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THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSION OF FEMICIDE[1]

abstract

The aim of my paper is to provide an explanation of the surprising fact *that a decrease in sexism in liberal democracies has not resulted in a decrease in the number of killings of women (section 1). I argue that making sense of this empirical fact requires a conceptual clarification of femicide, a term whose definition is widely contested both at the juridical and the political level. Starting from the blurriness of the concept, I show that the root-causes of femicide do not lie in the mind of the perpetrator but in the way socio-economic and political settings are configurated (section 2). Drawing on Kate Manne's distinction between sexism and misogyny (section 3.1), I argue that femicide is the most extreme form of the latter and does not require necessarily the former. Although analytically distinct, both misogyny and sexism are two necessary conditions for the existence of patriarchy. The specific relation between the three variables explains why a more gender equal society does not produce immediately a less violent society for women (section 3.2). This in turn has a political implication, since it requires governments to disentangle strategies against gender-based violence from gender-equality schemes.*

keywords

femicide, sexism, misogyny, structural subordination, patriarchy, backlash

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I will offer a conceptual framework for understanding the nature of "femicide", a crime which has not decreased in liberal societies, despite the (slow) progress in gender-equality in socio-economic and political settings. This analytical task will fill the existing gap at the juridical level caused by the lack of a widely-accepted definition of femicide. I argue that the blurriness of the concept signals a poor understanding of the empirical phenomena which prevents current public policies to effectively reduce the occurrence of such a crime.

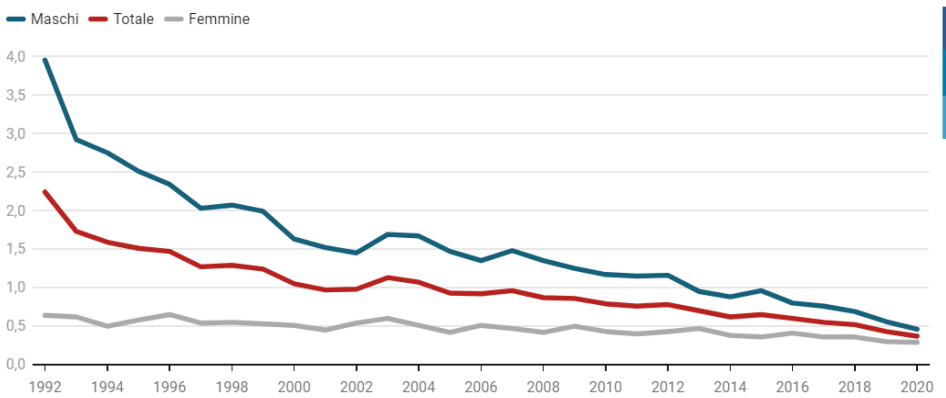
The case of Italy is paradigmatic. The Italian Code of Criminal Procedure does not include the term 'femicide' but refers to "domestic violence" and to "gender-based violence" (Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul femminicidio, 2022, pp. 45- 49). However, simply assuming that femicide is the most extreme form of gender-based violence is misleading, since the latter entails within its scope a broad range of acts which do not necessarily culminate with femicide. For instance, while domestic violence is a typical example of gender-based violence that may culminate in the killing of a woman, the same cannot be said for sex-based harassment, which is a form of sexism occurring in public spheres.

Moreover, the Italian Ministry of the Interior who collects data on violence against women does not use the label "feminicide" "femminicidio" (an Italian word that could be used as a translation of "femicide") but speaks instead of "voluntary murders committed" and "female victims". As a result, Italian governments have conceptualized the high rate of femicides in Italy as emergencies rather than as a structural problem. This has prevented Italian governments from understanding the root-causes of femicides and implementing comprehensive national strategies to reduce effectively the number of femicides (Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul femminicidio, Novembre 2022).

As the graph below illustrates, the number of femicides in Italy have remained constant over time, in contrast to the number of voluntary homicides which have decreased significantly. Nobody would contest that Italy has made progress on gender-equality schemes and on women empowerment since 1992.[1] Why is it so, then, that the number of victims of femicide have not decreased?

1 Since 2010 Italy has improved its Gender Equality Index by 14.9 points. The main driver of such an improvement concerns the domain of power (+37.5 points) (EIGE 2023).

Grafico 1 | Vittime di omicidio volontario per genere. Anni 1992-2020 (valori per 100.000 abitanti) (a)



(a) I tassi del presente grafico possono differire leggermente rispetto a quelli riportati altrove nel sito, in conseguenza dei diversi criteri di classificazione delle rilevazioni. Dati provvisori per il 2020.

