CONSTRUCTIONS OF INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE IN THE *NATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND FEMICIDE* AND ASSOCIATED SCHOLARSHIP: A DECOLONIAL ANALYSIS

by

Mashaole Lucas Mamabolo

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SUPERVISOR: Professor Shahnaaz Suffla

CO-SUPERVISOR: Dr Nick Malherbe

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DEDICATION

To my late mother, Maria Mampe (Mahlaga) Mamabolo, for her encouragement in my

learning journey and setting a perfect example that provided me with a reason and foundation

to realise the importance of education.

DECLARATION

Name: **Mashaole Lucas Mamabolo**

Student Number: **5478-120-5**

Degree: **Master of Arts (Psychology)**

Dissertation Title: **A decolonial analysis of intimate partner femicide in South Africa**

I declare that **A decolonial analysis of intimate partner femicide in South Africa** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis/dissertation to the appropriate originality detection system which is endorsed by Unisa and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

8 August 2024

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Mashaole Lucas Mamabolo **Date**

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My family, siblings, and grandparents: Ogopoleng Mamabolo (Wife), Thoriso Mamabolo (Son), Mahlaga Mamabolo (Daughter), Lekau Mamabolo (Brother), Mashaole Mamabolo (Grandfather), Selina Mamabolo (Grandmother), Madimedja Mamabolo (Great-Grandfather), for being the most important support system throughout the journey of my studies. Your prayers, advice, and support are much appreciated.

A DECOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE IN SOUTH AFRICA

STUDENT NO: **54781205**

STUDENT NAME: **MASHAOLE LUCAS MAMABOLO**

DEGREE: **MASTER OF ARTS (PSYCHOLOGY)**

DEPARTMENT: **DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY**

SUPERVISOR: **PROF. SHAHNAAZ SUFFLA**

CO-SUPERVISOR: **DR. NICK MALHERBE**

ABSTRACT

The National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF-NSP) is the most recent and most prominent national-level effort to address femicide in South Africa. Published in 2020, the GBVF-NSP seeks to guide government responses to gendered violence. To date, there has not been a sustained analysis of the GBVF-NSP and its impact. Assuming a decolonial feminist framework and adopting thematic analysis and document analysis as a two-step analytic process, this study aimed to examine thematic constructions of intimate partner femicide within the GBVF-NSP and the academic literature published since the GBVF-NSP's inception. It was found that although data sources sporadically pushed back against colonial logics, an individualising approach was by-and-large adhered to which unwittingly reproduced the logic of the colonial difference. Accordingly, several policy, grassroots, and pedagogical recommendations are suggested which make central the backdrop of coloniality in how we seek to address gendered violence in South Africa.

Keywords: Intimate partner femicide; intimate partner violence; decolonial feminism; social constructivism; document analysis; thematic analysis

NAGANWAGO

Leano la Togamaano la Bosetšhaba ka ga Dikgaruru tše di Theilwego go Bong le Polao ya Basadi (GBVF-NSP) ke maitapišo a moragorago le a go tšwelela kudu a maemo a bosetšhaba a go rarolla polao ya basadi ka Afrika Borwa. E phatlaladitšwe ka 2020, GBVF-NSP e nyaka go hlahla dikarabelo tša mmušo go dikgaruru tša bong. Go fihla ga bjale, ga se gwa ba le tshekatsheko ye e swarelelago ya GBVF-NSP le khuetšo ya yona. Ka go tšea gore ke tlhako ya bofeminisi ya go tloša bokoloniale le go amogela tshekatsheko ya sererwa le tshekatsheko ya ditokomane bjalo ka tshepedišo ya tshekatsheko ya magato a mabedi, nyakišišo ye e be e ikemišeditše go hlahloba dikago tša morero tša polao ya basadi ya molekane wa kgauswi ka gare ga GBVF-NSP le dingwalo tša thuto tšeo di phatlaladitšwego go tloga mola GBVF-NSP e hlongwago. Go hweditšwe gore le ge methopo ya datha e be e kgoromeletša morago ka dinako tše dingwe kgahlanong le ditlhaologanyo tša bokoloniale, mokgwa wa go dira gore motho e be motho ka o tee ka o tee o ile wa kgomarela ka bogolo woo ka go se lemoge o tšweleditšego gape tlhaologanyo ya phapano ya bokoloniale. Ka go realo, ditšhišinyo tše mmalwa tša pholisi, tša metheo, le tša thuto di šišinywa tšeo di dirago gore bogareng e be lefelo la morago la bokoloniale ka fao re nyakago go rarolla dikgaruru tša bong ka Afrika Borwa.

Mantšu a bohlokwa: Polao ya basadi ya molekane wa kgauswi; dikgaruru tša molekane wa kgauswi; bofeminisi bja go tloša bokoloniale; constructivism ya leago; tshekatsheko ya ditokomane; tshekatsheko ya sererwa

CATSHANGWA

UHlelo Lwesu Lukazwelonke Lokulwa Nodlame Olusekelwe Ngokobulili Nokubulawa Kwabesifazane (i-GBVF-NSP) wumzamo wakamuva futhi ogqame kakhulu wezinga likazwelonke wokubhekana nokubulawa kwabesifazane eNingizimu Afrika. Ishicilelwe ngo-2020, i-GBVF-NSP ifuna ukuqondisa izimpendulo zikahulumeni odlameni lobulili. Kuze kube manje, akukabikho ukuhlaziywa okuqhubekayo kwe-GBVF-NSP kanye nomthelela wayo. Ngokuthatha uhlaka lwe-decolonial feminist nokwamukela ukuhlaziywa kwesihloko kanye nokuhlaziywa kwemibhalo njengenqubo yokuhlaziya enezinyathelo ezimbili, lolu cwaningo luhlose ukuhlola ukwakhiwa okunesihloko kokubulawa kwabesifazane abasondelene naye ngaphakathi kwe-GBVF-NSP kanye nemibhalo yezemfundo eshicilelwe kusukela kwasungulwa i-GBVF-NSP. Kutholwe ukuthi nakuba imithombo yedatha ihlehla kancane kancane ekuphikisaneni nemibono yamakholoni, indlela yokwenza umuntu ngamunye yalandelwa kakhulu okwaveza kabusha umqondo womehluko wekoloni ngokungazi. Ngokunjalo, kuphakanyiswa izincomo ezimbalwa zenqubomgomo, emazingeni aphansi, kanye nezokufundisa ezenza umgogodla wobukoloniyali ngendlela esifuna ukubhekana ngayo nodlame lobulili eNingizimu Afrika.

Amagama angukhiye: Ukubulawa kwabesifazane abasondelene naye; udlame olusondelene nozakwethu; i-decolonial feminism; i-social constructivism; ukuhlaziywa kwemibhalo; ukuhlaziywa kwetimu

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GBVF-NSP: The National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide

IPF: Intimate Partner Femicide

IPV: Intimate Partner Violence

Stats SA: Statistics South Africa

WHO: The World Health Organisation

UN: United Nations

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the constructions of intimate partner femicide within heterosexual relationships, as outlined in South Africa's National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence & Femicide - GBVF-NSP, 2020) as well as in the academic literature that has engaged the GBVF-NSP since its inception in 2020. In rooting this analysis in decolonial feminism, the thesis reads these constructions of intimate partner femicide against South Africa's traumatic history of violence, and in particular how such violence was central to a global project of colonial modernity. It is argued that this historical context must be foregrounded if we are to make sense of intimate partner femicide, and patriarchy more broadly.

This introduction chapter presents the background of the study, the problem statement and a definition of its central concepts. Moreover, the chapter highlights the purpose of the study, research paradigm and study approach, design and methods. The chapter concludes with an outline and structure of the thesis.

BACKGROUND

Following growing reports of assault, rape, abuse, and murder of women across the globe, in 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared gender-based violence a pandemic (Cucinotta & Vaneli, 2020). Even within this global context, South Africa is notorious for its especially high levels of gender-based violence which, in most cases, occur in intimate relationships (see Abrahams et al., 2024). In 2021, intimate partner femicide fatalities in Africa were more than double the global rate, with 2.5 deaths per 100 000 females compared to the global rate of 1.1 per 100 000 women (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime -

UNODC, 2022). The rate at which women in South Africa are murdered is five times the global average and at least half of these women die at the hands of their intimate partners (Boonzaier, 2022). Indeed, intimate partner femicide is the leading cause of death for women living in South Africa (Abrahams, 2024; Amusa et al., 2022; Seedat et al., 2009). In South Africa, as was the case in many places around the world, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic saw the implementation of lockdown measures that restricted movements and kept families together in their households, all of which saw exacerbated rates of intimate partner violence (Nduna & Tshona, 2021; Odeku, 2021).

In response, there have been several national-level efforts to address the disproportionate levels of gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence in particular, in South Africa (Mills et al., 2015; Sonke-Justice, n.d.; Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation & Department of Social Development, 2016). Of particular interest for the proposed research is the GBVF-NSP (2020), which the South African state introduced to guide the government's response to gender-based violence and femicide in the country to ensure gender equality[1] (Abrahams et al., 2024; Lindfors, 2023; Ndawonde, 2023; Thusi & Mlambo, 2023). The GBVF-NSP (2020) professes to follow six pillars, namely: accountability, coordination and leadership; prevention and rebuilding the social cohesion; justice, safety, and protection; response, care, support, and healing; economic power; and research and information management (Madiba, 2022). Variava and Dekel (2023) note that since the introduction of the GBVF-NSP (2020), several legislative amendments have been made which would affect the implementation of the GBVF-NSP (2020) and its mandate. Among others, such amendments include the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 13 of 2021,

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[1] Gender is not understood in this thesis as an essentialised or binary category. It is both performance and identity.

which seeks to ensure the successful persecution of violent sexual offenders and the protection of survivors, as well as amendments made to the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998.

The GBVF-NSP (2020, p. 10) defines gender-based violence as:

> The general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with the gender [that relates] to the sex assigned to a person at birth as well as the unequal power relations between the genders within the context of a specific society. GBV includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse, or threats of such abuse or threats of such acts or abuse, coercion, and economic, or educational, deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life, in peacetime and during armed or other forms of conflict, and may cause physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or economic harm.

Intimate partner femicide is understood as an extreme form of gender-based violence (Spies, 2020). Indeed, according to the World Health Organization and Pan American Health Organization (2012), intimate femicide is defined as the murder of women by intimate partners, which may be committed within a domestic relationship, interpersonal relationship, by a person not in a relationship with the victim, or perpetrated by the state and its agents. On the other hand, intimate partner femicide is understood as deaths suffered by women and caused by their present or former partners (Campbell et al., 2009; Messing and Campbell, 2016; Storey & Hart, 2014). The GBVF-NSP (2020, p. 10) specifies that in South Africa, intimate partner femicide:

> is understood as the killing of a female person or perceived as a female person based on gender identity, whether committed within the domestic relationship, interpersonal relationship or by any other person, or whether perpetrated or tolerated by the State or its' agents, and private intimate femicide is defined as the murder of women by intimate

partners, i.e., a current or former husband or boyfriend, same-sex partner, or a rejected would-be lover. (p. 10)

The introduction of the GBVF-NSP (2020) has had little observable impact. Since its inception, intimate partner femicide continues to have an increasing and deleterious social and relational impact on the everyday lives of families and communities in South Africa (Boonzaier, 2022; Boonzaier et al., 2020; Brodie, 2020; Spies, 2020). Due to the socioeconomic, psychic, and spatial legacies of colonialism and apartheid, Black[2] families and communities have been especially impacted in this respect (Boonzaier, 2022). As such, there appears to be scant academic evaluative inquiry into how the GBVF-NSP (2020) engages intimate partner femicide, as well as how scholarly literature has engaged intimate partner femicide as denoted by GBVF-NSP (2020).

