

Article

Categories and orthodoxies in studies on culture and femicide: An ethno-informed route to knowledge

by

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Abstract

This article is a methodological discussion, in which I argue that to study complex phenomena such as culture and femicide calls for other approaches other than the dominant interview and survey studies. By their focus on the contextual, the interactional and the process itself, and by rejecting language as referential and transparent, ethno-informed approaches better recognize and capture this complexity. To see the interview as a social interactional event grounded in a world of common-sense thinking makes members of a society share a common stock of knowledge, or a social world and communicative understanding. This is particularly relevant in cross-cultural studies, in which we can no longer assume that members share such common-sense thinking. This makes activities such as asking questions and filling answers into categories problematic. We need to see how a phenomenon such as femicide, telling stories about it and our representations reflect the diversity of cultural forms. I will draw on secondary data to illustrate my arguments and their relevance.

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Introduction

In his classic book *Local Knowledge* (1983), Clifford Geertz refers to Danish writer L. V. Helms and his 1880s story from Bali when the late Rajah died and 'his body was burned with great pomp, [and] three of his concubines sacrificing themselves in the flames. It was a great day for the Balinese' (p. 37). To Helms this justified what he saw as the 'right to conquer and humanize barbarous races' (p. 39). To Geertz, the story illustrates his point that we never neatly apprehend another person's imagination. 'We can apprehend it well enough...; but we do so not by looking *behind* the interfering glosses that connect us to it but *through* it.' (p. 44). This is crucial. Access to thought-worlds alternative to our own as in Helm's story, he claims, multiply rather than reduce our uncertainties. His critique, which is also most relevant to studies of femicide, was firmly positioned in the critical and experimental era of the 1980s onwards. It addressed both the doing and the writing-up of research (Atkinson, Delamont, & Housley, 2008). Also, the cultural issue, as in the early influence of Alfred Schutz's phenomenology to ethnomethodology, problematized the most complex relationship between information

generated from interviews, and society (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1992, pp. 166-193). To see social reality as collaboratively accomplished changed the ways we also came to think about interviews, and accentuated the question of subject position by involving both the interviewee and interviewer, and the everyday work of giving meaning to objects and events in settings, which implies 'to empirically investigate *situated practice* that create reality' as Marvasti (2008, p. 315) describes it. And, to see methods, such as social activities through which identity, narratives and other work get done, calls for analytic practices that reflect the local forms of cultural and social action, in which both environment and social location provide narrative options to how we story our lives (Wilkinson, 2011; Ryen, 2012), as in storytelling by femicide survivors, perpetrators and the many professions engaged with preventive work, caring and the law.

So, what then is the problem with reports such as Helm's Bali-story? After all, he had witnessed the event. This takes my discussion to the sociological controversies around the problem of social order and everyday life, in which femicide across cultures is firmly positioned. The important question then is how to explore into the culture of femicide. This is where I call for an alternative to the more classically oriented approaches.

The article consists of six sections. After the formal introduction, I present some major problems associated with more classically oriented approaches and the relevance to our topics. This works as an introduction to sections three and four on David Silverman's (2007) two criticisms or orthodoxies in much qualitative research. The ethno-informed preference for data over theories reflects the interest in members' own terms and categories and the rejection of pre-fabricated theoretical and researcher-generated categories as 'interfering glosses'. It follows from this that it is the researcher's epistemological - and not theoretical position - that matters. Mona Abba's (1988) ethnographic study of village vendettas in section five captures the problem of interviewing about complex and delicate issues, as well as and the prerogative of investigating *situated practice* that create a reality grounded in the local common stock of knowledge which is so hard to reach across cultures even within our own region. I then conclude by advocating approaches that understand the cultural forms of telling and writing. This takes us back to Helm's story from Bali and Geertz on the interfering glosses and the production of social order. It also demands that we see methods as

social action through which identity, narratives and other work get done. This calls for analytic practices that reflect the local forms of cultural and social action.

