expression of femicide practices in a private/ intimate set-up (as discussed in the case of dowry deaths) exhibit male dominance and female subordination. When we try to understand events of dowry-related femicide in view of the patriarchal system, we realise that this form of macro-level patriarchal violence exemplifies ideological defects and deficiencies. Ideological defects here suggest that the problem structurally lies with unfair and partisan beliefs that model and support male supremacy and female subjection. Nangia writes about this aspect of dowry-related femicide which highlights female subjugation of women as independent agents: "Dowry and dowry violence are as much an outgrowth of consumer greed and a decline in moral values as they are a reflection of a patriarchal society that discourages the education and economic self-sufficiency of women" (Nangia, 1997, p. 692).

Dowry-related violence, thus, could be read and explored as an instance of not merely an embodiment of physical violence but also evinces inherent symbolic nuances. These symbolic nuances connote that femicide is an occasion of an established social frame of mind that women are inferior to men and they must respect the design of male supremacy. Moreover, as far as men are concerned, they tend to dissipate this social pattern which I term as ideological patriarchy and further stage it in the form of gender-related violent crimes. Hence, in a nutshell, this interplay between male domination and female subordination in the case of femicide underlines the patriarchal essence of the practice. Femicide corresponds with the theme of ideological patriarchy.

3.1.b. Sexism

It is clear by now that femicide demonstrates uneven power relations and is an exposition of male lineage. It is a product of patriarchy; a social system that denotes male supremacy where men are coached to think about themselves as powerful. The out-turn of this ideology is that men develop a propensity to exploit, abuse, and maltreat women. In addition to this premise, femicide can also be understood by alluding to the ideology of

sexism. Correspondingly, Caputi & Russell (1992) aver that femicide is a manifestation of “anti-female terror” (Caputi & Russell, 1992, p. 15).

In this background, let us now consider the concept of sexism as a second avenue for constructing a potential analytic vocabulary of the phenomenon of femicide. As discerned earlier, patriarchy evinced an impression of gender-based discrimination corresponding to a highly male-centred and male-governed social structure, differing from it, sexism explicates discrimination on the basis of sex; it revolves around certain sexist mental attitudes and viewpoints. In this backdrop, we must now explicitly deliberate over the inter-connection between the phenomenon of femicide and the theory of sexism.

In the article, “From Misogyny to Murder: Everyday Sexism and Femicide in a Cross-Cultural Context”, Gilda Rodriguez clarifies the link between femicide and sexism. I quote her: “femicide is not only related to other forms of explicit violence against women but also to everyday acts of misogyny that contribute to the creation of a culture of sexism and devalorization of women and their lives” (Rodriguez, 2010, p. 16). In Rodriguez’s view, femicide is rooted in sexism and sexist attitudes because it is perceived that femicide is a form of anti-female violence wherein the act of killing is associated with and motivated by a feeling of discrimination on the basis of sex. However, I would like to add in here that the practice of femicide could be labelled as a sexist exercise clearly because we observe that the culprits and executioners of such murders are mainly male. Specifically, in this case, victims (who are mostly female) are targeted by their sex by the culprits (who are mainly male). This bias demonstrates the spirit and mood of sexism within a society. It bespeaks the stature of femicide as a discriminatory practice based on sex and also spotlights prevalent sexist culture.

In order to substantiate this position, let us make a momentary reference to the case of female foeticide and infanticide. Russell describes female foeticide as a sexist practice. In one of her recent articles, she extensively re-examines and re-defines femicide by touching upon the practice of female foeticide. She writes:

After making minor changes in my definition of femicide over the years, I finally define it as simple as “the killing of females by males because they are female.” I repeat this definition: “the killing of females by males because they are female.” I use the term “female” instead of “women” to emphasise that my definition includes baby girls and older girls. However, the term femicide does not include the increasingly widespread practice of aborting female foetuses, particularly in India and China. The correct term for this sexist practice is female foeticide (Russell, 2011).‡‡

In this context, when Russell shifts focus from the category of gender (woman/women) to the category of sex (female), she concomitantly plans to collect all the attention towards the issue of sexism and to further delineate this form of femicide as a sexist practice. The relation between sexism and female foeticide gives utterance to the fact that in that particular set-up, more preference is given to a male child than a female child. This phenomenon also effectively contributes to gender-related inequalities and disparities but originally, it is launched and governed by ideological sexism.