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PROBLEM

In a foreword to the GBVF-NSP (2020), Cyril Ramaphosa, the President of South Africa, proclaimed that:

South Africa holds the shameful distinction of being one of the most unsafe places in the world to be a woman. We have amongst the highest rates of intimate partner violence, and recently released data from Statistics SA show that rape and sexual violence have become hyperendemic. The unacceptably high levels of gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa are a blight on our national conscience, and a betrayal of our constitutional order. We are in the throes of a deep crisis that must be brought to a decisive end. (p. 2)

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[2] The use of socially constructed racial categories in this thesis does not signify uncritical acceptance of racial groupings. They are used here to refer to the oppressive use of racial categories by the racist apartheid State. Contemporary inequalities in South Africa continue to be structured along 'racialised' lines.

The President further mentioned that the GBVF-NSP (2020) is among the key interventions recognised as imperative to addressing and rooting out gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa, referring to it as "our shield and armour as we reclaim or society from the clutches of violence, homophobia, chauvinism, and misogyny" (GBVF-NSP, 2020, p. 4). He further highlighted the need to build a South Africa where every citizen is safe and can live, work, and play in freedom. However, for the GBVF-NSP (2020) to be successful, its goals and assessments of the present must, it is argued, resist producing narratives rooted in white supremacy that fail to locate violence historically, that is, within colonialism's racist, patriarchal, and spatial relations of oppression (see Ratele, 2016). These underlying issues and matrices of power must be engaged if we are to fight gender-based violence in a suitably intersectional manner.

The GBVF-NSP (2020) is undoubtedly an important legislative protection and policy intervention in the fight against gender-based violence and femicide (what is referred to in this study as intimate partner femicide) in South Africa. Accordingly, the proposed study is dedicated to studying the psycho-social construction of intimate partner femicide as embedded in the GBVF-NSP (2020) and to interrogating how academic scholarship has engaged intimate partner femicide since the establishment of the GBVF-NSP (2020). It is anticipated that the study will offer to policy engagement critical, activist-driven and context-specific epistemic conceptions of gender and intimate partner femicide outside of a dualistic colonial framework that serves to 'other' Black masculinity, and thus expand the purview of these engagements to ensure that they are relevant to people's lived realities and experiences.

RESEARCH AIM, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

Research Aim

The overarching aim of the proposed study is to identify and examine, through a decolonial lens, thematic constructions of intimate partner femicide in South Africa, both within the GBVF-NSP and the academic literature published since the GBVF-NSP's inception in 2020.

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the proposed study are to:

1. Identify and analyse the constructions of intimate partner femicide in the *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (2020-2030)*.

2. Critically examine the academic scholarship that has engaged intimate partner femicide in South Africa since the inception of the *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (2020-2030)*.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the constructions of intimate partner femicide in South Africa's *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (2020-2030)*?

2. What are the thematic constructions in academic scholarship on intimate partner femicide in South Africa since the inception of the *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (2020-2030)*?

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Popular narratives on gender and intimate partner femicide in South Africa tend to fail to locate both the perpetrator and the victim in a particular socio-historical context. Indeed, many of these narratives are rooted in an individualising, colonial logic that demonises a static conception of Black masculinity (Mfecane, 2008; Ratele, 2016). As such, these narratives tend to engage in racist othering rather than working towards the development of positive masculinities, and what it would mean to involve men in feminist praxis. Boonzaier (2017) states that the othering of Black men as bad people positions violence as an essentially poor Black problem, rather than a structural issue, one that is rooted in histories of colonial violence. In speaking to these dominant narratives (many of which can be understood as exemplifying a liberal, white pseudo-feminism), this thesis seeks to provide a critical and activist-driven analysis of scholarly and policy engagements on the conceptualisation of intimate partner femicide. The study strives to expand the scope of these engagements to ensure that they are relevant to the lived experiences and realities of all people, particularly those living under the heel of colonial patriarchy.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

The definitions of key concepts and terms used in the present study are provided below.

Gender-Based Violence

The European Institute for Gender Equality (n.d.) defines gender-based violence (GBV), sometimes referred to as violence against women, as "violence directed at any person because of their gender identity". It also acknowledges that although men and women experience gender-based violence, the majority are women and girls. Durham (2020) defines

gender-based violence as violence directed against any person based on their biological sex or gender identity. The definition further specifies that gender-based violence occurs both in public and private settings, incorporating acts relating to verbal, sexual and psychological abuse.

Intimate Partner Femicide

According to the World Health Organization (2012), whether committed within a domestic relationship, interpersonal relationship, by a person not in a relationship with the victim, or whether perpetrated by the state and its agents, private intimate femicide is defined as the murder of women by intimate partners.

Intimate Partner Violence

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - CDCP (2022) define intimate partner violence as threats or the deliberate use of physical or sexual violence with the potential to result in harm, disabling, or death; or coercive measures such as psychological or emotional abuse when there has previously been physical or sexual violence committed by a current or former spouse or nonmarital partner, such as a boyfriend or girlfriend, in a dating relationship. The World Health Organization (2021, n.p.) defines intimate partner violence as "any action by an intimate partner or ex-partner that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviours".

Decolonial Feminism

Decolonial feminism is an emerging theoretical concept that challenges the idea of coloniality/modernity, and explores how gender has been harnessed as a colonial construct (Lugones, 2010).

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is a philosophical approach that relies on the assumption that reality is created through human activity (Kim, 2001). Amineh and Asl (2015, p. 13) define social constructivism as "a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the knowledge and understandings of the world that are developed jointly by individuals."

Document Analysis

Benjamin and Mario (2018) define document analysis as a systemic form of qualitative research that relies on documentary evidence to answer specific research questions. Bowen (2009) refers to it as a systemic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, be they printed or in electronic form.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a methodological approach used for detecting, analysing, organising, summarising, and reporting themes produced from a set of collected data.

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STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

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The dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: This chapter presents an introduction to the thesis, orientating the reader to the research project with respect to its background; the study problem; research aim, objectives and central questions; the significance of the study; and definitions of key concepts.

Chapter 2: This chapter presents a review of literature pertinent to the study, including the GBVF-NSP (2020) and academic literature that has engaged intimate partner femicide since the inception of the GBVF-NSP (2020). Additionally, the theoretical framework, decolonial feminism, is also outlined in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the literature reviewed.

Chapter 3: This chapter presents the research design and methodology, data collection methods and procedures, and data analysis. Lastly, methods for ensuring rigour are discussed.

Chapter 4: The research findings are presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents a summary of the main findings, recommendations, and recommendations for future research.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the overview of the study, including a description of the problem statement, research aims, research objectives, and research questions. The definitions of key concepts are also provided. The next chapter presents a review of relevant literature.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intimate partner femicide is the most extreme form of gender-based violence and is considered the most prevalent form of gender-based violence in South Africa (Boonzaier, 2022; Brodie, 2021; Seedat et al., 2009; Variava & Dekel, 2023). As noted in the previous chapter, intimate partner femicide tends to follow routine acts of violence (e.g., physical, sexual or emotional abuse) against women in intimate relationships (Boonzaier, 2022; Brown et al., 2023; Variava & Dekel, 2023). Again, as recounted earlier, these routine acts form part of what is known as intimate partner violence, which the World Health Organization (2021) defines as any action, undertaken by an intimate partner or ex-partner, that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviours. In this study, I follow Garcia-Vergara et al. (2022) in defining intimate partner femicide as those women's deaths caused by current or previous intimate partners. In South Africa, heterosexual relationships are a primary site for intimate partner femicide and thus it is heterosexual relationships that will form my primary focus (Boonzaier, 2022). However, this is not to say that femicide does not take place in other kinds of relationships in South Africa, but rather that femicide is overwhelmingly undertaken by men in heterosexual relationships.

Despite numerous policies and strategies in place to address GBVF in South Africa, more women continue to die at the hands of their male partners (Boonzaier, 2022; Brown et al., 2023; GBVF-NSP, 2020; Simelane et al., 2023). However, it is crucial to remember that no one factor – in South Africa or elsewhere, for that matter – can fully account for male violence against women (Mtotyma et al, 2023). Such violence is influenced by a wide range of

elements, and the base of the issue is how these elements interact with one another (Mtotywa et al, 2023). As exemplary of this, media reporting and academic discourse in South Africa tend to report on intimate partner killings (often desensitising the issue in the process) while ignoring backgrounded or structural factors (Boonzaier, 2022; Spies, 2020).

In South Africa, there is a paucity of literature that engages intimate partner femicide. Most academic scholarship tends to focus on gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and non-intimate partner femicide (Abrahams et al., 2024; Boonzaier, 2022; Brown et al., 2023; Garcia-Vergara et al., 2022). Nonetheless, there have been critical research studies examining intimate partner femicide in South Africa. Such research has sought to grapple with the legacies of coloniality as well as societal gender role expectations, psychosocial factors, heteropatriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, inequality and poverty, substance abuse and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (Amusa et al., 2022; Boonzaier, 2017; Boonzaier, 2022; Brown et al., 2023; Enaifoghe, 2021; Gottzen et al., 2020; Isike, 2022; Malherbe et al., 2021; Yesufu, 2022;). However, in less critical scholarship, there is a risk that an individualising frame creeps into these assessments, whereby violence is essentialised as part and parcel of particular subjectivities and identities. When shot through with racist colonial logic, this individualising tendency acts to associate Black men with sexual violence, attaching such violence with this particular embodiment of blackness and masculinity. Such colonial logic feeds into narratives that Black men should be subject to racism, general wariness and fear, and government aggression (Connel, 2001; Mfecane, 2008; Ratele, 2016). Moreover, in less critical South African scholarship, studies tend to focus on femicide around universal norms, thereby ignoring context and region intricacies, as well as the contextual underpinnings of femicide (see Variava & Dekel, 2023).

In what follows, I review the literature on intimate partner femicide in South Africa, with a specific focus on the GBVF-NSP's (2020) constructions of intimate partner femicide, as well as the extent and ways in which academic scholarship has engaged intimate partner femicide since the inception of the GBVF-NSP (2020).

CONSTRUCTIONS OF INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE IN THE GBVF-NSP

In 2020, the South African government introduced the GBVF-NSP (2020), a product of a consultative process that was led by the interim steering committee in April 2019. The strategy contained within the GBVF-NSP (2020) relies on a multisectoral, coherent strategic policy and programming framework to encourage a coordinated national response to the crisis of gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa (see also Netshitenzhe, 2024). The specific focus of the strategy is on challenges faced by all, and especially women, across age, sexual orientation, sexual and gendered identities; and specific groups such as elderly women, women who live with disabilities, migrant women and trans women, all of whom are affected and impacted by the gender-based violence scourge in South Africa.