Femicide across regions

The extensive European Science Foundation COST-Action IS-1206 on Femicide across Europe (2012-2017) (2018) is organized into four working groups in ways that reflect the relevance of my points. Working Group I focuses on definitions and questions, in which Janet P. Stamatel (2014) in her presentation, 'Building concepts and definitions: A Practical proposal' discusses problems associated with producing standardized data, using voluntaries in research, and complex and controversial definitions. She recommends 'to make it simple'. The next group works on reporting and data collection across Europe, and on building a conceptual map by categorizing data from quantitative and qualitative studies. Number III is dedicated to culture, and refers to independent variables related to cultural phenomenon such as sharia, masculinity/femininity and trafficking. The last, working group IV, works on bringing together practitioners and researchers to discuss prevention of femicide. This work necessarily builds on the results from empirical studies. This made all working groups in their own ways refer to concepts, categorization and complex variables, and in her article, 'The Advantages of Qualitative Research into Femicide', the chair, Shalva Weil (2017), dedicates much attention to the interview method in general.

No working group was allocated to a theory of science which comprises ontological questions concerned with the nature of reality, or an epistemology concerned with the relationship between the inquirer and the known, and their consequences to methodology. The complexity of European cultures makes it hard to assume there is a universal analytic approach to the cultural of femicide in Europe. The same criticism applies to Weil and Kouta's (2017) special issue 'Researching Femicide from a Qualitative Perspective', in *Qualitative Sociology Review* with its main focus on interview studies (where we also find Weil, 2017).

However, this article on the ethno-informed approach fills in this gap by thinking differently about the social world and the sociologist's concern with social order. The triggered controversies informed by the meeting of philosophy and sociology made

Harold Garfinkel establish ethnomethodology as an empirical programme. The question of social dis/order is significant to femicide studies.

Social order and typifications in ethnomethodology

To wind back in history, whereas Talcott Parsons was concerned with the properties of orderliness and his interest with the systems of action with properties of orderliness, cooperation and stability by shared normative commitments (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1979, p. 173), Schutz argued that the foundations of sociological understanding were not located at the system level, but at the level of action as experienced by the actor in the world of everyday life. He rejected Parsons and his concern with sociological idealizations of what it took for the system to be maintained. In his 'translation' into sociology, Parsons lost that the actors' actual understandings were located in the everyday life, because the everyday social life is an interpretive reality. Schutz also criticized Max Weber's interpretive sociology for failing to obtain the intersubjective experience actors have of their social world as a common shared world in which we are involved. This world takes on a common objective nature that we as social actors take for granted (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1992, p. 169). Alfred Schutz's analytic focus was on the common-sense perspective later developed in ethnomethodology, whose interest is not so much with meanings, but with how meaning is possible by asking how it is locally managed. This makes ethnomethodologists study members' methods and how they in a setting accomplish the practical relevance of their understandings in a given setting. This accounts for the ethnomethodological interest with data *in situ*, not actors, or to study collaborative activities as they take place. It is the common-sense perspective that is the focus of Schutz's analysis. We experience the world as 'given' or as organized, orderly and 'out there'; it is independent of, and pre-exists any particular individual (Cuff, Sharrock, & Francis, 1992, p. 169). We treat it as a fact, and we make sense of it in terms of our experiences by 'common-sense knowledge'. It is this that makes it possible for us to categorize and name the things we experience. These 'typifications' refer to what is typical among a collection of objects, event and actions, and all of us have a number of such typifications that enable us to see the everyday world as 'familiar, ordinary and mundane' (p. 169). 'Femicide' is one such 'typification'. We also use these to make sense of other peoples' actions, to make assumptions about their actions towards us and the opposite, in addition to

other peoples' motives and interests, and then plan our own behaviour. By this we can treat our social environment as 'known in common'. This is a practical perspective, in which the individual deals or copes with his or her everyday situations as they occur, in 'real time' or *in situ*. Garfinkel argues that since this common understanding cannot be guaranteed from 'without' by the common culture, he sees it as constructed from 'within', or as a product of the activity itself. As the authors say, it is the recognition of 'this' activity that places it as a local production, and which made 'the local production of social order' into ethnomethodology's main idea. Social settings are not externally out there, but instead engaged by the members in their interaction 'work'. It is this work that Garfinkel pointed to when he argued that members accomplish or achieve their social world. Our concern is how to investigate how members construct their understandings.