Similar to female foeticide, there is another practice called female infanticide that could be considered as a sexist estimation of femicide. In the context of India, it is said that:

In most parts of the country, a woman is still considered a burdensome appendage. She is an economic drain. She must be exploited or dispensed with as a non-person. Because she crushes her family with marriage and dowry expenses she must be raised-from childhood-in financial and physical neglect. Her birth, in many parts of the country is greeted with silence, even sorrow. A boy arrives to the sound of joyous conch shells. Discrimination begins at birth (S. H. Venkatramanki, in Russell & Radford, 1992, p.125).

Venkatramani (1993) in his research, noted that the plight of Indian girls in relation to the practice of female infanticide highlights sex-based discrimination in the Indian society. According to him, the desire to have a male child and overall male bias and obsession that exists in the society could be regarded as one of the primary causes for the situation of female infanticide. After an intricate reading of Venkatramani’s work, it is perceived that such killing of

daughters is indeed an instance and token of a sexist sentiment and demeanour. It is a sexist practice simply because it is based on giving value to one sex, while devaluing and debasing the other.

In this milieu, we may propound that with reference to instances of female foeticide and female infanticide, we discern the role of sexism towards the stimulation of the phenomenon of femicide. Additionally, I would like to underline here that by considering the idea of sexism as one of the constitutive concepts that would help us construe a comprehensive understanding of femicide, I intend to express and argue that this proposition relates to the idea that femicide could also be comprehended as a sex-biased and sex-prejudiced occurrence, meaning that it conveys ingrained blemishes. Thus, femicide could be recognised and anticipated as a form of sexist killing. Put in a nutshell, femicide could be generally described as an intentional killing of a girl or woman that is customarily perpetrated by men (also by other acquaintances and family members or strangers in some contexts), consequentially, highlighting the suggested unequal and unfair gender relations and male supremacy.

4. On the Affinity between Bourdieu's Notion of Symbolic Violence and the Phenomenon of Femicide

It is clear by now that femicide is a sub-type of physical violence which is also associated with certain inherent structural and systemic undertones. Let me pose a question now- 'can we contend and aver that femicide could be read along with Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence?' In this pneuma, the central question that shall be regarded here is, 'can we discern an affinity between the elementally physical strand of femicide and the symbolic element inherently attached to it?'

Before directly regarding this question, let me begin this section by exploring the notion of symbolic violence. The idea of symbolic violence was advanced by French Sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu (1979, 1991, 2001), the idea of symbolic violence could be employed as one of the conceptual threads to understand male domination and supremacy in a particular society. In his words, symbolic violence is "a gentle violence,

imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 1-2). In plain terms, the notion of symbolic violence was introduced and expanded upon by Bourdieu in order to enhance subsisting thoughts on the interplay between power, control and domination and the role these factors play in everyday life towards the materialisation of violent practices. When we view femicide in view of girl’s/women’s status as victims of particular crimes, we recognise that this form of victimisation is not merely restricted to direct physical domination and subordination of girls and women, but it also informs us about deep-rooted symbolic content of such despotic enterprises and acts.

Katie Smith (2007) in her article, “Pierre Bourdieu-Challenging Symbolic Violence and the Naturalisation of Power Relations” writes about the idea of symbolic violence that:

At the core of Bourdieu’s politics is the emotive notion of symbolic violence. This is a similar concept to the Marxist idea of ‘false consciousness’, whereby people internalise the discourses of the dominant, meaning that the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable and even natural (Smith, 2007, p. 2).

