

Language and Femicide in Kenya: How Media Outlets Shape the Discourse on Gender-Based Violence

A Laidlaw Research Project by Anjelica A. Young

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Introduction

Femicide has claimed over 500 lives in Kenya since 2016. Despite protests and rising awareness, it remains normalized in public discourse. Media plays a powerful role in shaping how society interprets violence, responsibility, and justice.

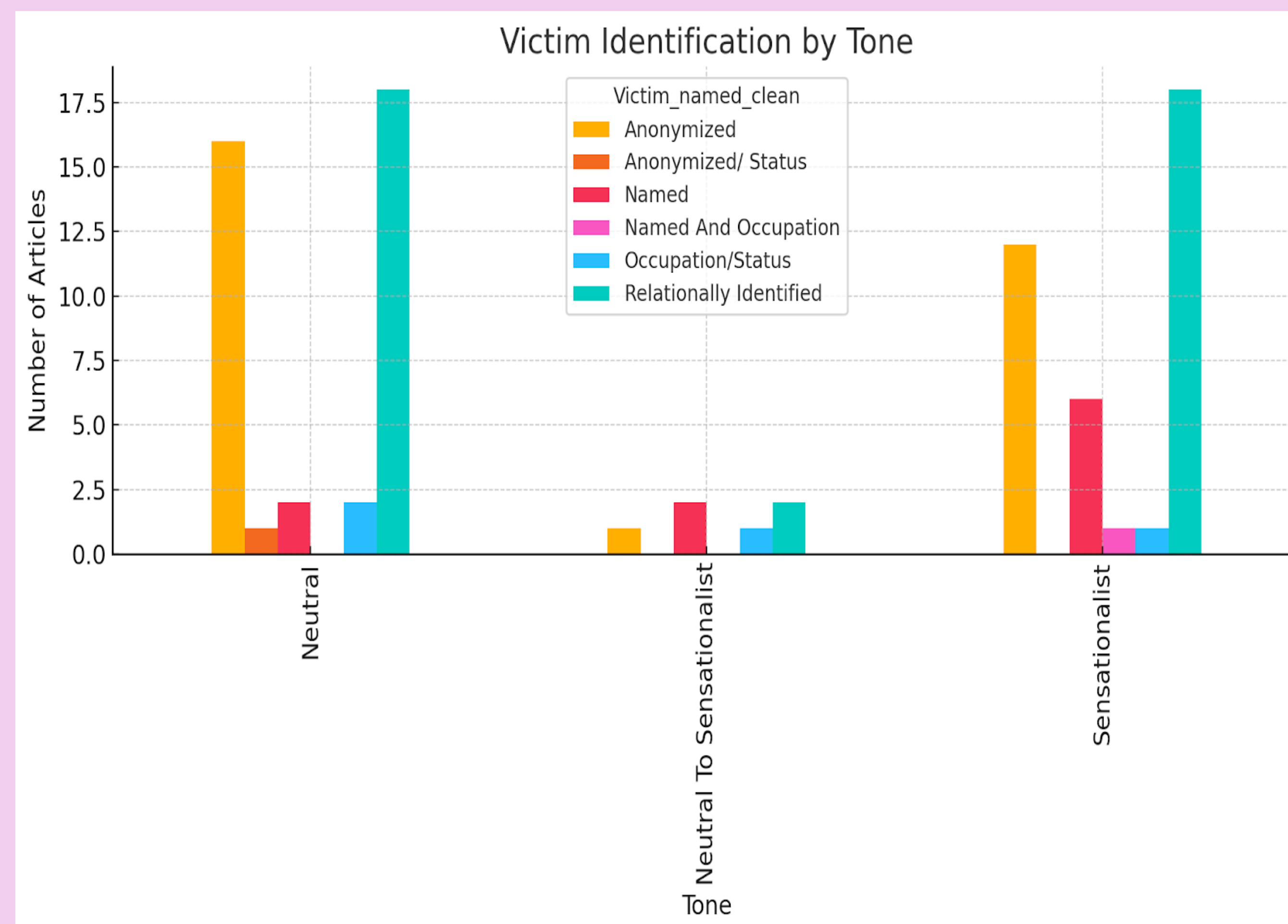
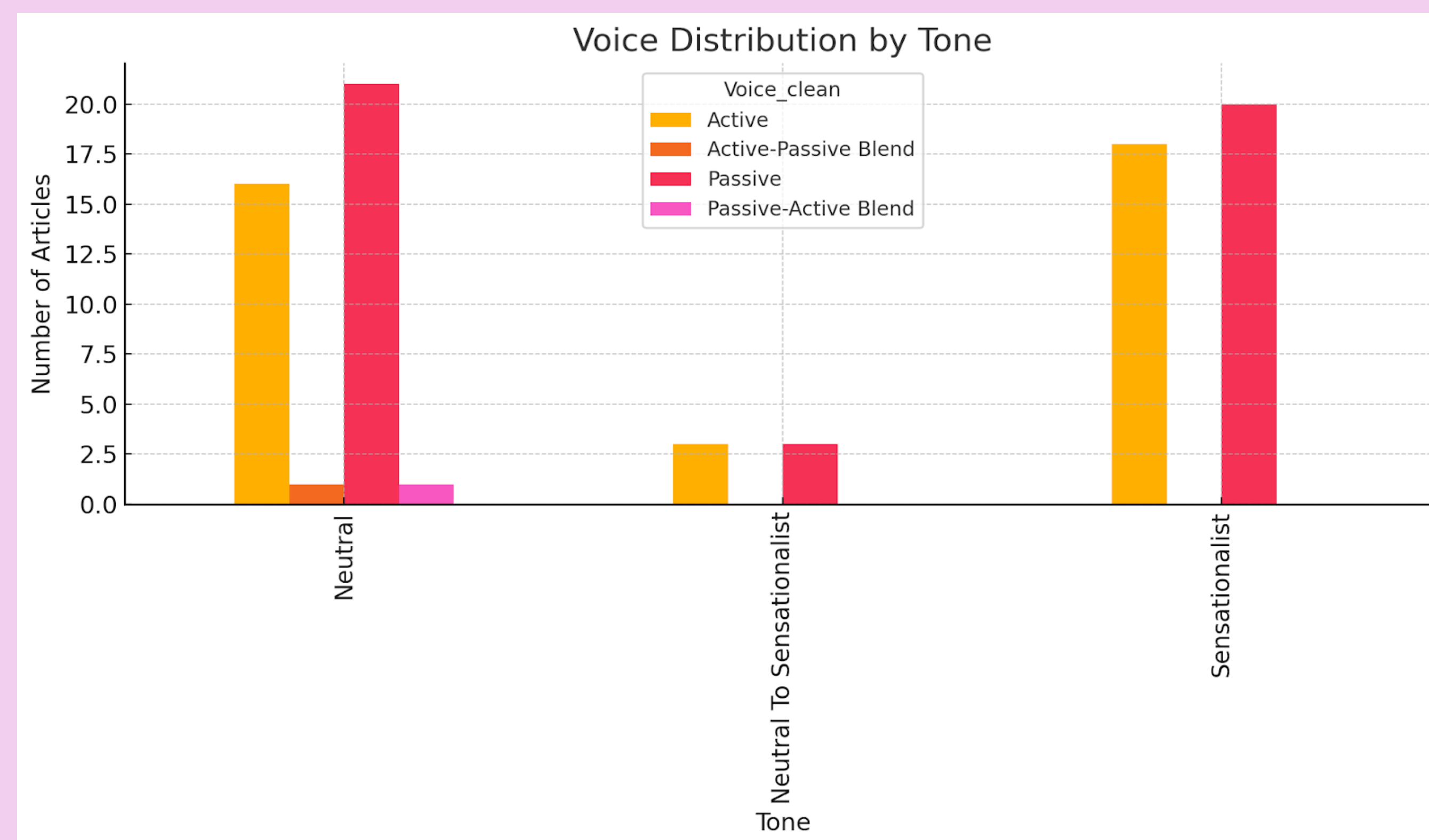