This relates to studies of femicide across cultures, as in Helm's story from Bali. In the eyes of the local, we cannot take it for granted that "murder" is a relevant local category. The ritual was devoid of local protests, no one attempted to rescue the three women - not even other women, and only one of the three seemed to hesitate before she 'leaped into the flaming sea' as Helm describes it. Let us inquire further into the ethnomethodological approach to culture.

Femicide: Looking through or back interfering glosses?

Yanow (2014/159) reminds us that to categorize and name things matter just as Prior reminds us of how statistics filter our knowledge about the world (2011, p. 177) which Dorothy Smith (1974) referred to as the social production of documentary realities.

So, we may ask, what if femicide was categorized as terror? Let us look into the category-issue in studies of femicide.

Claire Laurent, Michael Platzer and Maria Idomir (2013) claim that for a case to be considered femicide there must be an implied *intention* to carry out the murder and a *demonstrated connection* between the crime and the female gender of the victim. Without access to the inside of a perpetrator's head, ethnomethodologists would look elsewhere e.g. How did the perpetrator come to see the knife as a contextual relevant remedy, rather than simply a kitchen tool? How to apply Garfinkel's practical

perspective to Norwegian perpetrators who operate individually with the home as a crime scene, as opposed to the Indian male gangs who come to see a bus as an available space for gang rapes and murder? Moreover, with reference to their definitional criteria, we need to differentiate between the social scientist and the law's conception of 'intentions'. Additionally, how does their crime-female gender link apply to LGBT people? Geertz's 'interfering glosses' demands that we also inquire into the researcher's own interfering gaze, which accounts for the ethnomethodological criticism of the interview method. However, American sociologist Diana Russel, applies a different criterion to the category 'killing of females', as killed *by males because they are female* (2013, p.19) based on the number of male partners, including male strangers, acquaintances, dates, friends, colleagues, etc. Her definition also illustrates the problem of 'biological sex' as a category criterion. Murders in same-sex couples escape this category, which may introduce statistical and other inaccuracies and dilemmas, but still shape the social world as we see it. It also includes the rather non-observable criterion 'because of'. The question then, 'How would we know?', refers to the 1960s-debates on the studies of the *social* production of data and statistics, and the processes of document production and consumption. Both are based on the combination of an available conceptual and theoretical scheme, and of technical instructions on how to allocate instances to categories (Prior, 2011) which point to the relevance of Stamatel on the problem of using voluntaries in research.

Let us return to Harold Garfinkel who rejected the formal analytical of social order by his argument that social order is not a result of norms, but of constitutive rules and sensemaking or as he put it, 'social order does not collapse in light of violations of social norms, as long as participants remain able to make sense of the situation' (vom Lehn, 2013, p.75). This is methodologically crucial. The vast numbers of femicide cases worldwide, should indicate a breakdown of societal norms, but the facts that femicide still happens invites us to take Garfinkel's argument seriously. To focus on meaning-making practices means exploring constitutive processes rather than a concern with operational definitions. We simply explore how members make sense of observations even when they represent social disorder. To illustrate, members may appeal to the everyday talk of gendered relations as a resource offered by their surroundings. This also includes more dubious online surroundings, such as the online *incel* networks (2018), some with more sinister and gender aggressive versions than

others, and 'dark room' networks for illegal sex with minors, or on murdering women as part of sexual satisfaction, as in the murder case of the Danish Peter 'Rocket Madsen', who sexually violated and dismembered the Swedish journalist Kim Wall's body, possibly while still alive. The police traced links on his computer to such online networks. Rather than interviewing, we may analyse perpetrators' talk in court, to the police, prison guards, fellow prisoners or social workers, including their professional reports, or media coverage. James W. Messerschmidt's (2017) interest in the link between masculinities and different types of femicide takes us to how the generational shift in American hip hop is represented by the new wave or the new punk rock, including rappers such as Jaseh Dwayne Onfroy alias XXXTentacion who is accused of first violating his girlfriend and later to singing about it, and 2Pac, who was convicted of rape and violence (Holen, 2018). Their soundtracks, texts and online comments represent alternative and available documents to be studied as opposed to interviewing them. Then what about culture?