To elaborate, the GBVF-NSP (2020) is guided by ten principles: (1) mobilising a multisectoral approach that makes use of resources from various tiers of government, civil society organisations, social movements, youth groups, faith-based organisations, media, development agencies, the private sector, and academic institutions; (2) complementing and reviewing strategies, methods and national initiatives which address gender-based violence, femicide, and safety issues more generally in South Africa; (3) encouraging active participation from communities, civil society movements and other stakeholders affected by and concerned with gender-based violence and femicide; (4) considering a visionary, gender-responsive and transformative approach that engages gender difference in terms of inequalities and how these

inequalities contribute to gender-based violence and femicide; (5) prioritising a human rights sensitive, victim-centred, survivor-focused approach that privileges marginalised populations; (6) embracing an intergenerational, youth inclusive approach; (7) encouraging a progressive realisation of results through reforms and partnerships that address systemic issues; (8) changing the social order in a way that encourages an environment of respect, compassion and dignity for all; (9) instating mutual accountability for changes; and (10) honouring inclusiveness, diversity, and intersectionality.

The GBVF-NSP (2020) is a response to activists' demand for a safe environment for women, children, and those who identify as gender nonconforming. It also serves as motivation for Outcome 3 of the National Development Plan, which states that all South Africans are to feel safe (Isike, 2022). The GBVF-NSP (2020) states that, in addition to declaring a state of emergency, South Africa should take intelligence-driven preventative measures, collaborate to create an environment that empowers women, teach young schoolboys about conflict, support campaigns to end gender-based violence, have an efficient criminal justice system, impose harsher punishments on offenders, and take a multi-sectoral approach to assisting families. The six pillars that form the foundation of the GBVF-NSP (2020) are: accountability, coordination, leadership, prevention and prebuilding of social cohesion, justice, safety, and protection, response, care, support, and healing, economic power, and research and information management. The most recent innovation involves including six districts in the planning of 100-Day Challenges to engage common South Africans in the fight against gender-based violence

The GBVF-NSP (2020) problematises gender-based violence around gender role expectations associated with the gender assigned to a person at birth. This is an important

legislative protection in the fight against gender-based violence and femicide, or, for the purpose of this study, what is referred to as intimate partner femicide (although there are of course limitations here with respect to transgender people). Accordingly, the GBVF-NSP (2020) proclaims that gender-based violence results from the "normative role expectations associated with the gender associated with the sex assigned to a person at birth, as well as the unequal power relations between the genders, within the context of a specific society" (p. 10).

Following this, the GBVF-NSP (2020) defines intimate partner femicide as "the murder of women by their partners" (p. 10). As noted in Chapter 1, the GBVF-NSP (2020) further defines femicide as "the killing of a female person or perceived as a female person on the basis of gender identity, whether committed within the domestic relationship, interpersonal relationship or by any other person, or whether perpetrated or tolerated by the State or its' agents" (p. 10). Further still, the GBVF-NSP (2020) defines private intimate femicide as the murder of women by intimate partners, identified as "a current or former husband or boyfriend, same-sex partner, or a rejected would-be lover" (p. 10).

At present, there is a paucity of scholarly literature that critically engages with how the GBVF-NSP (2020) constructs gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa. Nonetheless, there is a small body of such literature. Critical scholarship of this sort has ascribed the weaknesses of the GBVF-NSP (2020) to its attribution of gender-based violence and femicide to leadership failures of the government and its establishment of the National Council on Gender-Based Violence (Shoba, 2021). Other studies have pointed out that implementation failures of the GBVF-NSP (2020) are due to a lack of political will (Yesufu, 2022), as well as repeated and multiple power struggles between relevant stakeholders (Vetten, 2021). Considering particular socio-economic issues affecting women (i.e., unequal pay,

unpaid care work, education needs, and access to water and sanitation), Maphanga (2021) indicates that gendered social issues are not sufficiently articulated in the GBVF-NSP (2020). Following this and in reflecting on ways in which to enhance the impact of the GBVF-NSP (2020), Shai et al. (2022) argue for a focused strategy that classifies femicide as a stand-alone criminal activity. They also advocate for the inclusion of varying forms of femicide, including femicide against transgender women and all LGBTQI+ identifying individuals.

The GBVF-NSP (2020) has had little effect on gender-based violence in South Africa. Yesufu (2022) notes that, despite strategies and actions, like the GBVF-NSP (2020), that have been put in place by the government, women in South Africa continue to experience intimate partner killings, with no significant reduction observed in the incidence of intimate partner violence in the country (see Boonzaier, 2022; Brodie et al., 2021). As a significant step in policy, it is important to understand what effects the GBVF-NSP (2020) has had on academic scholarship, and indeed how intimate partner femicide in South Africa is studied and engaged at a scholarly level.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE IN ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP SINCE THE INCEPTION OF THE GBVF-NSP

Gender-based violence can manifest in many ways, including through intimate partner violence, sexual assault, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and so-called "honour crimes" (United Nations Refugee Agency - UNHCR, n.d.). However, as several studies have emphasised, when engaging gender-based violence, it is necessary to also refer to acts of violence which make visible intimate partner violence (Abiolu, 2022; Brown et al., 2023). The often-partial representation of intimate partner femicide within research and policy is a result

of the South African government's late response to addressing intimate partner killings (see Boonzaier, 2022).

Intimate partner femicide as a serious manifestation of intimate partner violence has been defined in many ways within the academic literature (see Garcia-Vergara et al., 2022). Garcia-Vergara et al. (2022, p. 1), for example, define intimate partner femicide as those deaths suffered by women and that have been inflicted by their present or former intimate partners in heterosexual relationships. Speaking to the European context, Gottzen et al. (2020) define intimate partner femicide in terms of gender roles, with an emphasis on traditionally masculine gender performances which are said to contribute to the (re)production of classed and racialised identities (Gottzen et al., 2020). As noted in Chapter 1, The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention-CDCP (2021) define intimate partner femicide as the use of physical or sexual violence with the potential to result in harm, disabling, or death; or coercive measures such as psychological or emotional abuse when there has previously been physical or sexual violence committed by a current or former spouse or nonmarital partner.

Definitional and scholarly understandings of partner femicide are, in many regions of the world, largely influenced by scholarship within the Global North (Sardinha et al., 2022). Brodie (2020) notes that global events can increase the visibility of local events, magnifying or multiplying their importance. In other words, the manner by which the West constructs intimate partner femicide has powerful implications for colonised nations. For example, definitions offered by influential institutions in the North can affect how research studies engage with intimate partner violence in the Global South. The United Nations Office (2018), for example, has emphasised that the killings and murder of women and girls are the result of conventionally socialised masculinity. This definition, as noted by Brodie (2020), influences

how intimate partner femicide has been researched in South Africa. This phenomenon becomes pernicious when influential definitions from the North rely on individualising and/or colonial rhetoric that ignores and plays down patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist social systems (Connel, 2001; Mfecane, 2008; Ratele, 2016). As Brown et al. (2023) argue, while individual risk factors are important, there is a need to focus research on the structural and contextual drivers of intimate partner violence.

According to Wu and colleagues (2020), intimate partner violence prevalence and understandings vary across geographic areas for a number of cultural, economic, social and religious reasons, with Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, and South-East Asia having the greatest rates of such violence, followed by the Americas. Garcia-Vergara (2022) insists that in intimate partner femicide, the victims' geographical location is especially important in understanding some of the drivers of intimate partner femicide. It is imperative that critical research studies highlight that this finding takes place against histories of colonisation that entrenched violence at the structural level (Brysk & Faust, 2021; Walklate et al., 2019). Omagu (2020), in conversation with Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, conceptualises colonialism as an encounter in which people come into the country to conquer and dominate people through violence, violence which is always met with resistance. Put into context, colonialism is a powerful structure that transforms ways of life in human beings and relations through the establishment an asymmetrical interpersonal relations between the colonised (subjects) and the coloniser (the citizen) and robs indigenous people of their land and their right to property ownership, unfairly distributing economic resources among the colonisers.

In South Africa, critical scholars like Mfecane (2008) and Ratele (2016) embed their analyses of gendered violence in South Africa's racist colonial history of violence. They note

that gender-based violence is not a problem pertaining specifically to Black men (it is not, in other words, a problem particular to Black masculinity, as racist colonial discourse would have it), but is instead a structural issue.

Ratele (2016) posits that men and boys are gendered and embedded within structures of violence and inequality, whereby violence is seen as a means of asserting traditional masculinity. Traditional masculinity, in our own context, is a by-product of a powerful structure imbricated within a patriarchal state, that serves to transform human beings into conflicting subjects. Therefore, a critique of traditional masculinity is enhanced by considering the power of the state in the making of human subjects. Connel (2001) argues that the enactment of hegemonic masculinities brings into focus power relations that exist at a societal level. These structures of power are not irrelevant to the ways in which hegemonic masculinities manifest in intimate relationships and their implication in the perpetration of intimate partner femicide. Stated another way, it may be said that men exercise power over women within the context of their own encounters with the structures and systems of violence, oppression and inequality.

It would seem, then, that critical academic scholarship within the Global South has emphasised that while we cannot ignore individual factors when studying intimate partner femicide, structural, historical and contextual influences are crucially important in this respect. As such, it is important that systemic, psychic and societal factors are engaged when seeking to understand intimate partner femicide. Below, is a section that considers some of these factors and appraises the ways by which they have been engaged in the academic literature on intimate partner femicide in South Africa.

SYSTEMIC AND PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS IMPLICATED IN INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Colonisation and Violence in South Africa

South Africa, like much of the Global South, has a long history of colonialism. In South Africa, as elsewhere, colonialism manifested as a settler project, a pain-inflicting process that depended on violent acts of land dispossession, rape, slavery trade, killings, wars, and the mass murders of indigenous peoples. Fanon (1967) speaks of colonialism as a dehumanisation process that gives way to the zone of being and zone of non-being (see also Grosfoguel, 2016). According to Fanon (1967), colonised subjects were denied their humanity, and thus placed in the zone of non-being. The zone of being, by contrast, is reserved for those colonial subjects whose humanity is recognised by colonial systems. Both the zones of being and non-being are products of an anti-Black world where whiteness is reified by dehumanising Blackness.

According to Enaifoghe (2021), the high rate of violence against women in South Africa can be attributed to the inherited policy of the past where the ills of apartheid have continued to plague the country's social ordering. Despite the various efforts by governments and international organisations to put an end to gender-based violence globally, such violence, which has serious psychological effects on its victims, remains among the foremost human rights violations in South Africa today (Enaifighe, 2021). The legacy of colonialism in South Africa is noted today in many ways, such as in the way by which gender-based violence enacted by White males is treated in the media and oftentimes in academia as exceptional, where violence in Black communities is understood as the norm which, in turn, shapes how private security officers and media outlets profile Black men and justify police violence (Boonzaier, 2022). In a similarly racist colonial discourse, Black women are positioned as sexually

licentious, promiscuous, and 'available', whereas Black men are established as inherently violent and 'savage', with both being sexually deviant and in need of 'civilising'. The processes of colonisation, enslavement and apartheid have, therefore, shaped common of perceptions gendered and masculine subjectivities. Accordingly, Boonzaier and her colleagues (2020) note that critical scholarship must consider the multigenerational, traumatic violences caused by previous injustices, exploitation, and dehumanisation when focusing on gender-based violence. We need to take all gendered lives, their histories, and material realities seriously within their geopolitical contexts.

