

# Serial Sexual Femicide in Ciudad Juárez: 1993-2001<sup>1</sup>

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In memory of Guillermina Valdés-Villalba

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We aren't talking about the final moments of these children and women. We are talking about a long and slow death. Perhaps we'll never know what those final moments were like, and that may be a charitable thing. But we need not know this either. These are crimes of power.

ALICE VACHSS, *Sex Crimes*.

The appropriating of women's bodies, either for sexual pleasure or as a symbol of a "victorious conquest", is a common theme in literature concerning women during war or in other situations of conflict.

Monica McWilliams, *Violence Against Women in Societies Under Stress*.

## *Personal Overview*

I wouldn't be so interested in serial sexual femicide<sup>2</sup> if not for a series of murders of women and girls which have taken place in Ciudad Juárez. Nor would it be the subject matter of this paper if not for the impunity that has prevailed and the meager information available regarding them. Because of this, I have researched material on *femicide* in Mexico and I found out that, with the exception of Ximena Bunster-Bunalto (1993), few feminist theorists have explored into femicide in Latin America; this is not so in other countries.<sup>3</sup>

The murders of more than two hundred women in Ciudad Juárez, as well as the torture and rape of a hundred more since 1993 up to now, is a painful testimony of the vulnerability of girls and women on the border and of the male violence perpetrated against them. The media and the offices of the justice department in charge of solving the murders of women, refer to them as "the homicide of women," "serial killings" and "sex crimes." On the other hand, the police investigations have resulted in more doubts and problems than solutions. The information gathered has still been insufficient and vague,

I ask the people of Chihuahua how it is they can today demand we solve some crimes when all we've got from the previous administration is 21 bags with bones. We don't know what [quote] this is called. We don't know what the circumstances [quote] were for those acts. The files are poorly put together, he said: How do we investigate these homicides?

Patricio Martínez, Governor of Chihuahua.<sup>4</sup>

And the crimes continue.

The lack of a comprehensive strategy<sup>5</sup> by the authorities charged with serving justice can be seen on various levels: 1) access is not allowed to the files on the murdered women to corroborate the exact number of killings, the violence with which they were murdered and if the murderers have actually been convicted; 2) the assistance of foreign criminologists who do not agree as to the profile of the serial killer with the domestic

ones, or statements are made that such [serial killer] does not exist, or that there are a number of copycats,<sup>6</sup> 3) a Special Prosecutor's Office for the Investigation of Homicides [quote] of Women whose title has changed on four separate occasions;<sup>7</sup> 4) the moral invalidation of the victims;<sup>8</sup> 5) the queries which have been put to the authorities regarding those detained for these crimes against women. All of this demonstrates the inability of the police forces to deal with the problem, but above all it questions the abilities of the judicial institutions responsible for public safety because the crimes continue.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that crime and violence prevail in Ciudad Juárez. Being situated on the border gives it certain characteristics which may not be found in other cities of the country; it is known as a violent place due to it being the seat of a drug cartel (Sánchez 1988: 44). Men and women die under violent circumstances here.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the death of women expresses a gendered oppression, the inequality of the relations between what is male and what is female, a manifestation of domination, terror, social extermination, patriarchal hegemony, social class and impunity.

### *Theoretical Reflections*

But if there is no compelling reason to use the same definition as that used by those with whom one disagrees, then it makes sense to define a phenomenon in a way that best fits feminist principles. DIANA E. H. RUSSELL, *Making Violence Sexy*

Even though feminist criminology has made its way into mainstream criminology, its most important contribution has centered on the victimization of women, that is, the kinds of crimes of which women are most frequently the victims. Sociological studies concerning violence and sex against women have especially focused on rape and personal assault. (Britton 2000: 8). It could be said that feminist criminology started in 1976 with the publication of the book *Crime and Criminology: A Feminist Critique*, whose author, Carol Smart, takes into consideration issues denied by the criminological hegemony, as are: experiences of women as offenders and victims of crime (Britton 2000: 2).

In the 1980s feminist academics started questioning other areas of criminology such as the murder of women. One of the chief contributions of this new incursion of gender into mainstream criminological studies was the analysis of sex killings, whereby all of the serial sexual killers were men and a majority of their victims were women.