In this setting, I would now like to momentarily touch on Marx’s position on the notion of false consciousness§§ in order to further concertise our understanding of Bourdieu’s stance on the theme of symbolic violence. For Marx, false consciousness represents the basic fact that the society and the social structure is ideologically unequal and prejudiced.*** False consciousness entails the idea of sustaining invalid and flawed beliefs about oneself (mainly maintained by the disadvantaged members of the society like the minority class). It is a thorough misperception and misinterpretation of social relations in a particular social set-up. In Marx’s view, these beliefs and viewpoints contribute towards the establishment of the dichotomy of individual-society and the way we further study social domination. As far as theoretical resonances between Bourdieu and Marx’s positions are concerned, it is essential to note that even though several thinkers and scholars do nourish and concretise a sense of similitude between the theories of

social practice both the thinkers advocate, however, when read exhaustively, Bourdieu peculiarly deviates from Marx's exposition on the relation between consciousness, social domination, and human action. In particular, Bourdieu criticises Marx's standpoint because of one chief reason, that Marx over-emphasises the role of economic factors while assessing social life. He further argues that by over-emphasising the value of economic and material strands, Marx also distinctly abandons the value of non-material factors. The following passage gives an illumination on Bourdieu's critical assessment and revision of Marx's version of social theory:

The only way to escape from the ethnocentric naiveties of economism, without falling into populist in full what economism does only partially, and to extend economic calculation to all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 177-178).

By offering a critical estimation of Marx's theory, Bourdieu makes an attempt to institute his primary claim that material and economic calculation must also include non-material or symbolic elements. In addition, Bourdieu tries to append and polish Marx's viewpoint by categorically engaging in a two-fold claim about the interaction between the category of consciousness, action, and the phenomenon of social domination. Bourdieu's two-fold claim could be best understood by reflecting on two notions that he regards throughout his groundwork. The two notions are: first, the theme of habitus (practical sense or dispositions)††† and second, field (specific state of affairs in which habitus operates; the social space). According to him, social classification and the phenomenon of domination could be envisioned by focusing on these two themes in an inter-linked manner. Thus, roundly, Bourdieu underlines the function of habitus (rather, embodied aspect of habitus) and the arena of field (social space) in understanding social domination and this is his illustration of the idea of symbolic power/violence. An excerpt would clearly explain these two concepts:

A field consists of a set of objectives, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of

perception, appreciation, and action (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16).

Mindful of the value of habitus and field in Bourdieu's theory, let us now review the idea of symbolic violence in order to further interpret its association with the practice of femicide. As far as the themes of habitus and field are concerned, according to Bourdieu, these themes serve as explanatory and supportive mechanisms for expounding the symbolic facet of other forms of violence. Habitus and field highlight the ingrained interactions between individuals, institutions and the norms they have raised.

As far as the practice of femicide is concerned, let us see whether we can employ Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence as a useful and valuable tool to analyse and understand power relations that operate in the practice of femicide. In the previous section, we had examined how socialisation and acculturation fabricate the phenomenon of femicide with special emphasis on the order of patriarchy and the system of sexism. In my view, these two themes could be known as embodiments of habitus and field. I aver this simply because patriarchy and sexism are not direct, instinctive or spontaneous operations, instead, are determined by habitus (conditionings) in particular field (social space/context). For instance, when we previously addressed the instance of dowry-related bride burning, we detected how this practice could be interpreted as a legacy of deeply-entrenched patriarchal ideals. Analogously, when read in company with Bourdieu's notion of habitus and field, one can pointedly propound that dowry-related bride burning is a socially ingrained disposition (habitus) in a particular social set-up or context (field). To be specific, in the case of dowry-related killings, we observe a sense of unconscious domination and submission. About this aspect of dowry-related femicide, Govind Kelkar, in his article, "Women and Structural Violence in India" has explicitly written that:

Women marry over long distances and move out of their parental homes to the households of their husbands. Young women are advised that once married they should leave the husband's houses only after death and that they should bear all pain and humiliation. In order to adjust in the new family, a daughter-in-law has to be on her best behaviour at all times. She must be submissive and

obedient to her in-laws and demonstrate selflessness about her possessions (Govind Kelkar, in Russell & Radford, 1992, p.119).