Fonte: Istat, Indagine su decessi e cause di morte • Scaricare i dati • Incorpora • Scarica il pdf • Scarica il svg

This graph seems to suggest that whatever phenomena have affected the decrease for all and male homicides has had no impact on femicides. At the political level, this means that while Italian governments have been successful in making men safer, they have completely failed in making women safer. As a result, the distribution of the public good of safety in Italian society is unfair, since it advantages men who are now safer than in 1992 at the expense of women, who have remained as unsafe as they were in 1992.

By contextualising the previous graph in the socio-economic context of the Italian state, it seems plausible to hypothesise that the occurrence of femicide is not correlated (at least directly) to the level of sexism and/or misogyny of a given society, which has plausibly decreased since 1992. Testing this hypothesis at a conceptual level will be the task of my analysis, which will be guided by the following research question: does the relation between sexism and misogyny help in understanding the persistence of femicide in Italy? Even if they are commonly believed to be synonyms, I will demonstrate in what sense they are conceptually distinct by expanding on their meanings.

In order to fulfil my aim, I will introduce the concept of patriarchy, which is the broader socio-economic and political structure within which both misogyny and sexism play a distinct role. I will argue that shedding a light upon the distinction between the two terms will be useful to better understand the underlying logic of femicides and their persistence within liberal democracies. In turn, I expect that this conceptual clarification will shed a light upon the political implications for governments.

2. A preliminary conceptual issue: does femicide target the sex or the gender of its victims?

In this section I will tackle two set of questions that are preliminary to the conceptualization of femicide I will elaborate in the next section. First, a naive definition of femicide runs as follows: a femicide is the killing of a woman because of her being a woman. However, this definition is not satisfactory because it is circular: it defines the term that it is supposed to explain by using the same term. What does it mean to be a woman? Does femicide punish its victims because of their sex or because of their gender? Answering this question requires a clarification of the difference between the notion of sex and gender that I will introduce in my study. Only after having clarified the distinction between sex and gender, I will be able to explain the distinction between sexism and misogyny. Second, in light of the fact that explaining the difference between sex and gender will naturally involve the notion of

patriarchy, what is the relation between femicides and patriarchy? The wider aim of my analysis is not to find definite answers to these sets of questions, but rather to point out clearly that liberal societies are still lacking a widely accepted conceptual framework on femicides which is preliminary to any effective campaign to fight against this kind of crime.

In order to reply to the first set of questions, I will refer to the philosophical debate about the difference between sex and gender[2] by focusing specifically on the positions of Sally Haslanger and Jennifer Saul. Analytical feminists such as Haslanger and Saul usually start their analysis by noticing that at the level of common language, the meaning of "woman" is not problematised, but it is usually assumed to be the equivalent of "female", i.e. an individual that shares some relevant reproductive characteristics.

Starting with Haslanger's position, she argues that sex (x) and gender (y) are analytically distinct because the latter is the social meaning of the former. Y is attributed by the other members of a society because a given individual is assumed to possess those biological characteristics that are relevant to define x. The act of matching an individual with Y has a straightforward normative implication, since it positions an individual at a given level of a hierarchical structure, where power relations are at work: "to ask what I should be called is to ask what norms should I be judged by" (Haslanger 2000, p. 47). Thus, for Haslanger each gender entails a set of social norms that codifies the standard of what behaviours are considered as socially accepted by a given society. "Woman" is not a neutral term, but it is value-laden, since it prescribes[3] what an individual is expected to be (and not to be) within the larger socio-economic and political structures she is embedded in.

Haslanger's (2000, p. 42) definition of woman identifies the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a woman with the fact of occupying a subordinate position within the socio-economic and political structures of a society. In her view, the ideology that justifies the system of domination within current societies is based on the idea that from the distinctive reproductive function of females, which is different from men's reproductive functions, necessarily follows that those who are assumed to be females should be oppressed by those who are presumed to be males. The social meaning of female consists in being oppressed by the male's counterpart, along some relevant dimensions[4] (economic; cultural; political; social; legal; etc.). This means that a woman might be better-off than a man, for example in regard to her class or sexual preference, but she will necessarily be worse-off along other dimensions, for instance the social, the legal and the cultural ones because of the system of oppression she is embedded in.

Contrary to Haslanger's account, Saul does not think that subordination is a necessary nor a sufficient condition for being a woman. Saul argues that the hierarchical requirement in Haslanger's definition runs the "counterintuitive" implication that all those women who are not actually subordinated to men in societies would not enjoy the membership of women, because of the advantages that they enjoy with respect to other members of their group. For instance, a woman who becomes the Prime Minister of Italy would lose her gender identity

2 The traditional way to distinguish between sex (biology) and gender (social construct) have been criticised, e.g. from philosophers who claim that sex is also affected by social contexts such as Anne Fausto-Sterling and Judith Butler. However, in my discussion I will assume that there is still a reasonable difference of origin/basis between them, i.e. physical or material versus cultural.