Jane Caputi, Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer were the first to systematically analyze sexual killings through the category of gender. However, Diana E.H. Russell coined the theoretical term *femicide*<sup>12</sup> in 1976. The term is defined as the misogynist killing of women by men and a form of continuity of sexual assault, where you must take into account: the acts of violence, the motives and the imbalance of power between the sexes in political, social and economic environments. There is a direct proportional correlation between the structural changes that take place in society and a direct proportion to the level of tolerance manifested by the collective to it and its level of violence (Vachss 1994: 227). All of the factors and all of the policies that end the lives of women are tolerated by the state and other institutions (Radford and Russell 1992).

In *The Age of Sex Crime*, Jane Caputi takes on the sexualized serial murder<sup>13</sup> of women by men. She affirms that the crime of lust, murder through rape, serial and recreational killings are new expressions of a new kind of crime. This kind of murder by no means lacks motives, since rape, torture, mutilation and finally extermination speaks to us of “‘sexual murder’ as a sexually political killing, as functional phallic terrorism” (1987: 2).

Sexual serial murder should not be explained either as an irruption of evil forces or of “mysterious psychopaths,”<sup>14</sup> affirms Caputi, and she continues in the line plotted by Mary Daly and Andrea Dworkin to analyze this crime as a logical consequence of the patriarchal system<sup>15</sup> that maintains male supremacy through what the first one refers to as *gynocide* and later defined by Andrea Dworkin as: “the systematic crippling, rape and/or killing of women...the relentless violence perpetrated by a gendered class of men upon a gendered class of women”(Caputi 1987:3).

Women-killing is usual in the patriarchy, yet, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has been known for a new kind of crime against women, which includes torture, mutilation, rape and the murder of both women and girls. The frequency and upsurge of these acts has brought Caputi to call our times as the “era of sexual crimes.” This age starts with “Jack the Ripper,” the still unknown London killer who in 1888 murdered and mutilated five prostitutes (1989: 445). Through him and his crimes, a tradition of sexual murders and sexual killers is established, the purpose being “terrorizing women and inspiring and empowering men” (1990: 3-4;1989: 445).

Consequently, serial sexual murder is a ritualistic mythic act in the contemporary patriarchy where sex and violence combine, where an intimate relationship between manliness and pleasure are established because...

The murder of women and children—including torture and killings by husbands, lovers, and fathers, as well as those committed by strangers—are not an unexplainable crime or in the domain of “monsters” only. On the contrary, sexual murder is an ultimate expression of sexuality as a form of power (Caputi 1989: 39).

Even though the causes of violence are not found in the pathological characteristics of the offenders, they are to be found in the social status of the victims<sup>16</sup> (Andersen 1983: 196). When a society faces the extermination of women on a daily basis, it does not make any sense to ask why one individual kills another. The question should be: “Why do members of one group in particular kill members of another group?” When attempting to answer this question it is necessary to interrelate the motives and the violent acts of the criminals and juxtapose them with the social structures of a particular area and the differences of power in the hierarchy of sexual power (Cameron and Frazer 1987: 30).

However, Cameron and Frazer, in their book *The Lust to Kill*, beyond accepting male violence as a reality derived out of the patriarchy, explore the irrationality of the fusion between sex and violence, and why some men find killing the objects of their desire - be they men or women - as erotic<sup>17</sup>. They conclude that these brutal acts are not only present in misogyny and sadistic sexuality, but also in the social construction of masculinity as a form of supremacy over others, because the victims could be men and women. What is constant is the gender of the victimizer: male. Therefore, they conclude that rape and sexual assaults are not essential conditions or enough to label a crime as sexual. What is important “is the eroticizing of the act of killing.” Sexual murder is defined and includes all the cases in which the killer was motivated by sadistic sexual impulses, by “the lust to kill,” which is also the product of a certain social order (Cameron and Frazer 1987: 18-19,33).

Pornography, and the increase of violence and the degradation of women in it, can be and are, causes of rape. But other causative factors should also be taken into account in rape and in femicide such as the socialization of men, the experiences of sexual abuse during childhood and adolescence of the men, and the easy access to purchase firearms (Russell 1993: 257-258). Nevertheless, most cases of sexual abuse are committed against girls and women, but by no means do their experiences turn *them* into sexual killers.

The analysis of crimes against women and girls inevitably takes us to the theoretical construct of femicide. This social phenomenon is tied into the patriarchal system that predisposes, to a greater or lesser degree, that women be murdered. Be it for the simple act of being women, or for not being one “adequately”. The inadequacy presupposes that the woman has “stepped out of line” and has “exceeded the established limits”,<sup>18</sup> accordingly, the authorities in Chihuahua -referring to the victims- state:

...it is important to note that the behavior of some of the victims does not correspond with those established characteristics of the moral order, being there has been excessive frequenting into the late hours of the night of entertainment establishments not appropriate for their age in some cases, as well an inadequate care and abandonment of the family unit in which they have lived.<sup>19</sup>

Femicide is understood as a progression of violent acts that range from emotional and psychological abuse, battery, verbal abuse, torture, rape, prostitution, sexual assault, child abuse, female infanticide, genital mutilation, domestic violence and all policies tolerated by the state that cause the death of women.