According to Kelkar, dowry-related violence fundamentally has a symbolic relevance. Moreover, this symbolic aspect of dowry-related femicide could be conjectured in view of Bourdieu's notion of habitus simply because a married woman's submissiveness, dutifulness and obedience is related to mental habituation; a habitual property that are developed as a product of the internalisation of specific socio-cultural institutions. As far as the role of the man in a marriage set-up is concerned, their dominance, supremacy and authority also imitate a particular habitual property; a property that is learned and acquired in the background of a particular socio-cultural field. Concisely put, the inscription of dominant socio-cultural ideas and conditions and the phenomenon of habituation that they unconsciously stimulate consequentially engender and nutrify dowry-related femicide. When there is an agreement and conformity to the prevalent status quo, violent practices like bride burning and other forms of dowry-related bride killings get actualised. Thus, the categories of habitus and field would help us analytically comprehend the practice of dowry-related femicide essentially because this conceptual aid further guides us to understand how such violent practices are created, manifested and sustained. The production and reproduction of certain habits in particular fields generate violent practices (bride killing in this context). Therefore, the instance of dowry-related femicide is not merely an evident and visible physical manifestation of violence against women, instead, it could also be recognised and reasoned as an outspring of symbolic violence.

Besides, in the article, "Research on violence against women. A sociological perspective", feminist scholar, Angela Maria Toffanin writes that "Symbolic violence coexists with other forms of violence, and because it sustains them, other patterns of violence are legitimized" (Toffanin, 2012, p. 23). In this particular article, Toffanin has made fresh attempts to review and discern the role of Bourdieu's concept of habitus and field (symbolic violence, largely) in understanding the occurrence of physical violence against women. She argues that when read along with Bourdieu's

conception of habitus and field, various forms of violence against women could be conceived as a normal or normalised socio-cultural phenomenon. This sense of normality implies and necessitates the view that violence against women rests on specific socio-structural patterns; patterns that are devised to be normal order of things. Furthermore, if we make a re-reference to the above-discussed case of dowry-related femicide, we would realise that the discussed submissiveness of women as brides and the dominance of men as grooms underlines this affair of normality. Meaning that in a particular marriage set-up, the customary normalised social order which is a manifestation of unequal power relations between genders and exhibits the prevalence of inequality within a social system could be regarded as the genesis of such primitive violent practices.

In this background, talking precisely of the practice of femicide and whether it could be regarded and learned as a symbolic construction, I would swiftly like to propound that by considering Bourdieu's framework of symbolic violence with special emphasis on the idea of habitus and field, we shall be able to unwrap inherent symbolic patterns and understand the phenomenon of femicide as not merely a physical manifestation of gender-based violence, but also as an expression of symbolic violence.### The reason for doing this in my view is that femicide is fundamentally a multifactorial event. It is not merely a physical manifestation of violence; it has structural and symbolic implications. The phenomenon of femicide could be effectively elucidated by taking into account subconscious mechanisms (habitus) and the platform that carries and nourishes such habitual conditions (fields).

5. Femicide Re-Considered: Breaking the Dichotomy between Physical and Symbolic Violence?

In the first segment, we had discovered how themes such as Patriarchy and Sexism could be recognised as analytical and elucidatory tools through which one would be able to develop an exhaustive exposition of femicide as a feminist issue. Now, one might forthwith submit and speculate that these two socio-structural themes furnish us with a prompt vindication of the role of symbolism in stimulating the callous act of femicide. In my

opinion, by adjoining Bourdieu's standpoint on the symbolic schema with our previous delineation on Patriarchy and Sexism, we would be able to develop a detailed illustration of the way these systems are built and further pursued (i.e., under the influence of the concept of habitus and field). This is exactly what Bourdieu intended to do by introducing the perspective of symbolism, focusing on the idea of habitus and field, particularly. By considering the symbolic dimension of violence, Bourdieu wanted to exemplify the inter-relation between symbolic violence and physical violence. His exclusive focus on the symbolic schema primarily serves as an avenue to understand other forms of violence.

Toffanin writes about this aspect of Bourdieu's position:

Bourdieu (1998) uses symbolic violence as an analytical perspective to describe how differences are built, acted on and reproduced. This perspective considers not only the difference of power between women and men but also the mechanisms of production and reproduction of the practices involved in the re-negotiation of asymmetry. The socially legitimate patterns of identity and behaviour are social constructions, which are adopted as temporary representations, even though they seem natural and immutable (Toffanin, 2012, p. 23).