Culture

Sacks showed an interest in culture motivated by anthropologists' understanding of other cultures, or their problem as he framed it, which made them ask questions about social order. This does not permit ready understandings, but instead leads us to explain behaviour 'as a product of "culture" without problematizing the "machinery" involved' (Silverman, 1998, p. 49) in the same mechanistic sense that anthropologists often appeal to 'culture'. Sacks insists we need to describe how this is done, rather than to treating the something we study as given by culture, as Silverman reminds us. To shift our focus from the content to how particular activities get recognizably 'done', opens to cross-cultural similarities – and dissimilarities. Sacks refers to culture as 'an "inference-making machinery" ' or a descriptive machinery, 'which is to be revealed in how descriptions are "administered" and used in specific contexts' ' (Silverman, 1998, p. 50). The problem with asking informants questions is that researchers then study the categories their informants use. Instead, they should investigate their categories to find the activities in which they are employed.

As we have seen, there are many definitions to describe an act such as femicide, so our task is 'to find out how they [members] go about choosing among available sets of categories for grasping some event' (Silverman, 1998, p. 90). This is different from

question-driven studies on a pre-fabricated term such as 'femicide'. Instead, he wants to show 'the active interpretive work involved in rendering any description and the local implications of choosing any particular category' (Silverman, 1998, p. 91). This approach offers access to how culture is reflected in local members' everyday category-work (Ryen & Silverman, 2000) by problematizing the 'machinery' involved to follow Sacks.

Importantly, descriptions do not only refer to ourselves, but are recipient-designed to others. They help others to infer things from our descriptions by indicating how the hearer is to use them. If a story teller names someone 'Trygve' s/he creates impressions about the person being named, but also about him or herself and the audience. If s/he instead uses 'intruder', the storyteller orders 'materials out of alternative versions of what happened...as what happened is other than your version of it' (Silverman, 1998, p. 93). 'Trygve' may refer to the late Åshild's husband which constructs a relational pair of 'man/woman' with category-bound activities within a generally accepted moral schema. The alternative 'Intruder' offers an alternative category for grasping the event with its own local implication of choosing a particular category. By Sacks' MCD analysis, or membership categorization device (Ryen, 2008), we will acquire access to the category-work in storytelling by the perpetrator, survivors or in reports by professionals. This is vital data in preventive work.

Therefore, Norway's top scores on the UN ranking on happiness and gender equality, do not tell us about the activities in which men kill their women, though according to a study by Vibeke Ottosen most cases show that the probability tends to increase after a family break-up, or when a husband loses his ability to provide financially for his family, she says in her critical comments to Yardley, Wilson and Lynes' British study (2013) (Hanne Østli Jakobsen, 2013. Norwegian femicide survivor and consultant Anne Grete Solberg was herself shot in her home after she and her husband had signed their divorce papers (Dagbladet, 2012; Stavanger Aftenblad, 2014). She claims violence against women in Norway is more hidden and thus more difficult to document compared to in other countries. At the global level, crime scenes vary: How? Data from Norway shows that most cases take place in or near victims' homes (Vatnar, 2015, p. 87). This invites empirical research on how members employ this description across cultures. We need to explore how places are locally constructed into spaces in

ways that open or close institutions like the family, the home, the yard, the bus, the neighbourhood and the rural (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2008) for alternative activities. It also invites ethnographic studies of local communities and how members negotiate 'a couple' or 'gendered relations' both with or without an audience. We simply need to explore the very enactment of local life. Women do not get killed at the structural level, and variables do not themselves kill, but classic variable-use may prevent us from seeing how institutions are regularly enacted.