3 Butler's claim that gender is 'performative' is an effective way to describe how it relates to 'socially prescribed' behaviour: "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (Butler 1988, p. 520). Gender is a performative act because the agent gives her/his own interpretation of existing cultural norms and directives that restricts the margin of freedom of the agent and of those who interpret his/her act.

4 In defining subordination, Haslanger (2000, p. 40) refers to Iris Young's (1990) five forms of oppression (exploitation; marginalisation; powerlessness; cultural imperialism; and violence).

because she is not subordinated to the male's counterpart. Moreover, from the claim that an individual is a woman only if she is subordinated along some dimensions would follow that fighting against social injustice that affects women would result in the elimination of this label category/group of individuals. However, this implication is in contrast with the salience of gender in defining individual identities. For those individuals who struggle to be recognized as women because they have male's biological traits, gender is not a matter of power-relations, but of self-respect and social status (Haslanger, Saul 2006, pp. 122-123). For these individuals, the elimination of gender would be a source of additional harm rather than an achievement of social justice. For these reasons, Saul developed a context-sensitive definition of woman, whose scope is wide enough to encompass any conception of women which that depends on the standards that are set by a given social context:

> X is a woman is true in a context C iff X is human and relevantly similar (according to standards at work in C) to most of those possessing all of the biological markers of female sex (Saul 2012, p. 201).

Saul's intellectual aim is preserving the common-sense assumption that biological features of an individual play an important role in defining her gender while defending a non-reductionist approach that merely equates gender with sex.[5] For Saul, sex is "important", but it is not a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the definition of gender. On the contrary, she identifies an act of self-identification as a woman to be a sufficient condition for womanhood, in almost all social contexts she found herself into (Saul 2012, p. 203).

In Saul's view, the benefits of the high level of generality of the definition of woman is its "flexibility": sometimes it will refer to biological kinds, sometimes it will refer to social kinds- collections of phenomena that share a social feature or property. Different cultures will have different conceptions of what it means to be a woman because the criteria of membership vary from one context to the other.

In my view, Saul's analysis is flawed because of two reasons. First, by adopting a very generic definition which is context-dependent, she elaborates an analysis that is not convincing from an analytical point of view. Basically, what she has to say is that what is meant when we say that someone is a woman depends on standards that vary from one context to the other. Even if it is true that the background of individuals and their culture influences their conceptions, I think that political philosophy needs to overcome this *subjectivist* impasse to problematize those concepts, which contribute to perpetrate social injustice. I believe that Saul's choice of focusing on the meso-level of social contexts makes her blind to the macro-level of socio-economic and political structures of power, which ground the configuration of any given social relation.

Second, in elaborating the "counterintuitive" objection to Haslanger's definition- a non-subordinated woman would not be a woman- Saul assumes a conception of subordination which is too narrow to pin-down the injustice that women have been suffering from. By requiring being subject to oppression in at least one relevant dimension as a necessary condition for subordination, Saul restricts the domain of subordination to its actual and interpersonal instances. However, I will demonstrate that *structural* subordination is sufficient to reduce the freedom of agents affected by its structures by exposing them to the constant

5 One of Saul's main motivations is to give a definition of 'woman' that makes the statement 'Trans women are women' true.

risk[6] of being punished. By adopting a negative conception of freedom, which defines freedom in terms of the number of options that are not limited by other actors, I would argue that in addition to actual sanctions, also *probable* sanctions constrain the choice set of the agent. This is because the higher probability of a sanction attached to a specific subset of options as opposed to other subsets makes the agent more reluctant to select the former than the latter.

From the fact that the mere probability of the sanction is sufficient to reduce the freedom of the individual follows that interpersonal relations are not a necessary condition for limitation of individuals. Socio-economic and political structures alone are sufficient to prevent affected individuals from performing a given set of actions, thanks to the *remote* control that the former exercise over the latter through a codified set of sanctions and rewards that are entrenched within the system. Although the sanction is merely probable, i.e. it is not issued explicitly by an actor but it is implicit within a given macro-structure, it modifies the behaviour of individuals who will choose those set of actions that are rewarded by the system and will avoid those set of actions that are punished by it.