By highlighting this facet of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence, Toffanin mainly makes an attempt to substantiate Bourdieu's argument that domination in the form of physical violence or gender-related physical violence is deeply implanted in one's social situatedness and dispositions. The prevailing social pattern defines and fosters perceptible acts of gender-based physical violence. Perhaps, if we engage in the analysis of femicide typically as guided by misogynistic motivations, we shall be able to recognise an agreement between Radford & Russell's exposition of femicide and Toffanin's account of violence against women. Pointedly, what I am indicating here is that in actual fact, the effect and weight of social situatedness, everyday socio-cultural interactions and experiences contribute towards the fabrication of violent practices like femicide. These normalised invisible socio-cultural leverages legitimise the visible and perceptible practice of femicide. Toffanin, states in this regard: "Symbolic

violence coexists with other forms of violence, and because it sustains them, other patterns of violence are legitimized" (Toffanin, 2012, p. 23). Thus, simply placed, femicide is essentially a physical manifestation of symbolic violence; it is embedded in symbolic violence. Moreover, the phenomenon of femicide also represents and specifies a symbolic vision of the overall social order.

In order to further establish my point about the interplay between physical and symbolic violence, I would like to make a momentary reference to Kraus (1993). Kraus writes:

But physical violence against women is not in itself the problem of a social theory dealing with the oppression of women; still less may it be seen as a key for theoretical understanding. Physical violence just draws attention to the fact that in the oppression of women elementary modes of domination play an important role and that, therefore, we have to look at the complementary mode of domination, too- namely, at symbolic violence (Kraus, 1993, p. 172).

Drawing on Bourdieu's exposition, what Kraus is trying to convey through this excerpt is that when examined acutely, every form of physical violence against women is sanctioned with symbolism. Furthermore, even though symbolic violence is invisible and covert, following Bourdieu's trail, Kraus suggests that symbolic schemes get corroborated through the body. §§§ In plain words, Kraus argues that physical and symbolic violence can operate simultaneously. They co-exist and this co-existence implies that the long-established dichotomy between physical and symbolic violence stands effaced.

Let me categorically take up the idea that symbolic violence gets corroborated through the body and examine this in light of the phenomenon of femicide. We may at once contend that when examined as an amalgamation of both physical and symbolic manifestation of male domination, the specific context of femicide could be understood as a two-dimensional practice, wherein previously stated Kraus' idea of elementary and complementary models of domination would simultaneously function. If we follow this postulation, this would indicate that femicide is not merely a physical and visible form of masculine domination (elementary

model of domination), instead, it also has symbolic implications (complementary model of domination).

For instance, if we re-refer to Radford and Russell's interpretation of femicide, we observe that they rudimentarily identify femicide as a continuum of systemic male domination and coercive sexual violence. According to them: "The concept of femicide extends itself beyond legal definitions of murder to include situations in which women are permitted to die as a result of misogynous attitudes or social practices." (Radford & Russell, 1992, p. 7). Hence, all the occasions of femicide ranging from intimate partner femicide, infanticide, foeticide, lesbicide, advertising femicide, other forms of honour killings, etcetera which they have explicitly addressed in their research could be constructively perceived as an expression and continuum of male domination and misogyny.

Just as Kraiss' framework orients towards a compound rendition of physical and symbolic violence, similarly, I profess that when we examine femicide as a type of gender-based physical violence, we also have to take receipt of the inherent symbolic values and nuances it carries. This rendition becomes coherent and justifiable if we re-consider Kraiss' stance on the elementary and complementary models of violence in this context. In this context, the elementary (physical) aspect of femicide entails the visible and perceptible aspect of femicide. Simultaneously, the complementary (symbolic) aspect of violence here refers to the role of the previously discussed problem of masculine domination that is legitimised as the regular or normal order of things. Now, if we review the complementary facet of femicide in view of Radford & Russell's argument that femicide must be scrutinised as a continuum of the prevalent systemic and structural status quo, this would further help us restore the formerly conserved opinion that the concepts of patriarchy and sexism could efficaciously serve as bracketed components of the above floated proposition of reading femicide as complementary (symbolic) violence.