Religious institutions are not left behind: the Catholic Church, on the 16th of December 2001 at an event entitled “Light and Justice for the Women of Our City (Luz y justicia para las mujeres de nuestra ciudad),” called the murdered women angels in the presence of God, singing “Holy, Holy” to the *good* God.

For its part, The Evangelical Ministry Alliance of Ciudad Juárez, (La Alianza Ministerial Evangélica de Ciudad Juárez), sponsored on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December of the same year a forum on violence against women, during which the death of women was referred to as a satanic cult which will last twelve years. Therefore there are still four more years of angels being produced and dragged to Heaven by Satan.

However, for femicide the motives can be hate, pleasure, ire, malice, jealousy, separation, arguments, robbery, the sensation to possess women and exterminate the one that is dominated. The victimizers can be among others: a father, a lover, a husband, a friend, an acquaintance, a stranger or a boyfriend. They are violent men who believe they have every right to kill some women.

Maintaining the analysis of the social class of the murdered women and girls is to forget that sexuality is configured through the subjectivity and society (Weeks 1998: 40). Through the murder of some women known to be especially vulnerable, all women are sought to be controlled, who will internalize the threat and message of sexual terrorism (Caputi 1987: 118); all of this, along with the prevention campaigns, places limitations on women, their mobility and conduct in the public and private sphere.

In this city, the prevention campaigns are centered on making women responsible for any aggression they could befall, especially if it is at night or if they are walking along an empty street. Warnings were sent out about attending parties, staying out late till the morning hours, walking alone, and more importantly, if she was a laborer, about dressing provocatively and consuming alcoholic beverages; her guardian angel, it was said, would not always be there to take care of her. Moreover, men were called upon to show their manliness and *machismo* by watching over their women and the activities in which they may participate. These declarations, as Tabuenca asserts, were especially classist, misogynist and heterosexist (1998: 1-10).

The murders of women are closely related to the structural changes experienced in a given society, and to the level of tolerance that each society manifests around them and its level of violence (Vachss 1994: 227).

What's going on is that we are focusing right now on Ciudad Juárez, and perhaps if something like this happens in Chihuahua it isn't noticed, and if it happens in Torreón it isn't noticed, or in Durango or in the State of Sinaloa, where as of January till now there have already been 96 homicides and it hasn't been noticed.

Arturo González Rascón, Attorney General for the State of Chihuahua.<sup>20</sup>

For without a radical goal toward eliminating sexual violence, rather than just simply responding to it, prevention becomes an undertaking directed towards the victims or the potential victims (Kelly and Radford 1998: 72). It is important to note that all of the mentioned studies establish gender as a stand alone category for the analysis of the murder of women, nevertheless, the analysis of social class or of other power structures or material conditions which can influence male violence against women are only mentioned, without being analyzed. Furthermore, other authors, including Monica McWilliams, affirm that societies under stress have an important role in violence against women. She defines these as societies that are in the process of transformation, which we can call modernization, civil unrest, and a state of war or terrorism. These events are not the only determining factors, though. One should take into account the religious systems and ideologies as contributing to the escalation and the legitimizing of violence. Yet, *the attitudes towards the victims and the perpetrators, the available strategies to prevent and combat [the violence] can be independent of political and ideological powers that exist in that society* (McWilliams 1998: 112).<sup>21</sup>

Ciudad Juárez, situated on the border, has certain peculiarities, which are not found in other cities in the country. There is a constant migration<sup>22</sup> of men and women who find in the region a good place to settle or to cross over into the United States. Drug cartels come here as well.<sup>23</sup> The conditions are good not only for the trafficking of drugs, because the conduits to the consumer market of the United States are closer to this area, but also for the industrialization process that attracts men and women.<sup>24</sup> The relations and social networks of these migrants - family,<sup>25</sup> friends, and relatives - have been altered as a result of the transformations taking place in the country.<sup>26</sup>

I am assuming that all of these factors are intimately interrelated with violence against women. Even though this existed before all of the processes of change, which the city is undergoing today, the consistent killing of women - raped and dumped into empty lots, and into deserted areas<sup>27</sup> has never been seen as it has during the 1990s.