Research Question: How do Kenyan media outlets frame femicide, and what narratives reinforce or challenge patriarchal understandings of gender-based violence?

Methodology

- **Media Content Analysis:** 100 Kenyan news articles coded for tone, voice, victim identification, terminology, and contextualization.
- **Interviews:** Data journalists, editors, academics, and activists provided insights into newsroom practices, advocacy strategies, and counter-narratives.
- **Theoretical Framework:** Feminist theories of violence (Diana Russell, 1990) — media as a site of patriarchal reproduction or resistance.

Results



Conclusions and Impact

- Kenyan media overwhelmingly reports femicide as **episodic crime** rather than systemic violence.
- Passive voice and relational identifiers obscure accountability and reinforce patriarchal logics.
- Activists and data journalists are reframing femicide as a structural crisis, pushing for cultural and legal recognition.
- **Impact:** This research shows how ethical, systemic reporting could shift public discourse, challenge normalization, and support policy change.

New Questions / Next Steps

- How can media guidelines be standardized to ensure sensitive and accurate reporting on femicide?
- What role can legislation (e.g., a **Femicide Act**) play in shaping media practices?
- How can grassroots activism and data journalism influence long-term cultural change?

Literature Cited

- Africa Data Hub. *Femicide Kenya Database*.
- Migwi, Njeri. *Interview*. YouTube, 2025.
- Media Council of Kenya. *Report on Femicide in Kenyan Newsrooms*. 2024.
- Russell, Diana E. H. *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*. 1990.

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