So far, my argument has demonstrated the structural character of unfreedom, i.e. the fact that interpersonal sanctions are not necessary for the reduction of freedom of agents but their probability is sufficient. Since subordination is a type of unfreedom, I will argue that for subordination to be enforced, it is not necessary to have actual and explicit sanctions, but it is sufficient that actors face the *risk* of being punished, would they not comply with a codified set of norms that are entrenched in the macro-structure/s they are embedded in. As a matter of example, a woman in a patriarchal society is subordinated, even if she is married to a non-sexist and non-misogynist husband and she is the top-manager in the company where she works. Despite the fact that in the meso-sphere of her social relations she occupies a non-subordinated position, she faces a disproportionate risk of being sanctioned within the macro political and socio-economic system she is embedded in. Above all, this risk takes the form of the objective unsafety that she is exposed to in the public space, as opposed to her male counterpart. For example, even if you are a rich CEO if you walk at night alone you may be a potential victim while the probability of danger for a male walker are lower.

The conceptual excursus I have made so far is useful for the analytical debate on the definition of woman I am examining, because once it has been proven that subordination has a structural dimension which is independent from quality of interpersonal relations, one can easily argue that a woman is subordinated to men, even when her actual interpersonal relations with her male counterparts are non-sexist and non-misogynist. The unfair mechanism of distribution of opportunities which privileges men as opposed to women is legitimised by the perpetration of gender-based biases which influence personal aspirations and social expectations of situated individuals. As a result, the public and the intimate space is hostile for those individuals who do not comply with social norms. The ways in which gender-based biases work within the public and intimate space will be illustrated in the next section, thanks to the analysis of the philosopher Kate Manne. For now, it is sufficient to note that the conceptual clarification of the term "subordination" that I have conducted in these paragraphs requires me to defend the position of Haslanger as opposed to Saul. I believe it is plausible to plug the hierarchical requirement in the definition of woman to take into account the fact that once an individual is recognized as a woman, she becomes exposed to a disproportionate risk of violence both in the public and in the private sphere.

6 To criticise the position of Saul, I am referring to the debate on republicanism vs liberals about the definition of domination. Despite the differences, liberals agree with republicans on the point that remote control is sufficient to reduce the freedom of individuals. See for instance Ian Carter (2008).

I will now reply to the question that motivates this section of my analysis. Does femicide represent the killing of a woman because of her sex or because of her gender? I would argue that the (i) presumed sex of the victim would not be on its own a necessary condition for the commission of the killing, if female's biological role in reproduction was not invested with the *ascriptive* feature of (ii) structural subordination within a system of domination. A preliminary definition of femicide runs as follow:

> Femicide is the killing of a woman because of her gender[7], when gender is defined in Haslanger's terms as the *social meaning* of sex. Through the physical act of killing, the body of the victim becomes a mere means that the perpetrator uses to exercise absolute control over the female's counterpart. Thus, the killing has also a structural impact, since it reinforces the *status* of subordination that patriarchy attributes to a presumed female's body.

Femicides cannot be understood without the reference to a macro socio-economic and political system that attributes a specific meaning to individuals' bodies that are embedded in such a system. This is what I will argue in the next section.

3.1 The distinction between sexism and misogyny

The book of Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (2018) is the first analytical study of misogyny. Manne's distinction between misogyny and sexism will be useful to the conceptualization of femicide that I will carry out in the last section of my paper.

Manne aims at elaborating an analytical definition of misogyny which is capable of overcoming the limits of a widespread conception of the term, which *naively* defines misogyny as a mere psychological phenomenon. As Manne points out, the naïve definition of misogyny[8] argues that:

> Misogyny is primarily a property of individual agents (typically, although not necessarily men) who are prone to feel hatred, hostility, or other similar emotions towards any and every woman, at least women generally, *simply because they are women*. That is, a misogynist's attitudes are held to be caused or triggered merely by representing people as women (either individually or collectively), and on no further basis specific to his target. Such a representation, together with the agent's background

7 By assuming Haslanger's definition of woman, I consider gender-related motivation as the root-cause of femicide, rather than its only factor. This means that gender interacts with specific characteristics pertaining the identity of the perpetrator and the victim, their reciprocal relations and their relation within the community where such a crime is committed. The notion of *intersectionality* suggests a promising way forward for the conceptualisation of femicide that may be explored in a future work. However, because of time and space limitations, I will leave it out from the scope of my analysis. Note that it has already been pointed out that non-binarism should be included in the analysis of femicide, in order to make this concept more inclusive (Brubaker 2021). The only aspect of intersectionality that I will briefly tackle in my analysis concerns the relation between the reduction in socio-economic gender inequalities and the occurrence of femicide, because empirical research on this aspect will be useful to better reinforce my conceptual claim that femicides are the most extreme form of structural misogyny.