Eventually, I suggest that if we allude to Kraiss' description of elementary and complementary models of gender-based violence, we shall be able to understand why and how femicide occurs and not merely address the question as to what it means. When scanned as a gender-specific expression of violence, femicide accentuates

deeper symbolic nuances such as the pre-eminence of patriarchy and sexism. In my view, if we appraise these deep-rooted symbolic nuances and address the parallelism between the physical and the symbolic strands of femicide, we would be in a position to treat the above broached shift from a physicalist, perceptible and discernible interpretation of femicide to a symbolic, invisible and non-material elucidation of it.

Therefore, I explicate Bourdieu's position on the notion of symbolic violence as a pathway to fathom the conceptual framework of understanding femicide as a symbolic (not solely physical as it is generally perceived) practice or phenomenon. Symbolism affects individuals, groups or communities in such an exorbitant way that certain ideas and values are internalised and considered to be legitimate (for instance, in this context wherein we have considered the role of male supremacy, we may understand this idea of internalisation in light of the dominance of men or masculine ideals in the society as a legitimate or authorised custom; something that is considered to be normal order of things). Hence, we can now reasonably postulate that by giving consideration to the scheme of symbolism, we shall be able to extend an explanation to the immanent dynamics and underpinnings of the phenomenon of femicide.

Lastly, I would like to conclude this section by making a crucial re-reference to Radford & Russell when they profess the value of re-conceptualising the event of femicide as a *continuum* of a sequence or series of particular subsisting socio-cultural values. In their view, by doing so, we would be qualified to reflect on the habitually ignored structural and systemic motivations that promote this form of violence. Additionally, according to them, the act of normalisation of power relations delineates this sequential and continuous estimation of the practice of femicide.

In their words:

This reconceptualisation is theoretically significant: it provides a broader perspective that more sensitively reflects the experiences of male violence as named and defined by women and children. Rather than forcing experience of sexual abuse into discrete legal categories, the concept of a continuum allows us to identify and

address a range of forced or coercive heterosexual experiences. The notion of a continuum further facilitates the analysis of male sexual violence as a form of control central to the maintenance of patriarchy (Radford & Russell, 1992, p. 4).

Hence, re-envisioning femicide as a consequence of the interaction between symbolic and physical dimensions of violence furnishes a three-fold end; firstly, it supplies an explanatory and evaluative backing to the practice, secondly, it exemplifies a sense of affinity between the symbolic and physicalist rendition of femicide, and lastly, it highlights the view that when we expound different forms of violence against women or gender-based violent practices (femicide in this context) in light of the proposed affinity between symbolism and physicalism, this would eventually break and overrule the long-established dichotomy between physical and symbolic strands of violence.

6. Conclusion

We began this paper with an analytical review of the constitutive concepts associated with the practice of femicide. The symbolic significations of these concepts were further examined on account of Sociologist persistent social Pierre Bourdieu's idea of symbolic violence with special emphasis on the themes of habitus and field. Eventually, we were able to document a sense of affinity between the symbolic and physical depiction of femicide. The fundamental purpose of documenting the practice of femicide in tune with Bourdieu's theory of symbolism was to attain a more robust and exhaustive understanding of femicide as a gender-biased and sexist phenomenon, not merely as an easy, unpremeditated and mechanical crime. Fundamentally, it has been established in the paper that Bourdieu's conception of symbolic violence could serve as a conceptual, visionary, and analytical mechanism for envisioning the practice of femicide. The symbolic schema helped us acknowledge and understand the implicit interplay between habitual dispositions and persistent social fields. Hence, I would like to submit by proclaiming that if we consider Bourdieu's scheme of symbolic violence as a conceptual bridge to further explain the encapsulation and expanse of themes of Patriarchy and Sexism that were initially scrutinised in relation to femicide, we

would observe a resonance between these explanatory themes and Bourdieu's idea symbolism or symbolic understanding of violence. Moreover, this theoretical engagement encompassed a sense of affinity between the physicalist strand of femicide and the symbolic aspect of it.

End Notes

* Doxa refers to some common belief or opinion. In the Greek philosophical tradition, doxa (belief/opinion) was contrasted with real knowledge. It also referred to probable knowledge, not certain knowledge.

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‡‡ Russell defines female feticide as a sexist practice as according to him, the practice is a manifestation and documentation of the largely prevalent sexist culture; a culture that discriminates on the basis of a person's sex with the purpose of maintaining male domination.

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