It is against colonialism's historical backdrop that critical South African scholarship on gender-based violence has sought to read psychosocial factors like gender identity, hegemonic masculinity, racialised inequality and poverty, substance abuse, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (Amis et al., 2021; Boonzaier, 2021; Boonzaier, 2022; Brown et al., 2023; Enaifoghe, 2021; Gottzen et al., 2021; Isike, 2022; Malherbe et al., 2021; Yesufu, 2022; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022). Isike (2022), for example, makes reference to the socio-cultural, political, economic and legal aspects associated with gender-based violence, linking socio-cultural facets of South African society to the production of patriarchy and gender inequalities that sustain violence against women. Several other South African studies have adopted a similar approach that problematises culture as the root cause of gender-based violence, with some engaging colonialism more explicitly than others (Enaifoghe, 2021; GBVF-NSP, 2020; Isike, 2022; Seedat et al., 2009; Yesufu, 2022; Zinyemba & Hlongwana, 2022).

In a recent study, Brown and colleagues (2023) found that colonialism has imposed patriarchal beliefs that devalue women, resulting in intergenerational trauma and structural

inequities. Other studies have similarly noted how gender norms are implicated in violence against women. For example, Seedat et al. (2009) made reference to masculine mores of risk-taking and defence of honour when considering gender-based violence, with the apartheid historical backdrop emphasised more than colonialism. Brown et al. (2023) went on to argue that there is a need for systemically focused interventions and policies that address not only gender norms, but also larger structural disparities left in the wake of colonialism.

Patriarchal Masculinities

Enaifoghe (2021) ascribes violent acts against women and children to unequal and oppressive patriarchal power relations. Yesufu (2022) understands patriarchy as the social structure in which men are mostly in charge and predominate in positions of moral authority, political leadership, social privilege, and property ownership. The author argues that "social norms, religious and traditional values, patriarchy, and gender relationships contribute to violent masculinity and physical abuse against women, undermining their right to existence" (Yesufu, 2022, p. 90). Zinyemba and Hlongwana (2022) shared a similar view, arguing that gender-based violence in South Africa is caused by a combination of legal, socio-cultural, and socio-economic factors, such as the payment of lobola, use of alcohol and drugs, and social norms, such as being submissive to the husband, and sex as a conjugal right. For example, men may feel entitled to their female partners' bodies once they have paid lobola (Zinyemba & Hlogwana, 2020).

It has also been argued that patriarchy is a product of racialised sexualisation, derogatory representations, and legitimised suffering, all of which take place on the systemic level and have shaped gender-based violence (Boonzaier, 2023). Millet (cited in Gottzen et al., 2020) echoes a similar point, insisting that patriarchy can only be maintained through force –

it needs violence, or the threat of violence, to sustain itself. Patriarchy is thus put to work in consolidating an oppressive colonial logic organised along the lines of race, class, and sexuality, a logic that has been constituted by the forces of history.

Psychological Harm and Intergenerational Trauma

Intimate partner femicide is, like all forms of violence, bound in many ways to South Africa's political history where apartheid as a political system placed Black people in an oppressive social-cultural and economic position based on inequality and exclusion, and was qualified (legislatively and through colonial moralising logic) in terms of race and gender (Boonzaier, 2022; Ratele et al., 2021). The violent rule by the apartheid government thus created an unbearable traumatic experience in Black communities, an experience that has been passed down generationally.

Scarry (1985) highlights the nature of such trauma, describing pain as an experience that is both intimately felt by the victim and simultaneously detached from their broader context by knowledge politics. This disjunction means that the pain experienced – whether through war, injury, or systemic violence – often becomes a subject of abstraction and detachment, controlled by those in power and dominated by neoliberal forces. Scarry's (1985) framework illuminates how the historical and contextual narratives of pain and injury are frequently obscured by these dominant knowledge structures.

It is essential to critically challenge the ways in which settler colonialist perspectives shape our understanding of intimate partner femicide, particularly when these perspectives employ dualistic or individualistic frameworks. The global power structure is designed to isolate individuals from their broader contexts through the control of knowledge politics. This

underscores the need to explore the psychological harm – such as trauma and pain – inflicted by colonial systems. Such exploration is crucial for accurately understanding and contextualising gender-based violence and femicide in our own experiences.

Notably, the psychosocial origins of violence in general and gender-based violence in particular – the interactions between social variables and personal cognition and behaviour in rates of violence – have received relatively little attention (Isike, 2022). According to Seedat et al., (2009), psychological harm in South Africa has been constituted at a structural level. This is the result of colonially arranged social and structural constraints relating to poverty, unemployment, and income inequality as well as patriarchal ideas of masculinity that validate power, risk-taking and exposure to practices of honour, experiences of abuse during childhood, severe alcohol abuse, and weaknesses of law enforcement. As such, vulnerability that issues from the enduring structural effects of apartheid-era structural violence (e.g., unemployment, poverty and inequality) coincides with power and domination to cause fear and insecurity (Boonzaier, 2022; Malherbe et al., 2021; Ratele et al., 2021). Vulnerability to violence and suffering is unequally distributed along the lines of race, gender, and class. Despite this, there has always been resistance to this kind of gendered and racialised structural domination, and people are able to exercise agency against structures of domination.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Enaifoghe (2021) argues that alcohol can serve as a coping mechanism for individuals facing structural violence. Exposure to alcohol and substance abuse can increase the likelihood of using violence against an intimate partner femicide (Backe et al., 2022; Brown et al., 2023; Seedat et al., 2009). In a recent study, Zinyemba and Hlongwana (2022) found that exposure to alcohol and substances can result in men being more likely to perform acts of violence

against their partners to maintain control over them. As such, it cannot be said that alcohol results in intimate partner violence, but rather that alcohol, which serves as a coping strategy for some, increases the likelihood of such violence. This connection is exacerbated by the colonial legacy of socio-economic and psychological trauma, which has fuelled substance abuse in marginalised communities burdened by systemic inequalities and inadequate access to resources and support systems. Colonial disruptions of traditional ways of life and the imposition of a new social order inflicted profound trauma, leaving these communities with a fractured sense of identity. This trauma has contributed to widespread mental health issues and substance abuse.

The history of violence and its impact on gender-based violence and femicide is deeply rooted in the traumatic experiences of colonialism, which inflicted severe psychological harm on marginalised communities. Caroppo et al. (2024) partially support the view that substance abuse can lead to femicide, but emphasises that intervention strategies must address socio-cultural factors, such as hegemonic masculinities. These strategies should consider the experiences of both victims and perpetrators, including the intergenerational transmission of trauma and psychological harm.

COVID-19 Pandemic

More recently, gender-based violence and, in turn, intimate partner femicide in many parts of the world have been exacerbated by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown regulations (Casy et al., 2020; Simelane et al., 2023). Dlamini (2021, p. 585) argues that the "social and economic stress brought by the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequality". The United Nations Development Programme (2020) inscribes increased gender-based violence during the

COVID-19 pandemic to toxic social norms, economic and social stress, and restricted movement and social isolation, leading to increased vulnerability. According to the US Agency for International Development - USAID (2020), COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions increased the risk of gender-based violence by exacerbating the negative conditions that result in such violence. Dlamini (2021) labelled violence against women as a "twin pandemic" to COVID-19 in the South African context. Indeed, a high number of cases of rape, assault, abuse and the murder of women and girls were reported nationwide during this time (Dlamini, 2021). The South African government implemented lockdown rules which forced partners and families to remain indoors, where abuse typically happens and for the most part, goes unreported. The lockdown regulations, in other words, trapped women in their homes with abusers, isolating them from resources and support (Mkhize & Sibisi, 2022). In the first seven days of the lockdown, South Africa reported 87,000 incidences of gender-based violence (Joska et al., 2020). Thus, increased gender-based violence, such as homicide and physical, emotional, and sexual violence, was caused by lockdown limitations, lost income, and restricted movement (Moganedi & Mkhize, 2023).

Both in the United States and South Africa, it was reported that Black women from low socio-economic backgrounds experienced especially high rates of intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gordon & Sauti, 2022). Unprecedented economic hardships brought on by the lockdown were correlated with increased violence against women and children in the home. Being confined to the house was shown to be related to conflict and crime (Mahlangu et al., 2022). Leburu-Masigo and Kgadima (2020) state that "the homes which are supposed to be safe spaces for women have turned into carceral spaces and violent zones" (p. 16622). Lund et al. (2020) indicate that lockdown measures not only socially distanced individuals from one another, but also instated a psychological and social disconnection with

disruptive consequences (see also Mittal & Singh, 2020; Nduna & Tshona, 2021). This had a deleterious impact on familial financial structures as many people lost their jobs. It was this mixture of fear, stigma, financial constraints, a lack of awareness, a desire for retribution, and attitudes toward violence that gender-based violence became such a salient, twin pandemic (Muleneh et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The GBVF-NSP (2020) represents a key step in addressing the elevated levels of gender-based violence and intimate partner femicide in South Africa. Although there has been sparse scholarship on the GBVF-NSP (2020), the document has nonetheless been critiqued by some scholars who have drawn attention to its inadequate implementation, owing primarily to a lack of political will and power struggles between stakeholders. Others have noted that the GBVF-NSP (2020) does not sufficiently engage with structural violence, noting also that it is not inclusive enough. The effectiveness of the GBVF-NSP (2020) thus remains to be seen.

Some academic literature on intimate partner femicide in South Africa risks relying on colonial, individualising, and essentialising logic (Boonzaier, 2022; Brodie, 2021). More critical literature on this matter has engaged with the impact that the colonial administration has had on gender-based violence in South Africa. This more critical body of work has examined, among others, the vulnerability and intergenerational trauma created by the colonial system, hegemonic masculinity/patriarchy, alcohol and substance abuse, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In short, much of the GBVF-NSP (2020) and, indeed, some of the less critical academic scholarship have constructed intimate partner femicide as physical violence that can be

attributed to specific individuals. When shot through with colonial logic, it is Black masculinity that is made responsible for such violence.

To summarise, then, in this chapter I undertook a review of how intimate partner femicide has been conceptualised in South Africa. This included reviewing how the GBVF-NSP (2020), as a recent and particularly prominent policy document, and academic literature published since the inception of the GBVF-NSP (2020) have engaged intimate partner femicide. In the next chapter, I present the theoretical framework that underpins the current study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I present the theoretical framework of this study, namely: decolonial feminism. Deriving from schools of thought within the Global South (initially from Latin America but later elsewhere throughout Africa and Asia too), decolonial feminism seeks to explicitly challenge the idea of coloniality/modernity as world-historical systems that determine gender expression (Lugones, 2010). Before explicating more fully on decolonial feminism, it is important to first unpack how the coloniality of power and western ontology connect with gender-based violence.