Indian author, photographer and gender activist Rita Banerji lifts the impact of culture beyond practicalities, such as guns, knives, acid, etc. (for culture-specific ways, see the report), and stresses to 'De-emphasize Culture and Emphasize Law and Human Rights'. She is concerned with the 'gang' form in India such as dowry murder, 'witch hunts', rapes by strangers and forced abortion of female foetuses as examples of what she refers to as a 'collective cultural mind-set'. She opposes this de-individualization, which rejects men's personal responsibility by calling for a fight for individual rights (infants', girls' and women's) 'under existing national and international laws' (2013, pp. 22-23, also see Banerji, 2008). By this, she points to the cultural complexity of standard variable analysis, and challenges arguments of cultural specificities often called upon as threatened by Western individualism and the disrespect of other cultures (also see DeKeseredy, 2011, on Canada). DeKeseredy (2011) points to how culture may perpetuate and legitimize gendered violence in what outsiders may see as unexpected ways. In the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo, reminds us that gender-related killings are a multi-faceted phenomenon (2013) that reminds us of the risk that simple categories such as the above may still make the phenomenon escape our analysis, which is counter to Stamatel's recommendation to 'make it simple'.

When Sacks and ethno-informed researchers insist on exploring members' own active interpretive work in rendering descriptions, and how these are administered and used in specific contexts, this connects well with Silverman's criticism of much qualitative research to which we now turn in the two next sections.

The problem of Explanatory Orthodoxy

In his *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Qualitative Research* (2007), David Silverman points to the problem of cause and effects in quantitative research and how professional enactment is disregarded and thus tends to remain unchallenged. However, qualitative researchers, concerned with being 'applied', struggle with practitioners who see their practice in terms of previous social science orthodoxies, and how normative assumptions about people's practice come to frame questions asked when such assumptions seem sensible - relevant to studies on femicide cases. The problem is that researchers ignore the impact of the context, or of methods, by assuming there is no connection with how people talk (pp. 88-99). He points in particular to the problems of the interview and the focus group's success, because the latter method fails to access how institutions are routinely enacted. This is highly relevant to studies of the cultural of femicide.

His focus is on two specific problems in much qualitative research, Explanatory - and Divine Orthodoxy, in which the former deals with social science research 'to provide explanations of given problems' (p. 88), as in the question: Why does a husband kill his wife? (author's question). This then ends up with explanations based on 'face-sheet' variables. The problem with these (p. 88), he argues, is that they fail to ask questions about what it is explaining. With reference to Sacks, the phenomenon escapes because we do not spend enough time to understanding how the phenomenon works. We are more concerned with the environment than the phenomenon itself. He encountered this in his own study of HIV counselling, in which researchers leaned towards an operational definition of 'unsafe sex' as well as on a normative version of 'good counselling'. This then made them fail to examine 'how such activities come to have meaning in what people actually are doing in everyday (naturally-occurring) situations' (p. 89). This is relevant to the Cost-Action working groups concerned with definitions and variables. The point is not that quantitative variable analyses do not offer us information – they do, but that correlations and even causal analyses offer rather general information by missing out on the interactional aspect of a phenomenon. To illustrate, according to Vatnar (2015), violence had been registered prior to the murder in many Norwegian partner murder-cases. Three out of four perpetrators and victims had previously contacted the police, the health sector or other parallel sectors, but these institutions only had data on their own organization,

which made them fail to see clients' initial struggle or prior contact activities. This tells us about organizational routines, confidentiality issues, citizens' trust in professionals and quantitative information on incoming telephone calls. Still, the data does not tell us how the phenomenon works. However, to tape telephone calls *in situ* offers access to organizational routines by studying peoples' activities in such telephone calls as they take place. This makes us avoid the problem of normative versions of 'good counselling', which Silverman points to since we now may examine, 'how such activities come to have meaning in what people actually are doing in everyday situations'. They may also be highly informative on cultural issues by revealing the ongoing categorization of activities.