8 Note that even the most recent international documents about femicides assume a psychological definition of misogyny. For instance, the UN statistical framework for measuring gender-related killing of women and girls distinguishes between the root causes of femicide and the subjective motivation of the perpetrator to commit the crime. While the former refers to the systemic factors that are necessary for the occurrence of the crime, the latter represents the intent of the perpetrator that may be present or not. Misogyny is defined as one kind of the subjective intent that may motivate the killing of a woman. Given its psychological character, misogyny is neither necessary nor sufficient for the occurrence of femicide (UNODC 2022, p. 13).

> attitudes towards women as, for example, disgusting, loathsome, fearsome, or mindless sexual objects, is supposed to be enough to trigger his hostility in most, if not all, cases (...). Misogynistic attitudes are thus unified by their psychological nature and basis- that is, their "deep" or ultimate psychological explanation. And a culture will be misogynistic to the extent that it contains, fosters, and is dominated by misogynists" (Manne 2018, pp. 32-33).

For Manne (2018, pp. 33-34, pp. 44-49), the naïve conception of misogyny, which corresponds to the common use of the term, raises at least two issues that make this definition a matter of concern for political theorists. First, the generality of the definition obscures the political dimension of misogyny. Considering the representation of women "as women" together with the "agent's background attitudes towards women" as two sufficient conditions for misogyny gives rise to a definition which is too vague for being able to identify a specific empirical phenomenon. It is clear that a misogynist does not hate all women but hate a specific *kind* of women (some of those who came in contact with them) because of specific reasons. Not all men are misogynists and a misogynist does not hate all women. Since misogyny develops in a distinctive kind of relation, the task of analytical philosophy is to define the scope of the concept by identifying the way it functions within a given society. Second, from an epistemological perspective, what is in the mind of the perpetrator is inscrutable, if misogyny had merely a psychological dimension, its meaning would remain blurry. As a result, victims would not be able to use this concept to denounce unjust acts that fall within its scope. Rather than being a tool for naming a moral injustice and seeking redress at the juridical level, "the notion of misogyny would be silencing for its victims" (Manne 2018, p. 44).

Manne's critique concerns the naïve conception of misogyny. However, by enlarging the scope of the analysis, I have found out that also sexism, as it is used in common language, is exposed to a similar critique. As *table 2* illustrates, two of the main online dictionaries (Treccani and Oxford Dictionary) classify sexism as a type of behaviour which manifests a set of beliefs of the individual who adopts it. Sexism is classified as an individual *attitude,* exactly as the case of misogyny. Both definitions are naïve in the sense that they reduce two political phenomena to the micro-dimension of the individual psychology, thus neglecting their macro-dimension, which consists in their respective functions within the broader socio-economic and political structures they are embedded in.

Table 1: Naïve definitions of misogyny and sexism

	MISOGYNY	SEXISM
TRECCANI	misògyny s. f. [from Gr. Μισογυνία; v. misogynist]. – Attitude of generic aversion to women, or repulsion, on the part of men toward sexual relations with women.	s. m. [der. Of sex, along the lines of racism]. – [attitude of those who claim the inferiority of the female sex to the male sex] ≈ phallocentrism, machismo, machismo, (not com.) machismo. ↔ ‖ feminism (Treccani)
OXFORD DICTIONARY	a feeling of hate or dislike towards women, or a feeling that women are not as good as men	the unfair treatment of people, especially women, because of their sex; the attitude that causes this (Oxford Dictionary)

The methodological strategy that Manne adopts to elaborate an *ameliorative*[9] definition is shifting the analysis from the perspective of the perpetrator (i.e. the attitude that she/he may or may not *feel*) to the one of the victims, i.e. to the fact that women *face* hostility in the private and social life (Manne 2018, p. 59). This way, the author avoids psychologism and individualism, since also social practices, institutions, and policies (i.e. socio-economic and political structures) can manifest hostility towards women (Manne 2018, p.p. 60-61). Manne's structural definition of misogyny runs as follow:

> I propose that at the most general level of description, misogyny should be understood as the "law-enforcement" branch of the patriarchal order, which has the overall function of *policing* and *enforcing* its governing ideology (Manne 2018, p. 63).

Rather than a property of the individual, Manne understands misogyny as a property of social environments. These latter are constitutive parts of *patriarchy*, an unjust socio-economic and political structure that concentrates power in the hands of men through the subordination of women, constructs and perpetuates gender-based norms whose content (i) is enforced through coercive mechanisms (ii).

The content of gendered-norms of patriarchy (i) consists in the asymmetrical moral support roles (Manne 2018, p. XV) that are assigned by a patriarchal society. In particular, women are treated by men with the social expectations that the former owe the latter specific human services and capacities much more so than vice versa:

> *Hers to give (feminine-coded goods and services):* attention, affection, admiration, sympathy, sex, and children (e.g. social, domestic, reproductive, and emotional labour); also mixed goods, such as safe haven, nurture, security, soothing, and comfort (Manne 2018, p. 130).