COLONIALITY OF POWER AND GENDERED VIOLENCE

The scholarly work of Mignolo (2005), Escobar (2010), Dussel and Ibarra-Colado (2006), and Quijano and Ennis (2000) offers decolonial theory as a radical and intellectual critique of Eurocentric modernity and claims of universality by Atlantic West fictions. This work offers us a foundation for understanding how Lugones' (2010) decolonial feminism (see later in this section) addresses the intersections of gender and coloniality. Dussel and Ibarra-Colado (2006) locate modernity as a European sociocultural identification that works to maintain global power and domination over colonies. Modernity, in a practical sense, involves the collection of practices and institutions that developed from Western ontology and cultural domination in an attempt to exert control over colonies (Misoczky, 2011). The universalising ontologies of coloniality neglect representations (i.e., actions, thoughts, and knowledge) of those in the Global South, creating the 'other' as people who do not fit the requirements of modernity.

In his theorisation on the modern/colonial world, Maldonado-Torres (2007) refers to the coloniality of being. He argues that the unfinished project of modernity needs to be understood as the unfinished project of colonisation. In this respect, Grosfoguel (2016) refers to the painful experiences and processes of violence and dehumanisation intrinsic to colonization, including gendered violence. As highlighted in the previous chapter, Fanon (1967) characterises this form of dehumanisation within racialised (and, we should add, gendered) power dynamics as the "zone of non-being", a label that relegates colonised individuals to a non- or sub-human status imposed by colonial systems. In contrast, the "zone of being" is designated for those colonising subjects whose humanity is acknowledged by these systems. Both zones emerge from an anti-Black world where whiteness is exalted through the dehumanisation of Blackness. Therefore, within the zones of being and non-being, power is used to meet the ends of colonialism, and modernity/coloniality through direct social, cultural and political institutionalisation.

Quijano's (2000) notion of the "colonial matrix of power" is central to how coloniality permeates our attitudes, thinking, and how we feel about and see the world. He argues that both race and gender find their expression in global patterns of colonial-capitalist power. In his articulation, Quijano (2001 cited in Lugones, 2008, p. 2) argues that "power is structured in relations of domination, exploitation and conflict as social factors fight over control of the four basic areas of human existence: sex, labour, collective authority and subjectivity/intersubjectivity, their resources and products". Relational disputes (i.e., contestation over talk, thought, and remembering) over the control of each of these four areas of existence are ordered around coloniality/modernity that thrives on dichotomy, structural hierarchies, and debasing colonised human beings into animals and hyper-sexualised beings (Quijano & Ennis, 2000).

WESTERN UNIVERSALISED ONTOLOGY AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Dussel and Ibarra-Colado (2006) locate modernity as a sociocultural identification associated with Europe. Modernity works to maintain global power and domination over colonised countries. It arranges human activities within a Eurocentric frame, leading to the denigration of personal values, forms of organisation and collaboration, and lifestyles in the Global South, as well as the negation, disavowal, distortion and denial of knowledges, subjectivities, world senses and visions produced in the South (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Misoczky (2011) notes that the complicity between modernity and reality works to (re)produce and enforce Westernised knowledge in the rest of the world. Several institutionalised feminist narratives, for example, are rooted in Western hegemony, measuring gender equality in terms of their ways of knowing and legitimising neoliberal forms of domination (Makama et al., 2019). This universal ontology, to which my research addresses itself, ignores knowledge embodied by subjects in much of the Global South, especially the knowledges of those who have lived and experienced the colonial difference (Mignolo & Escobar, 2010). It is in this context that systems and logics of coloniality have diminished and erased the ontological density of those subjects who are racialised as Black and gendered in a feminised or queer manner, thus dehumanising these subjects (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015).

In light of the above, the decolonial project is concerned with the logic of coloniality and the West's global imposition of violence (Lugones, 2010). Decoloniality influences ways of knowing, thinking, and doing in the world and involves thinking and theorising from lived and situated praxes (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). The implied aim of decoloniality is to construct clear paths away from the colonial matrix of power and towards decolonising modalities of thinking, feeling, believing, doing and living (see Grosfoguel, 2016). Articulating from such a

locus of understanding that is attentive to the structural coordinates of the modern/colonial world is therefore critical in decolonial analyses of gender-based violence, including intimate partner femicide.

DECOLONIAL FEMINISM

Decolonial feminism is a theoretical frame that positions feminism in cultural, social, and historical settings. It challenges how coloniality/modernity determines gender (Lugones, 2010). In South Africa, scholars such as Mfecane (2008) and Ratele (2016) have mobilised decolonial feminism to consider the position of both the perpetrator and victim in their analyses of gender-based violence. Their argument is based on the premise that the history of violence in Black families and communities is not a problem pertaining specifically to Black men, but is instead a structural issue that is directly related to anti-Black violence as a manifestation of coloniality. This perspective is relevant to South Africa given its history of violence that demobilised Black families and communities under the apartheid government and prior to this during the colonial administration.

Decolonial feminism speaks back to dominant feminist narratives in South Africa that ignore how historical and societal issues are implicated in dehumanising marginalised communities (Mfecane, 2008; Ratele, 2016). Decolonial feminism thus refuses interventions that strive only to expose toxic masculinities without working towards developing positive masculinities through the involvement of men in feminist praxis. Menon (2015) argues that although it is necessary to determine different hierarchically positioned gender identities, this process must avoid relying on colonial tropes and logics. The goal is thus to bring men into the project of decolonial feminism.

In this thesis, decolonial feminism is applied to critically analyse how the GBVF-NSP (2020) and academic literature that has engaged intimate partner femicide since the inception of the GBVF-NSP (2020) has constructed intimate partner femicide in South Africa. As such, attention is paid to how intimate partner femicide relates to the question of coloniality/modernity, capitalism, and patriarchy. The conflicting and violent actions in intimate partner relationships are therefore connected to colonialism and its associated social orders informed by Western norms and values. Importantly, the colonial history of violence is centralised in my attempt to examine constructions of intimate partner femicide in South Africa. In particular, I frame my analytical readings against Eurocentric claims of universality, claims that debase and dehumanise African social and gender norms as well as the Black female body. Decolonial feminism, in short, rejects the narrow lens of individuality and instead encourages scholars, practitioners, and activists to think from the perspective of "Otherness" which explicitly considers the struggles of those living under colonial patriarchy.

In the chapter to follow, the research design and methodology of the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This present chapter focuses on the methodology employed in this study, including a focus on the study's research paradigm; study approach; study setting; research design; data sources; data collection technique; data analysis; data trustworthiness; and ethical considerations.

RESEARCH PARADIGM

The word paradigm was first used by Kuhn (2012) to refer to a philosophical school of thought. However, today, the term "paradigm" has assumed several different meanings. According to Neuman (2000) and Creswell (2003), a paradigm might refer to an ontology, an epistemology, or a research methodology. The current study is guided by the social constructivism paradigm. As Amineh and Asl (2015, p. 13) put it, social constructivism is "a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the knowledge and understandings of the world that are developed jointly by individuals". As a philosophical approach, social constructivism relies on the assumption that it is through human activity that reality is created (Kim, 2001). In other words, reality is a socially and culturally shared product established by individuals who interact in a particular context. People in society thus create the properties of the world around them. In many ways, social constructivism pushes back against neo-objectivism and creative constructivism by emphasising how the multiple determinants of power in which narratives about social problems are manufactured and promulgated. Social constructivism thereby acknowledges how human agency influences the socially constructed nature of identity, beliefs and social institutions (Hollander & Gordon, 2006).

Bohan (1993) insists that social constructivism is a useful guide in our engagement with gendered concepts because it is based on the premise that gender roles are produced in social and historical contexts, rather than being innately linked to an individual or sexual identity. As such, and for the purpose of this study, social constructivism is relied on to understand the socio-historical processes underlying the construction of intimate partner femicide in the GBVF-NSP (2020) and in the academic literature published since the GBVF-NSP (2020). A social constructivist point of view can assist us in drawing attention to the power relations and contextual backdrop within and through which the GBVF-NSP is expressed. Social constructivism is also able to facilitate critical engagements with taken-for-granted assumptions that underlie concepts like intimate partner femicide, taking seriously the language and social conditions that surround these concepts (Gordon & Abbott, 2002). The GBVF- NSP (2020) and academic literature that has engaged intimate partner femicide since its inception are thus products of an amalgamation of social forces and human agency, and in this respect, these documents have tangible impacts in the world.

STUDY APPROACH

The present study follows a qualitative research approach. According to Creswell (2018), the qualitative approach involves an in-depth and holistic analysis of a research phenomenon. The analysis itself employs a flexible research design on rich and in-depth narrative material. As Anderson and colleagues (2018) put it, qualitative research focuses on a relatively small number of concepts and without a predetermined set of ideas regarding how these concepts should be understood. Creswell and Cheryl (2016) understand the qualitative approach as embodying a methodological tool that is to be used to probe deeply into specific social phenomena. In this regard, the qualitative approach involves the researcher introducing a nuanced, holistic picture of the phenomena under study, analysing signs and symbols (be they

linguistic or visual) related to these phenomena, reflecting socio-historic complexity and, lastly, conducting the study in a setting that has not been influenced by the researcher (Creswell, 2009).

For the purposes of this study, the qualitative approach affords the necessary nuance and socio-historical scope to examine how intimate partner femicide has been constructed, and what these constructions mean in the contemporary world. The qualitative approach also ensures that this research connects the symbolic to the material, probing into how we understand things and struggle over their meanings affects how these things are constituted in reality. Lastly, the qualitative approach facilities an engagement with how social phenomena alter through time and space, paying specific attention to the inequitable power relations that underlie these alternations. This is especially germane to the study of intimate partner femicide in South Africa.

STUDY CONTEXT

While the present study does not involve participants from a particular setting, it is concerned with gender-based violence and intimate partner femicide in the context of South Africa, and thus it is this context that serves as the study's setting. South Africa is among the countries with the highest rate of violence perpetrated against women and girls. In 2020 – which saw a global surge of intimate partner violence (World Health Organization, 2021) – one in five (21%) women experienced physical and sexual violence from their partners (Statistics South Africa- STATS SA, 2020). Recent crime statistics show that between July and September 2023, 1514 attempted murder cases were reported in South Africa, the majority of which took place in the home. The majority of these cases were domestic violence-related, whereby the victim and the perpetrator were said to be in a relationship (SAPS Crime Statistics,

2023). Over thirteen thousand assault cases were reported in 2023, most of which were domestic-related, and included women and children (SAPS Crime Statistics, 2022). These statistics on crimes against women and girls underline the existing call for a multidisciplinary approach to preventing such violence. Such high rates of violence in contemporary South Africa must, of course, be considered in relation to both colonialism and apartheid which, together, form the country's historical backdrop (Brodie et al., 2021; Boonzaier, 2022; Malherbe et al., 2021; Mothoagae, 2016).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study is non-participant in nature and relies on an exploratory research design to explore constructions of intimate partner femicide in the GBVF-NSP (2020) as well as scholarly articles on intimate partner femicide in South Africa published since the inception of the GBVF-NSP. Exploratory research design is a qualitative research approach aimed at uncovering and understanding the underlying meanings and insights related to a phenomenon (Burns & Gove, 2001; Creswell, 2018; Swedberg, 2020). Exploratory research is particularly useful in contexts where there is limited prior research or where the phenomenon is complex and evolving (Cresswell, 2018; Mansourian, 2008). It is characterised by its flexibility and open-ended nature, allowing researchers to explore various aspects of a topic. Exploratory research aims to uncover new insights and generate hypotheses rather than test existing theories (Burns & Grove, 2001). This type of research is particularly useful in the early stages of investigation, where the goal is to identify key variables, patterns, and relationships within a phenomenon (see Stevens et al., 2013). In this sense, exploratory research is useful for laying the groundwork for more structured and in-depth research, and the insights gained from exploratory studies can inform the development of more targeted research designs and

interventions (Creswell, 2018). Exploratory research is thus valuable in diverse fields, including social sciences, business, and health studies.