People close to victims report that most of them say they could identify a moment when they saw risk, though this is more like a process. They talk about a fear or bodily worry that is hard to describe, and not fully understood until it was too late (Vatnar, 2015, p. 90). In his recent book, *Histoire de la violence* (History of violence), the French author Édouard Louis (2016) describes how he was raped and almost killed by a man he invited to his apartment. He later reflects on the question: Why didn't I run out of the room and down the staircase to the street? He says he could have, but he stayed, which makes him, the victim into the subject. We also meet him after the incidence in spaces in-between in *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). This relates to LaViolette and Barnett (2000) who write on discrepancies in abused women and professionals' reasoning on separation to escape assault and coercive control relevant to criticism of Explanatory Orthodoxy. This goes beyond variable analyses, and invites us to see the complexity of the micro-interactional of love and darkness provided by methods other than the interview (O'Neill, Mansaray, & Haaken, 2017). In his novel Louis portrays the complexity of the intricacy, the subtlety, the emotional, the unexpected, the ambiguousness and even some kind of sophistication through the gaze of the victim caught in the *ongoing* horror. This is closely connected with the next section.

The problem of Divine Orthodoxy

Silverman criticizes social scientists for seeing themselves as capable of rectifying failed interview responses, such as when they see respondents' knowledge as imperfect, or that practitioners depart from normative standards of good practice. They simply know better than they do (2007, p. 88). One problem, he argues, is that people

are being asked questions that seldom arise in their day-to-day lives, thereby ignoring that people are smarter than what is said in words. The Norwegian data that shows that the involved had been calling several professional organizations prior to the murder, which shows their skills in a local context, though this is not always acknowledged. If we measure their activities by some idealized normative standards, Silverman says, and refers to studies of 'good communication', then 'like ordinary people, practitioners are condemned to fail' (p.89), which is the point here. We need to understand how institutions work. But, since social realities are constantly under construction, we need to study how members in the actual setting make use of interactional and interpretive resources provided by the social setting. It is through these recourses afforded by the local interactional context that members 'construct, defend, repair, and change social realities' (Miller & Fox, 2004, p. 38 in Silverman, 2007, p. 92). In the case of femicide, we aim at exploring institutional behaviour across cultures (Sara Omar's 2017 'cross-cultural' novel illustrates this exceptionally well). Could there be previously unnoticed practices? This can be studied in taped talks or visual data of counselling and talk with practitioners, just as with trust in small communities where trust materializes in a belief that professionals keep delicate information confidential (McEvilgy et. al., 2003), as in Norway opposed to reports on indigenous native women in Canada (Native Women`s Association of Canada, 2008). On 'rural patriarchy' and their professionals, Websdale (1998) also challenges myths, which reminds us that collective or community efficiency takes different shapes and forms, and how outsiders may misinterpret an unfamiliar social organization as social disorganization.

As referred to above, femicide is complex, and even more so when we cross cultures. The important thing is to avoid reductionism and ideological assumptions based on external concepts and theories, in addition to normative assumptions perceived as universal, including a misperception of the strengths of women, although in unanticipated ways. An ethnographic study from the Middle East illustrates this well. I have selected this ethnographic study because it is explicit in relations to the problems with interviews compared to ethnographic research, with its observations that may enable us to identify previously unnoticed practices. It also illustrates the immense complexity and unfamiliarity in new surroundings typical of cross-cultural projects. In regions consisting of diverse cultural, religious and traditional practices even

professionals fail to capture local ways of reasoning, categorizing and talking about events due to varieties in cultural forms.

The complexity of local culture: Honour fights – an ethnographic study navigating in the concealed domain

In her ethnographic study of a case in which a woman was killed, Arab researcher Mona Abbas (1988) explores the topic of local fights portrayed as vendettas, in which men maintain the family honour by responding to past injustices or violations by revenge. This is usually portrayed as men's domain. Abbas shows how intricate and complex such old rules of the games can be, while being firmly incorporated into historical contexts. Let us listen to her story.

In this vendetta the murder of an old woman is retaliated for one year later when four men from her family kill a male member of the rival family. According to Abbas, this vendetta resembled many other vendettas in the neighbouring villages, but with different consequences. Children had been playing and insulting each other's families which made their mothers interfere and start beating each other, and eventually the entire, small village was involved. The late mother involved in 'our' fight was known to be powerful with both sons and daughters-in-law, and her gossip used to mobilize the village in wars of stones. The large stone that hit her, had unintentionally killed her and generated chaos between the two families, and her family swore revenge. Still, the case was reported as a natural death to keep the police from interfering.