Moreover, the gendered economy prohibits women from having or taking masculine-coded goods *away* from dominant men (at a minimum, and perhaps from others as well), insofar as he wants or aspires to receive or retain them:

> *His for the taking (masculine-coded perks and privileges):* power, prestige, public recognition, rank, reputation, honour, "face", respect, money and other forms of wealth, hierarchical status, upward mobility, and the status conferred, by having a high-ranking woman's loyalty love, devotion, etc... (Manne 2018, p. 130).

Since gendered-norms allow men to preserve a position of advantage as opposed to women, their content is enforced through coercive mechanisms (ii) which punish those women who try to rebel against the position of subordination they are forced to occupy. In turn, the punishment plays also a deterrent effect, since it will reduce the risk of rebellion in the future. The interiorization of the norms by women and the perpetration of the system of domination does not occur necessarily through the issues of threats and/or violence. Mechanisms of rewarding and valorising women who conform to the gender-stereotype (praise) and the expression of disapproval towards those who deviate from the standard of appropriateness that men set are more subtle ways that contribute to the perpetration of the system: "hostility toward women is really only the tip of the iceberg" (Manne 2018, p. 72).

9 This is Haslanger's term for a definition with a political or moral purpose (Haslanger 2005, pp. 12-13).

Manne's demonstration of the pervasiveness of mechanisms of control within patriarchy reinforces the conceptual claim I have made in section 2, i.e., that *structural* subordination is sufficient to reduce the freedom of affected individuals, because its structures remotely control targeted individuals by exposing them to the constant risk of being punished. Patriarchy is a *kind* of structural subordination of women, which is enforced through gendered-norms setting the standard of adequacy of life-plans of members of each gender and sanctioning non-conforming individuals.

After having elaborated a non-naïve definition of misogyny, it is now time to analyse sexism, which is commonly used as synonym of misogyny, both indicating two interchangeable individual *attitudes.* However, by overcoming this psychologistic assumption and analysing the structural dimension of the two concepts, Manne demonstrates their analytical distinction.

Table 2: The distinctive functions of sexism and misogyny within a patriarchal order

PATRIARCHY	
SEXISM	MISOGYNY
"Sexism should be understood primarily as the "justificatory" branch of a patriarchal order, which consists in ideology that has the overall function of *rationalising* and *justifying* patriarchal social relations" (Manne 2018, p. 78).	"Misogyny should be understood primarily as the "law enforcement" branch of a patriarchal order, which has the overall function of *policing* and *enforcing* its governing norms and expectations" (Manne 2018, p. 79).

As the table shows, the difference between sexism and misogyny consists in the distinctive roles they play within a patriarchal order. While misogyny enforces and polices the gendered-norms of patriarchy, sexism offers the ideological justification[10] for the patriarchal logic of domination based on the following argument:

(B1) Women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical; men are identified with the "human" and the realm of the mental.

(B2) Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to ("below") whatever is identified with the "human" and the realm of the mental; or, conversely, the latter is superior to ("above") the former.

(B3) Thus, women are inferior to ("below") men; or, conversely, men are superior to ("above") women.

(B4) For any X and Y, if X is superior to Y, then X is justified in subordinating Y.

(B5) Thus, men are justified in subordinating women (Warren, 1990, p. 130).

Value-dualism in B1, which naturalises sexual differences between men and women, together with value hierarchical thinking in B2, which assumes the physical to be inferior to the mental, are the two jointly sufficient conditions from which B3 derives, which is the claim that women are inferior to men. When sexist ideology (B3) is plugged within the logic of domination (B4) that considers hierarchical social structure as a sufficient condition for the justification of subordination of those individuals who occupy an inferior position, sexism results (B5), i.e.

10 The aim of the reconstruction of sexism ideology is not to demonstrate its falsity, but rather to understand its function within the conceptual framework of patriarchy. I will be neutral to the validity of sexist argument, because I am interested in studying its relation with patriarchy.

the implication that subordination of women by men is legitimised within such a hierarchical structure. Thus, sexism justifies patriarchy which is a kind of *oppressive conceptual framework* based on the logic of domination (Warren 1990, p. 127).