The methodological approaches in exploratory research include qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and content and document analysis (see Swedberg, 2020). These methods provide rich data that are crucial for understanding the nuances of the research topic. For example, qualitative interviews can reveal participants' perceptions and experiences, while content analysis of documents and literature can help identify recurring themes. Accordingly, by focusing on the GBVF-NSP (2020) and recent scholarly literature, the study seeks to identify emergent themes, patterns, and conceptualisations of intimate partner femicide within the South African context. The exploratory design is intended to generate a nuanced understanding of how intimate partner femicide is framed within the GBVF-NSP (2020) and how it is represented in academic discourse. This approach is crucial for mapping out the various dimensions of intimate partner femicide as they are constructed in policy and academic discourse. The goal is to provide an overview of the topic and foundational insights, which can inform future research, policy development, and intervention strategies.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

Data inclusion criteria for the scholarly articles were: 1) peer-reviewed articles that focused on gender and intimate partner femicide published between 2020 and 2024 (the period between the release of the GBVF-NSP, 2020 and submission of the thesis); 2) articles that were explicitly focused on the South African context; 3) articles that were published in accredited academic journals; and 4) articles that followed a qualitative research design. Conversely, the exclusion criteria were: 1) articles on gender and intimate partner femicide that were not published within the period 2020 to 2022; 2) articles that were not based in South Africa; 3)

articles that were not published in accredited journals, and; 4) articles that followed a quantitative research design.

DATA SOURCES AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The term "data collection strategy" is used by Hofstee (2006) to refer to "everything that a researcher can utilise to acquire information from the participants" (p. 115). It is during the data-gathering process that information is gathered and organised (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). Taherdoost (2021) refers to the process of gathering information as that which answers specified research questions in a study. Thorough the data collection process, researchers get to know their data and become familiar with it.

Unlike quantitative data, qualitative research is non-numerical, comparatively unstructured, and raw (Goundar, 2012). In this study, there were two datasets, both of which can be considered secondary data. The first dataset, namely, the GBVF-NSP (2020), was retrieved via the official Justice and Constitutional Development website of the Republic of South Africa[3]. The second dataset, academic literature on intimate partner femicide published between 2020 and 2022, was accessed via several multidisciplinary databases, including Google Scholar, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Pro- Quest Central, EBSCOhost, Academic Search Complete, Scopus, PsychInfo, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and JSTOR. Faulkner and Trotter (2017) define data saturation as a point in research where no further information is discovered in the data analysis process. Data saturation was determined by the stage in the data collection process where no further information was discovered. The search for relevant literature on intimate partner femicide conducted in South Africa was guided by the following keywords: *intimate partner femicide; decoloniality*; and *South Africa*, along with

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[3] See https://www.justice.gov.za/vg/gbv/nsp-gbvf-final-doc-04-05.pdf

Boolean operators. The search terms included combinations such as "intimate partner femicide" AND "South Africa", "race" AND "intimate partner femicide" AND "South Africa", "decolonial feminism" AND "intimate partner femicide" AND "South Africa", "violence" AND "intimate partner femicide", and "intimate partner femicide" AND "Black communities".

The use of two data sources is known as triangulation. Patton (cited in Carter, 2014, p. 1) defines triangulation as "the use of various methods or data sources in qualitative research to generate a holistic understanding of phenomena". According to Flick (2004), studying a research phenomenon from two alternative angles can ensure rigour and a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. Hesse-Biber (2010) and Golafshani (2003) confirm that combining multiple methods helps to establish the rigour and trustworthiness of data.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study adopted a two-step analytic process: thematic analysis and document analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Firstly, thematic analysis was used to analyse both data sources. Thematic analysis is a methodological approach used for detecting, analysing, organising, summarising, and reporting the themes produced from a set of collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis helps to clarify the significance of the data by identifying, appraising, and/or analysing important themes (Wagner, 2012). Hofstee (2006) defines thematic analysis as a process of transforming data into usable information – or themes – through analysis. According to Riger and Sigurvinsdottir (2016), themes are explicit or implicit ideas derived from a set of information. A theme is not measurable, but instead depends on whether it captures something

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important from the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes themselves tend to emerge from a phrase, sentence, or paragraph (Schurink et al., 2011). Auerbach and Silverstein (cited in Riger and Sigurvinsdottir, 2016) recount that repeated ideas within data are identified by the researcher as loose codes which can then later be grouped into more concrete themes.

In the present study, separate thematic analyses were conducted on the GBVF- NSP (2020) and academic literature that engaged intimate partner femicide since the inception of the GBVF (2020). The thematic analysis followed the six-phase framework for this data analytic strategy outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This framework informs the steps a researcher takes in thematically analysing data. The framework comprises six steps: First, the researcher familiarises themselves with the data. I read the respective datasets thoroughly to understand their content and context. Secondly, the researcher creates initial codes. Here, I developed initial and multiple codes to categorise and organise the data based on emerging patterns or themes. Next, the researcher collapses these codes into more concrete themes. I thus refined and consolidated these codes into more concrete themes, making them more succinct. Fourthly, the researcher studies the themes in an attempt to answer their research questions. I accordingly analysed the emerging themes in relation to my research questions to derive insights. In the penultimate step, the researcher identifies and appraises the most salient themes. In this stage, I assessed and prioritised the most significant themes based on their relevance. Finally, the researcher assembles a final research report. I compiled my findings to present the results derived from the thematic analysis. As such, I arranged the data from the two data sources into two sets of inductive codes. More consolidated themes were then searched for, reviewed, and read against the academic literature.

Document Analysis

Secondly, document analysis was undertaken to examine both data sources, the GBVF-NSP (2020) and the academic literature. Document analysis primarily focuses on written materials which provide information on a particular phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Benjamin and Mario (2018) define document analysis as a systemic form of qualitative research that relies on documentary evidence to answer specific research questions. Bowen (2009), on the other hand, refers to document analysis as a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, be they printed or in electronic form. The application of document analysis is typically undertaken in combination with other research methods, firstly to establish convergence of ideas and to corroborate multiple sources of evidence, and secondly to address biases and challenge various propositions (Bowen, 2009; Golafshani, 2003). Document analysis considers relevant excerpts, quotes, or entire passages for the purposes of "finding, appraising, selecting and synthesizing data narrated in documents" (Bowen, 2009, p. 28).

In this study, the document analysis was informed and guided by the findings of the thematic analysis. Using document analysis to examine both data sources (i.e., the GBVF-NSP and the academic literature) enabled me to understand and categorise the data, both of which are important processes that precede synthesising the data sources into thematic categories. This involved understanding how the GBVF-NSP (2020) constructs intimate partner femicide and how academic literature published since the inception of the GBVF-NSP (2020) has engaged with intimate partner femicide. Indeed, both documents were understood as reflecting and challenging various discourses and political currents within the society in which they were produced.

REFLEXIVITY

The study applies reflexivity, a critical process wherein the researcher reflects on their own position and experiences in relation to the research context (see Berger, 2015). Reflexivity involves the researcher recognising and situating their own narratives within the context in which they are actively engaged. This process is particularly sensitive, as it addresses the potential for resistance from Eurocentric and Westernised perspectives that may view the research, especially if conducted by a Black man and student, as challenging their universalising claims and perpetuating the marginalisation of Black experiences within the scientific community.

According to Pillow (2003), reflexivity involves becoming aware of one's own biases and perspectives. Rosa (2015) underscores the importance of human experience in psychological research, emphasising that personal insights can significantly shape theoretical development and knowledge within the scientific community. Therefore, the researcher's engagement in the context of the study is crucial.

In this study, reflexivity was applied to critically examine the constructions of intimate partner femicide in the GBVF-NSP (2020) and the associated academic literature. This process included maintaining a detailed journal to reflect on personal emotions and thoughts before data collection began up to the conclusion of the thesis write-up process. The journal served as an essential and intuitive tool for me to remain mindful of my subjective experiences, ensuring that these did not overshadow my reading of the data and the emergent interpretations. Thus, by integrating reflexivity, the study aims to balance personal insights with the data analysis, enhancing the integrity of the research on intimate partner femicide within the South African context.

DATA TRUSTWORTHINESS

Data trustworthiness refers to: 1) credibility: establishing that the research results are believable and attained through well-established research methods; 2) transferability: the extent to which the research findings are applicable to other contexts; 3) dependability: the consistency and stability of the research inquiry processes over time; and 4) confirmability: the degree to which the research findings may be confirmed or corroborated by others (Shenton, 2004). Thus, data trustworthiness is concerned with the soundness of the research as it relates to the application and pertinence of the methods used in the research and the integrity of the conclusions that are drawn by the researcher (Shenton 2004).

In this study, credibility was ensured through the triangulation of data where, as noted earlier, a variety of data sources were used to establish convergence and corroboration (Bowen, 2009), develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (see Carter et al., 2014), and ensure the rigour of information (Flick, 2004; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010; Golafshani, 2003). The transferability of the research findings was addressed by the provision of detailed background information on the GBVF-NSP (2020) and the study's theoretical framing that allowed for comparisons to be made between the two data sources. The issues of dependability and credibility are closely linked. Accordingly, the dependability of this research was ensured by the use of two related methods of inquiry (i.e., document analysis and thematic analysis) utilised across the two data sources. With respect to confirmability, the research results were shared with five researchers and scholars working in the field of gender-based violence and femicide for purposes of verification. Most of these researchers and scholars agreed in large part with my findings and confirmed that the research itself aligns with the fifth Sustainable Development Goal, which seeks to promote gender equality and empower all

women and girls. Two of these scholars, however, noted that my research excludes those identifying outside of binary gender identities. Although it is important to investigate intimate partner killings in queer relationships, this study was strictly focused on heterosexual relationships as the most prevalent site of intimate partner femicide. Future research will undoubtedly need to be extended to include queer and gender-non-confirming relationships.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are a set of principles and rules that guide research design and approaches taken in research (Bhandari, 2021). Agwor and Adesina (2017) define ethical considerations as moral principles for guiding the behaviour of a researcher. For the purpose of this study, ethical clearance was sought from the ethics committee of the College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa. The GBVF-NSP (2020) is a publicly available document on the South African Government website (www.gov.za), as is the academic literature retrieved for analysis, both secondary sources of data. The ethical considerations for my study were thus informed by the non-participatory nature of the research. Ethics approval for the research was granted by the Unisa College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee (CREC), with reference number: 54781205_CREC_CHS_2022 (see Appendix A).