Next year after shooting at the perpetrators' family, four of the late woman's family avenged the murder by killing a male member of the rival family by beating him to death in a field with hoes. This prompted a massive turmoil in the village, which required the police to solve the dispute between the two families through a written contract to make peace in the village. Abbas emphasizes that all the interviews generated the story about a fight among children, about stubborn peasants, villagers or women who started up such riots, and that everybody who asked - Abbas, the police, state employees and others were all told this same version, she says. However, her ethnographic work uncovered a systematic social and economic differentiation that had made the woman's family subordinate to the family who had killed her. A man from the family who had committed the first murder had acquired an attractive position with a gun and

a state income that reinforced the vertical relations between the two families. When the young man was killed, no one reacted since the scales were now balanced. Later on, the word spread that the young men had been involved in some incidents with women. This gossip from the old woman's young female members and daughters-in-law reinterpreted the story as 'a problem of 'harim' or a threat to the 'harim' (about incidents with young women). Abbas draws on Bourdieu on violating men's sacred realms in the local community to see how the women had turned the story into a question of men's honour and pride. This redefined the case as part of a reciprocity mechanism in restoring honour, in which the strong old woman had challenged the role of the dominant 'patron'. The woman's death, a revenge killing, now appears as a response to a violation of the sacred realms. To kill the old man from the perpetrator's family would not have solved the problem, as it was now constituted as young men intruding upon young women. The women reinterpreted the incidence, and the men avenged it. Abbas argues that this not only strengthens traditional feminism, but, combined with the harim version, rebalanced the power relations between the two families. This first agreement was on the informal level. Nonetheless, later the better-off old man of the family who had killed her subsequently got a lawyer to pursue the case, which put four people from her family in jail for 15 years. So, after having 're-established his honour in public (as a gentleman who had accepted reconciliation after the death of his brother), he used the formal law to break the settlement' (Abbas, 1988, p. 115), thus restructuring the village's social relations.

This story illustrates the problem of simple explanatory orthodoxy in exploring unfamiliar cultural practices. It is most intricate to outsiders and unavailable to interview researchers. Because of her ethnographic curiosity, Abbas explores into the local meaning-making of events. She shows how the harim, or aspects of the local code of honour, becomes an interactional and interpretive resource provided by the local setting in the cultural knowledge system offered to the women in their interpretive work. By identifying how this is collaboratively accomplished we avoid ideological or normative impositions. Abbas makes visible Garfinkel's interest in sense-making as an interpretive and observable practice, in which people by their accounts (here harim) make violations of the ordinary into a familiar event that restores social order and the trust that reinforces it, as in the first informal agreement. We also see the reflexive relationship between the meaning of the action and the context of its production. This

avoids the problem of the Devine Orthodoxy by showing how descriptions are locally administered in the very activities in which they are employed.

Conclusions: Qualitative research and its complicities

The sociological concern with social order equally applies to social disorder, but our interest should be with how members make sense of whatever they encounter, rather than with externally imposed descriptions. Femicide is a delicate issue which may call for studies in sympathy. Instead, Patti Lather, invites a methodology of getting lost and a less comfortable social science. She accuses research of avoiding the difficult stories, and has coined the term 'validation of tears' as a desire for personal revelation and an inscription of presence. Her arguments are not against feminist research and the centring on empathy, voice and authenticity to move away from scientific thought, but rather an invitation to 'counter-voices and subtextual underwriting that rupture the narrative and forces reading in two directions: dialogic openness and variability of meaning...and a refusal of closure...' (2009: 22). To problematize orthodoxies in research is to rupture and to refuse to close off the complexity, the unfamiliar and the discomfort of femicide and culture. Comfort texts and empathetic romanticism do not disturb and destabilize. Just as in Geertz on Helm's report, we, too, need to alarm the reader and uncover the cultural forms of telling and writing, which equally applies to translated texts. Spivak (1974) reminds us that meaning is not 'portable'. This demands an epistemological and methodological awareness of members' practice and sense-making activities.

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