Differently from sexism, misogyny does not require a system of beliefs that openly and intentionally oppresses women. Misogyny is not an ideology but it is primarily a property of social environments. Individual agents may then derive misogynist attitudes from social environments without even being conscious[11] of their unjust behaviour. However, simply being embedded in an unjust social environment is not sufficient to give rise to a misogynist attitude. For Manne, misogyny is a *threshold* and a *comparative* concept. Its empirical instances can be identified by comparing an individual attitude (x) with the attitudes of those individuals who occupy a similar position in that social environment (y): if x is "significantly (a) more extreme, and (b) more consistent" (Manne 2018, p. 66) than y, then x would count as misogynist. Manne's conceptual clarification falsifies the extremist feminist view holding every single man guilty of gender-based violence simply because of their gender and calls for a comparative method in order to identify unjust behaviour in a given context.

The argument I have defended so far allows me to identify two features of the relation between sexism and misogyny which will be useful for understanding femicides. First, given the specific function they play within patriarchy, misogyny (x) and sexism (y) are analytically distinct. This means that x and y are not interdependent: an increase/ decrease in x does not affect the level of y, and vice versa. For instance, a reduction in the number of individuals who believe in sexist ideology will not impact misogyny, which is a property of a system rather than of the minds of its individual members. Second, misogyny and sexism are both *casually necessary* for the existence of patriarchy (Manne 2018, p. 88). This means that while misogyny and sexism do not affect each other directly, the increase/ decrease of one of the two variables (x) will have a direct effect upon the system which is causally dependent on both. In turn, it is plausible to hypothesise that a change at the systemic level will have an indirect impact on the other variable (y). This is because a modification of a component of the macro-structure where both x and y operate, i.e. patriarchy, will in turn affect the way each single variable functions. Testing this hypothesis will be the task of the following section, which is also the final one.

3.2. The implications of the distinction between sexism and misogyny for the occurrence of femicides

In the final section of my analysis, I will show that conceptual analysis on the relation between misogyny, sexism and patriarchy is useful for understanding the occurrence of femicides within liberal societies. To develop my argument, I use as a starting point the *preliminary* definition of femicide I have elaborated in section 2:

> Femicide is the killing of a woman because of her gender, when gender is defined in Haslanger's terms as the *social meaning* of sex. Through the physical act of killing, the body of the victim becomes a mere means that the perpetrator uses to exercise absolute control over the female's counterpart. Thus, the killing has also a structural impact, since it reinforces the *status* of subordination that patriarchy attributes to a presumed female's body.

11 The possibility of unconscious misogyny shows two aspects. First, it makes sense of the pervasiveness of mechanisms which sanctions women both in the public and in the private sphere. Second, it raises compelling issues regarding individual moral liability with regards to an unjust social setting that may be explored in a future work.

Following Manne (2018, p. 129), I would argue that femicide is encompassed within the scope of misogyny, when the latter is conceived as coercive enforcement mechanisms through which gendered norms are perpetrated and policed within patriarchy. Victims of femicide are "aberrant" women[12], i.e. women who deviate from the role of "givers" of moral-cum-social goods and services on which the social status of men depends. After having defined femicide as the most violent kind of misogyny, I will show that Manne's analytical distinction between misogyny and sexism has a relevant implication for the understanding of such a crime. In particular, I will argue that this move allows me to tackle one of the issues I have pointed out in my introduction, where I wondered why the numbers of femicides in Italy have remained constant since 1992, despite the (slow) progress in gender-equality that Italian society has made.

Defining sexism and misogyny as two analytically distinct concepts is explicative of the fact that decreasing the level of sexism in a given society does not result in a decrease of its misogyny, for at least two reasons. First, since misogyny is primarily a property of the socio-economic structures of patriarchy, it does not depend on the ideological orientation of individual embedded within such a system:

> For even when people become less sexist—that is, less skeptical about women's intellectual acumen or leadership abilities, and less inclined to buy into pernicious gendered stereotypes about women's being overly emotional or irrational—this does not mean that feminism's work is done. On the contrary, misogyny that was latent or lay dormant within a culture may manifest itself when women's capabilities become more salient and hence demoralising or threatening. And this may result in more or less subtle forms of lashing out, moralism, wishful thinking, and wilful denial, as well as the kind of low-grade resentment that festers and alights on effigies and scapegoats (Manne 2018, p. 101).

Second, since misogyny punishes women who "deviate" from gendered-roles that guarantee men's domination and a less-sexist society will increase the probability for women to deviate from such roles, it is plausible to argue that coercive punishments will increase in such a society:

> Misogyny often stems from the desire to take women down, to put them in their place again. So, the higher they climb, the farther they may be made to fall because of it. The glass ceiling might be broken; but then there may be smackdown. And some women get hit by the shards of the glass that rain down from other's rising (Manne 2018, p. 77).