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I present the findings of my research on intimate partner femicide in South Africa. This includes presenting the results, in integrated form, from the document analysis as well as the themes identified in the thematic analysis which were conducted on the GBVF-NSP (2020) and on the academic literature that has engaged intimate partner femicide since the inception of the GBVF-NSP in 2020. Each section represents a specific theme that was identified in the thematic analysis. Five themes emerged from the analysis: 1) *Impacts of Gender Dimorphism and Race on Intimate Partner Femicide;* 2) *The Traumatic History of Violence and Impact on Intimate Partner Femicide;* 3) *Gender, Race and Geo-Politics Drive Intimate Partner Femicide;* 4) *Patriarchy and Intimate Partner Femicide;* and 5) *Connections Between Psycho-Social Vulnerability and Intimate Partner Femicide.* The thematic analysis was then used to guide the document analysis. Where the thematic analysis assisted me in identifying patterns across the data set, the document analysis enabled me to locate these thematic patterns within the socio-cultural contexts from which these documents arose. As such, the discussion of each theme is referenced against the document analysis. In short, this study's analytic process involved linking emerging themes and sub-themes to relevant literature in an effort to advance a contextual reading of intimate partner femicide in South Africa that is attentive to coloniality as a socio-historical backdrop.

IMPACTS OF GENDER DIMORPHISM AND RACE ON INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE

Lugones (2010) refers to biological dimorphism as reflecting the coloniality of power in how it links gendered violence to the gender that one is assigned at birth. We can see

biological dimorphism reflected in the GBVF-NSP (2020), despite its purported openness to the fluidity and socially embedded nature of gender. The World Bank Group (2019) notes that gender-based violence manifests in various forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse, and occurs across both affluent and impoverished societies. According to the European Commission (n.d.), gender-based violence is defined as violence directed at an individual based on their gender identity or violence that disproportionately affects a particular gender. Such definitions risk essentialising gender and attributing violence to it. Violence is, in other words, fixed to gender which circumvents the colonial making of gender, and how coloniality both racialises and genders violence (see Kusnierkiewicz, 2019). Moreover, although heteronormativity is defined on page 11 of the GBVF-NSP (2020), and is referred to in two other places in the GBVF-NSP (2020), heteronormative assumptions appear to be inscribed in various definitions used in the GBVF-NSP (2020). In short, then, without historical context, definitions like these risk attaching an essentialised understanding of violence to colonial categories and relations – taking these categories and relations as static or eternal, rather than the site at which decolonising action must take place (see Boonzaier et al., 2020). In this, the colonial project is unwittingly perpetuated.

Essentialisations in the GBVF-NSP (2020) risk influencing policies and strategies at various levels of government. Although there are places in the GBVF-NSP (2020) which acknowledge that the collective traumas within Black families and community settings in South Africa stem from structural modes of violence that result from the colonial era (e.g., on page 23), these traumas are rendered as a kind of contextual footnote that 'sets the scene' rather than serves as a key site of analysis and action (see Ratele et al., 2021). Such trauma must be centralised if the GBVF-NSP (2020) is to situate itself historically and grapple with how the history of coloniality sits within and structures gender-based violence and femicide in

contemporary South Africa. Of course, gendered differences and societal conditioning are, to some extent, acknowledged in the GBVF-NSP (2020), but how these differences are put to work for coloniality – and indeed, coloniality's reliance on the colonial difference – requires more attention if the GBVF-NSP (2020) is to situate itself within modern relations of power. Moreover, the GBVF-NSP (2020) does not interrogate how colonial modernity relies on static gender categories to engender violence within its colonies (e.g., Oyěwùmí, 1997).

In another definition, the GBVF- NSP (2020) defines intimate partner femicide quite simply as "the murder of women by intimate partners" (p. 10). While this definition is suitably broad, when understood as part and parcel of the definition of gender-based violence considered above, it remains tethered to a similarly ahistorical framing. What does such murder mean in the context of coloniality, and indeed how did the murder of women form part of the colonial project? As such, GBVF-NSP (2020) is concerned primarily with an act – the murder of women – that is removed from the historical and structural place of such an act. Consequently, the GBVF-NSP (2020) avoids asking critical questions about this act, isolating it without engaging fully with its systemic roots.

THE TRAUMATIC HISTORY OF VIOLENCE AND IMPACT ON INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE

As noted above, although the GBVF-NSP (2020) acknowledges the impact that colonial administrations had on violence in South Africa, it does not tie this history into its definitions and conceptual categories. As such, the GBVF-NSP (2020) risks offering abstracted categories for making sense of decontextualised violent acts that are confined to individuals, rather than individuals located within and formed by particular contexts, individuals who act in, with, and against these contexts. Moreover, taking these categories out of their historical contexts papers

over the generational traumas experienced by South Africa's Black population (see Lugones, 2010; Ratele et al., 2021). If these definitions and categories are to embed themselves in history, this trauma should be made central within the GBVF-NSP (2020), while acknowledging both the agency and socio-historical positionalities of violent actors. This is a complex task, but it is essential for grappling with gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa today.

In his foreword to the GBVF-NSP (2020), South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, fails to make connections between colonialism and gender-based violence, specifying that "this is a scourge that affects us all: young and old, black or white, rich and poor, queer or cis, rural or urban. It pervades every sphere of our society" (p. 2). On the surface level, this statement is undoubtedly correct. However, the shared vulnerability alluded to here does not fall equally upon everybody – it is determined in large part by the relations of power engendered by coloniality. As Bertolt (2018) notes, Black African women, compared to their white counterparts, face greater degrees of violence. Moreover, racist colonial narratives tend to attribute such violence to poor Black men. The political, discursive and historical landscape, in effect, falls away by focusing on gender-based violence as a "scourge" or an act which implies an individualised response.

Later on, the GBVF-NSP (2020) provides an explanation of the interconnections between colonialism and violence in South Africa. In its articulation of violence, it places structural inequalities at the centre of intimate partner femicide, specifying that:

Violence has been part of the South African social context for decades, rooted in historical apartheid policies and underpinned by high levels of inequality and poverty, racism, unequal gender power relations, and hostility to sexual and gender diversity. All of this has resulted in deep levels of collective trauma that is demonstrated in daily

interactions across all social spheres as attested by the excessive homicide and crime rates (GBVF-NSP, 2020, p. 23).

The GBVF-NSP (2020, p. 23) further notes that:

Structural GBV is an outcome of the unequal and exclusionary South African economy. This form of structural violence has remained hidden, is often overlooked, and is underpinned by exploitation of labour, undervaluing of unpaid work, under-funded social protection, unequal pay for equal work, inflexible labour policies, the high costs of living, unsafe and unhealthy working environments, inhumane working hours, poor regulation of the minimum wage and precarious jobs impacting particularly on women.

These two paragraphs provide important and accessible historical context which no doubt aids documents like these in achieving wider circulation and understanding. However, it seems that the GBVF-NSP (2020) is unable to carry this context through to its concepts and explanations, preferring instead individualised hermeneutics roots in the here and now. Moreover, coloniality as such is missing from these background explanations, with little effort made to situate apartheid in a global context (e.g., how the National Party government was supported by the governments of Britain and the United States). It follows, then, that the GBVF-NSP (2020) offers prevention strategies and plans put in place by the government, civil society organisations and other interest groups/stakeholders to address gender-based violence and femicide, with little attention paid to the discursive context, and what decoloniality would mean with respect to gender relations and the place that South Africa occupies in the global world order (see Lugones, 2008, 2010).

GENDER, RACE AND GEO-POLITICS DRIVE INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE

Like the GBVF-NSP (2020), within most academic literature, intimate partner femicide is defined as the murder of women by intimate partners. Carcia-Vergara et al. (2022, p. 1) define intimate partner femicide as "those deaths suffered by women and inflicted by their present or former intimate partners in heterosexual relationships". Abrahams et al. (2024) refer to intimate partner femicide as the murder of women committed by intimate partners. The South African Medical Research Council (cited in Brodie, 2021, p. 84) defines intimate partner femicide as: "Killing of women by intimate partners (i.e. a current or former husband/boyfriend, same-sex partner, or rejected would-be lover)". The World Health Organization (2021) regards intimate partner femicide as the killing of women by their current or former partners; also see Variava & Dekel, 2023). These definitions, as noted earlier, risk decontextualising gender-based violence, removing such violence from its socio-structural historical context, and reducing gender-based violence to mere acts rather than acts that take place in, against, and with the structures of coloniality.

There are, however, instances in the academic literature where the power differentials that exist between socially constructed genders become backgrounded for a focus on gender as such (Boonzaier et al., 2021). Like the GBVF-NSP (2020), these contextual factors are almost always acknowledged in academic articles; however, such context oftentimes falls away, and gender becomes abstracted and essentialised. Moreover, coloniality's discursive context is almost never acknowledged within these definitions, which is to say, the broader meaning-making apparatuses out of which these definitions are derived are not explicitly engaged. The aftermath of racial and sexual othering of Black people influences how both Black men and women see and perceive each other and are thus perceived by hegemonic white frames (see Fanon, 1967). As such, definitions are offered that divorce such violence from heteronormative

attitudes, race politics and the location within which incidences of intimate partner femicide occur. Coloniality is, in short, made invisible and thereby exerts its influence all the more strongly.

The above definitions – which oftentimes lapse unwittingly into gender essentialisation by attributing femicide to gender itself rather than how coloniality makes gender – impact government and civil society policies and plans to address gender-based violence. According to Verges (2022), such mainstream understandings of gender equality speak to violence and the cruelty of the individual, without consideration of social structures, which may include state structures and/or social structures – both of which fall under the purview of coloniality.

PATRIARCHY AND INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE

In the GBVF-NSP (2020), President Ramaphosa identifies patriarchy as an important aspect to consider in fighting against gender-based violence and femicide. It is further mentioned in the GBVF-NSP (2020, p. 2) that "safety and security, poverty, access to economic opportunities, and the contestation of their rights in a climate where patriarchy and chauvinism is widely prevalent and all-pervasive" are central to this fight. Despite defining patriarchy as a "social system" (p. 12), patriarchy is linked in the GBVF-NSP (2020) to social norms and attitudes (see e.g., p. 22, p. 24. p. 28, p. 29, p. 45, p. 47). Once again, abstractions become rooted in an essentialising, individualised frame, rather than the history of coloniality (see Lugones, 2008).

The centring of social and gender norms thereby turns away from how context structures the incidences, meanings, and interventions of intimate partner femicide in South Africa today. In countering this, there is also a body of critical scholarly literature that

consistently seeks to link patriarchy to its structural context – rendering patriarchy an enduring system of coloniality. Boonzaier (2022), for instance, describes patriarchy as a byproduct of racialised sexualisation, derogatory representations, and legitimised suffering that shapes gender-based violence. Millet (cited in Gottzen et al., 2021) similarly demonstrates how patriarchy could not be maintained without the rule of force and imperialist power.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN PSYCHO-SOCIAL VULNERABILITY AND INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE

Scholars like Gill and Pires (2019) have observed that there is a correlation between substance use, intoxication, and gender-based violence. While this is certainly true, there is a risk that the context in which people drink alcohol and abuse substances is ignored. Engaging with this correlation must begin by interrogating the structural factors that render substances a means of escaping conditions of poverty or asserting one's masculinity and/or courage.

Coloniality has certainly had a negative impact on mental health, alcoholism, and substance use, all of which are linked to heightened gender-based violence; however, they do not cause such violence in and of themselves (Barker et al., 2007). This justifies Isike's (2022) idea that the psychosocial character of an issue, which is to say, its behavioural/cognitive and societal nature, remains under-studied, and issues like inequality and poverty must be understood as part of the continued legacy of colonialism that affects interpersonal relationships and embeds violence in society, entrenching violent systems like patriarchy. Considerations of intimate partner violence must, in other words, engage with the inter-generational trauma and psychological vulnerability encountered by those who have suffered under apartheid and colonialism in South Africa, particularly Black people (see Ratele et al., 2021). This is precisely what the critical body of scholarly literature on this issue does. In the

academic literature, Boonzaier (2022 p. 4), referencing colonialism and the impact it had on the high rates of violence in South Africa, notes that:

> Despite South Africa's history of apartheid being written about as the foundational framing for an understanding of its contemporary contexts of violence – including femicide and other forms of gendered violence – there is a longer history of settler colonialism and slavery that provides an important, much deeper and necessary contextualisation of the contemporary moment.

In a similar vein, Garcia-Vergara et al. (2022, n.p.) argue that "studies on IPF have commonly focused on the offender and the victim to understand the criminal behaviour, attributing less importance to the place where the crime happens". Brodie et al. (2021), on the other hand, argue against positioning violence as episodic (i.e., private, individual events), arguing instead for an understanding of violence as thematic, which is to say, linked to socio-structural issues and thus also a collective responsibility.

Within this critical body of literature then, an emphasis on context translates into making connections between colonialism and the history of violence in South Africa. The violent rule by the colonial system undoubtedly created an unbearable state of trauma for Black families and communities. This served as a kind of psychological harm arranged along social and structural constraints. To meaningfully address gender-based violence in South Africa today is to take seriously how this history sits within and shapes our present-day social relations.

SUMMARY

The processes of Eurocentric modernity aim to retain global authority over colonies through domination along racialised, classed, and gendered lines. Put differently, what is

universal and what is not is decided through Eurocentric modernity. Local worldviews, institutions, constructions, and practices have lost ground to the imposition of epistemologies built around universal ontologies.

As a document, the GBVF-NSP (2020) is a product of human activity in a society where power and dominance are inequality distributed along the lines of race, class, gender and location. A national tool like the GBVF-NSP (2020) is, then, expected to articulate the intergenerational and/or historical trauma and structural inequalities that resulted from how colonialism and coloniality – products of a Euro-modern global order – took root in South Africa. Particular colonial power dynamics that structure enactments and popular understandings of intimate partner femicide are not highlighted by the GBVF- NSP (2020) and most academic literature. Although the GBVF-NSP (2020) does draw attention to structural violence (such as inequalities related to poverty and unemployment), institutionalised racism is mentioned just once on page 22, and there is little attempt to tie such racism to structures of patriarchy within a colonial world order. It is in the small but growing body of critical academic literature that we find a serious engagement with coloniality and gender-based violence in South Africa.

In this chapter, I presented the findings from the qualitative data collected, from document analysis of the GBVF- NSP (2020) and academic literature that has engaged intimate partner femicide since the inception of the plan. The analysis indicates that definitions of intimate partner femicide problematise social and gender norms as constructs from which to comprehend intimate partner femicide, and conceals psychosocial vulnerability to intimate partner femicide issuing from structural difficulties in the form of poverty and unemployment

in Black families and communities established through the historical system of colonialism and the present-day system of coloniality.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: MAIN FINDINGS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the main findings of this research. Next, I consider the study's limitations. I then offer several proposed recommendations for future research as well for more pragmatic interventions into preventing gender-based violence and, more specifically, intimate partner femicide in South Africa. I close the chapter with a brief concluding comment.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

Gender-based violence is widely and openly spoken about in South Africa's public sphere. It is a topic regularly addressed by South African politicians and it is widely discussed in the news media. Nonetheless, rates of intimate partner violence and femicide in the country continue to climb. These high rates urge us to begin thinking and engaging critically and systematically with how domination and violence intersect to transform gendered relations, and indeed what this means in and against South Africa's present-day structures of coloniality. Put differently, to understand and grapple with gender-based violence in necessarily nuanced ways, we are required to think through structural and historical factors that decolonial feminism affords us.

While femicide is a broad concept that includes the killing of women and girls within different kinds of relationships, my study focused specifically on how intimate partner femicide was engaged within the GBVF- NSP (2020) and academic literature that has engaged with intimate partner femicide since the inception of the GBVF- NSP (2020). As such, I focused on how the discursive landscape surrounding gender-based violence and intimate partner femicide

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aligns with and pushes back against the dictates of coloniality. This meant paying particular attention to the racialisation of gendered violence, and indeed how this racialisation takes place against enduring structures of coloniality.

Both data sources, the GBVF-NSP (2020) and relevant academic literature, by and large, papered over the ways by which coloniality structures life for Black people and Black communities more broadly in South Africa. The manner by which colonialism and Eurocentric modernity/coloniality shape practices and understandings of intimate partner femicide was also, for the most part, not touched upon, and an individualising, incident-focused frame tended to take precedence over a historical-structural analysis.

I make the argument that the individualising frame taken up by the GBVF-NSP (2020) and much of the academic literature risks merely problematising gender instead of interrogating how gender is made and remade through the colonial difference. Within both data sources, definitions of intimate partner femicide served to problematise gender norms while also critiquing heteronormativity. This critical stance was however rarely sustained throughout the individual documents, which tended to fall back on incident-focused frames, with little to no attention paid to the functioning of coloniality (e.g., the sexualisation and racialisation of Black and feminised bodies).

Although there were select places in the GBVF-NSP (2020) where colonialism and even coloniality were engaged, this tended to serve as background information rather than an overarching analytical frame. There was, however, a small body of academic literature that sought to make central coloniality in engagements with gendered violence in contemporary South Africa. Such research took seriously the effects of coloniality and made reference to the

systemic and agentic qualities that must be considered when situating gender-based violence against the backdrop of coloniality.

Documents like the GBVF-NSP (2020) serve as important legislative and policy protections in the fight against gender-based violence and intimate partner femicide. Strategic documents such as the GBVF-NSP (2020) are influential and have an impact on how we understand, conceptualise and research gendered violence. Indeed, since its publication, the GBVF-NSP (2020) has been taken up and referred to in much academic literature. A focus on gender identity as well as social mores is important in interventions like these. However, decolonial feminism pushes us further, insisting that our policies and interventions engage with how mores and identities are forged through the crucible of colonial violence, a violence that is sustained through contemporary structures of coloniality. Neglecting the insights of decolonial feminism, I insist, turns us away from the structural drivers that influence both rates and understandings of gender-based violence in South Africa and beyond.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Like any study, there are several limitations to this research. The study was limited with respect to the policy it examined. Further rigour could have been achieved by examining and comparing different State-led policy documents on gendered violence in South Africa. Moreover, document analysis is not without its disadvantages. These include insufficient detail where documents are conceptualised for non-research purposes and audiences; and biased selectivity, in this case, the GBVF-NSP (2020) may reflect a State-centric bias that may not be altogether conducive to the critical study of gendered violence (see Bowen, 2009). Lastly, the activist voice remains absent in this study. The inclusion of how different people are engaging with coloniality, gender, and the dictates of the GBVF-NSP (2020) on the grassroots level

would undoubtedly expand and build upon our understanding of intimate partner femicide in South Africa today. All of these limitations are indicative of further research that is to be undertaken in this field of research.

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above findings, I propose the following recommendations:

The findings of this study point to the need to encourage discussions on what constitutes intimate partner femicide in South Africa, and how the traumatic and violent history of modernity/coloniality continues such violence in relation to racialised and sexualised identities (see Boonzaier, 2020; Ratele et al., 2021). There is a need to establish regular and accessible engagements/debates on what intimate partner femicide in South Africa means in relation to dominant epistemological frameworks, and what it would mean to decolonise such ways of knowing. These discussions could then serve as the basis for critical and activist-driven policy engagements and intervention plans that seek to address intimate partner femicide (see Gottzen et al., 2020). This would make for a bottom-up strategy by which to develop definitions and concepts within policy, and to ensure that these definitions and concepts remain open to dialogue, lessons, and the ever-evolving nature of our present colonial conjuncture. Indeed, definitions and conceptual categories need not be static. They can change and alter through committed dialogue that remains attuned to contemporary and historical socio-structural forces.

Secondly, it was found that in the GBVF-NSP (2020) and the academic literature engaging intimate partner femicide, social and gender role expectations as well as patriarchy were regularly problematised. This is, of course, a welcome direction to take discussions on

gender-based violence. Yet, structural analyses like these cannot ignore the modern colonial order, and the coloniality of gender in particular (see Lugones, 2010). It is important to understand that social and gender role expectations as well as patriarchal systems are products of a racialised world order, and that coloniality structures the functioning of our patriarchal order. It is therefore suggested that coloniality be made central to policy engagements that seek to address gender-based violence. Doing so is a complicated task and cannot be undertaken in a tokenistic fashion. As such, part of this recommendation includes education initiatives on coloniality, and indeed how coloniality structures gendered violence in and beyond South Africa. Moreover, an emphasis on decoloniality will also form part of this recommendation, and what it would mean to decolonise policy and interventions on gender-based violence.

Lastly, future research may wish to undertake an analysis of gender-based violence across different influential policy documents both within and beyond South Africa. It would also be useful to interview policymakers as well as decolonial feminist activists regarding what a useful and impactful conception of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence in South Africa would be with respect to the work that these actors are doing.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

The study examined the constructions of intimate partner femicide in the GBVF-NSP (2020) and the academic literature that has engaged intimate partner femicide since the inception of the GBVF-NSP (2020). Although there were instances in both data sources that pushed back against colonial logics and categories, both data sources by and large adhered to an individualising, incident-based approach that unwittingly reproduced the logic of the colonial difference. It is thus imperative that going forward, the historical and socio-structural backdrop of coloniality inform how we approach our understanding of gender-based violence

and intimate partner femicide. As such, decolonial feminism serves not only as an analytical lens, but a politics to which we must commit if we are to address gender-based violence and intimate partner femicide at their structural roots.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance

UNISA | university of south africa

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

15 December 2022

Dear Mr Mashole Lucas Mamabolo

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
54781205_CREC_CHS_2022

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 15 December 2022 to 15 December 2023

Researcher(s): Name: Mr M. L. Mamabolo
Contact details: 54781205@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Prof. S. Suffla
Contact details: suffls@unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Dr. N. R. Malherbe
Contact details: malhenr@unisa.ac.za

Title: A DECOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF INTIMATE PARTNER FEMICIDE IN SOUTH AFRICA
Degree Purpose: Masters

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The *negligible risk application was reviewed by* College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za