The claim that "progress and resentment are perfectly compatible" (Manne 2018, p. 77) is corroborated by empirical research on femicides, which shows that more gender equality, which is a manifestation of less-sexist society, plays a contradictory role for the occurrence of gender violence:

> On the one hand, enhanced women's financial independence, along with better access to educational level and the recognition of women's role in society, increase the

12 The structural definition of femicide is sufficient for its conceptualization, which requires a certain level of generality. As I stated earlier in my analysis, this explanation interacts with contingent characteristics concerning the victim, the perpetrator, their relation, and features of the community where such a crime occurs. Analysing the interaction between a structural conceptualization of femicides and contingent characteristics falls beyond the scope of my analysis and may be researched in a future work.

> possibility of women to free themselves from violent relationships (...). On the other hand, the backlash theory suggests that when women detach from traditional gender norms, they are at higher risk of being killed by their partners who might want to reassert their dominant role and control (Bandelli, Corradi 2021, p. 7).

The counterintuitive empirical claim that an increase in the number of femicides commonly occurs once a given society has reached a certain level of progressivism is a matter of interest for my conceptual analysis. I would argue that this anomaly corroborates the hypothesis I formulated in the previous section, where I suppose that the variation of one of the two independent variables defining a given system will have an *indirect impact* on the other variable. A variation of one of the two components (x= decrease in the level of sexism) of a given system (patriarchy) will have a direct effect upon such a system (more gender equality). In turn, this change at the macrolevel where both x and y operate will plausibly affect the way each variable functions. This means that the other variable (y= misogyny) will have to react to the macro-change that x's variation produces. It is plausible to think that misogyny will react to an increase in gender equality by enforcing more violent punishments in order to re-establish domination by men which fundamentally grounds patriarchy (increase in the occurrence of femicides). Thus, I would argue that within patriarchy, not only progress is compatible with resentment, but resentment is a likely outcome of progress.

To conclude, backlash theory falsifies the naïve claim that more gender equality results in less gender-based violence, since it shows that in many cases the opposite occurs. The case-study of Italy fits this scenario, since the (slow) progress in gender-equality has not resulted in the decrease of the numbers of femicides. This is a warning signal for Italy, where the mantras of gender equality and women empowerment are repeated rhetorically in civic and political discussions about gender-based violence. However, since women empowerment is neither necessary nor sufficient for ensuring women's safety, the Italian government should start distinguishing sexism from misogyny in order to address the structural roots of the latter which give rise to instances of gender-based violence, as it has been demonstrated by my analysis.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, the originality of my study consists in applying conceptual analysis to understand what at first sight may appear as an empirical anomaly: the persistence of femicides in the Italian society despite the decrease of its level of sexism. Manne's *distinction* between misogyny and sexism allows me to problematize the definition of femicide and therefore to understand its underlining logic. Two are the main outcome of my analysis.[13]

First, it allows me to clearly identify the *victims* of femicide in "aberrant" women, i.e. women who deviate from gendered-norms which ensure their subordination to men and are punished therefore. Following Manne, I argue that femicide represents the most violent kind of misogyny, which is the coercive mechanism through which gendered-norms are enforced and policed. Thus, in addition to the interpersonal dimension of the relation between the victim and the perpetrator, femicide has also a systemic dimension, since its occurrence represents men's attempt to re-establish their domination over women. Studying the interaction between contingent characteristics of the relation victims- perpetrators and socio-economic and political structures is the task of empirical analysis. However, the notion

13 The results that I discuss in the last section of my analysis may be extendable to what is happening in other Western liberal societies, but in this paper I focus only on the case of Italy.

of *intersectionality* which addresses layers of inequalities suggests a promising way forward for continuing researching the phenomenon of femicide within political theory.

Second, elaborating on Manne's distinction between sexism (the ideological justification of patriarchy) and misogyny (the law-enforcement mechanism of patriarchy) allows me to better understand the *persistence* of femicide within the Italian society. This distinction means that a reduction in the level of sexism of a given society thanks to the improvement in gender-equality does not result in a decrease of the level of misogyny. Since femicide is a kind of misogyny, then, an increase in gender-equality would not be an effective measure to counter this terrible crime. However, as both misogyny (x) and sexism (y) are causally necessary for the existence of patriarchy, I argue that a decrease in y, which affects the system of patriarchy, may plausibly have an *indirect* effect on x, which is mediated by the modification at the macro-level that the variation of y implies. Rather than decreasing misogyny, an increase in gender-equality may have the opposite outcome. Since misogyny punishes women who "deviate" from gendered-roles that guarantee men's domination and a less-sexist society will increase the probability for women to deviate from such roles, it is plausible to argue that coercive punishments will increase in such a society. This reinforces the need to conceptualize misogyny (and femicide) as distinct from sexism. Improving gender-equality is not sufficient for reducing the occurrence of femicide, which on the contrary requires specific political tools that recognise its multidimensional nature.

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