Nevertheless, it is important to insist, that any investigation of the killing of women and girls in Ciudad Juárez which does not take into account the perspective of gender, "as a constituting component based on the differences that distinguish the sexes...and a principal framework for significant relations of power" (Scott 1996: 289), together with social class, will not achieve in explaining what has happened on this border. Because the murder of women and girls, born immersed under structures of inequality, is directly related to these same structures.

This study seeks to analyze the crimes in Ciudad Juárez using sexual femicide as an analytical tool; beginning with social class, since the category of "female" comes out of – amongst other dimensions - social class. If we do not take this category into account "it is not that women experience inequality differently; nevertheless, it will make it more difficult for them to identify and challenge the bases of the inequality they experience" (Skeggs 1997: 7).

Marxist theory defines social class in this way: "social classes are groups of social agents, men defined *principally*, although not exclusively, by their place in the *production process*, that is to say in the economic sphere" (Poulantzas 1977: 96).<sup>28</sup> Marx was not interested in sex; therefore, the sexual oppression is not a subject of interest in his analysis. For him, human beings define themselves in relation to the means of production; therefore, they are farmers, workers, laborers and capitalists without differentiating men and women (Rubin 1999: 18).

However, the concepts of gender and class should be analyzed for "their place historically, and by no means universally" (Bellhouse 1999: 960). No analysis concerning the reproduction of a work force can offer an explanation for "the binding of feet, chastity belts, the incredible Byzantine panoply of fetiched indignities, not to mention the most ordinary of oppressions which have been inflicted upon women in different places and at different times" (Rubin 1999: 21). Andrea Dworkin calls them "culturally standardized violence against women" (1997: 20).

Notwithstanding, the violence can not only be understood in different ways, but rather within very concrete specifics. Karl Marx, in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, examines the men/women relationship framed in the theory of alienated labor, bourgeois society and private property. Even though the relationship between the sexes is found in an articulated form, but rather accidental, it has the merit of being situated in a *concrete and historical field*<sup>29</sup> in which the interpersonal relations of the human beings are developed (Manieri 1978: 145).

When Marx and Engels speak of violence, in addition to doing it in terms of social classes, they refer to the hegemony of the state: "violence is the political power of a class organized against another" (Marx and Engels 1980: I, 129-130), but also "it is the power of the state [that] as such, is an economic power" (Marx and Engels 1980: III, 522).

Regretfully, there are women who because of the [circumstances of their lives], the places where they carry out their activities, are at risk; because it would be very difficult for anyone going out into the street when it is raining, well, it would be very difficult not to get wet.

Arturo González Rascón, Attorney General State of Chihuahua.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, however, we should not just center on analyzing the behavior of the women, but also on the desire of men to kill them. The behavior of prostitutes, laborers, minors, students, of women in general must not be analyzed, because we leave the poverty with which they coexist intact, but mainly because we would leave aside the analysis of the violence on the part of some men, demanding that the women themselves prevent rape and murder (Cameron and Frazer 1987: 110). If it is true that we women should and must be responsible for ourselves, what happens when the conditions of poverty force some women to work night shifts? What happens when you live in areas with a deficient urban infrastructure and without electric power? When there is neither private nor public transportation to leave women at the doorsteps of their homes? In addition, what happens when she is under age? Marcia Pally affirms that it is not sex, position or customs, but force, be it psychological, physical or economic. In reality, it is in this where the problem of women lies. Men who rape do so because it hurts women. Nevertheless, a society that wishes to reduce that kind of violence must direct its attention to find the reasons for which men inflict such harm. To that end a society must favor and promote that women acquire the emotional means to know really what their desires are and the economic means to be able say no to sexual violence and all forms of intimidation (Pally 1997: 25,28).

On the other hand, violence is learned as a social model, which lacks a social conscience to eradicate it (Fisas 1998: 16). In violence we find an aggressor who looks to benefit at the expense of a victim subjected to his aggression; independent of whether the violence is legal or illegitimate, it damages the physical, psychic and biological well-being of whom suffers it (Asensio 1998: 19). In addition, in the act of violence, be it physical or verbal, a person is forced against her will to do what she does not want to do (Cortina 1998: 28). An object is needed for violence [to be possible], an object against which contrasting values can be applied such as inferiority versus superiority. In this way, a person is dehumanized and the object is broken by other factors, such as poverty, or any difference, whichever it may be. The object is the person without a face on whom, with all its crudeness, the practice of terror is imposed (Devalle 2000: 22). "We are before a kind of violence in which the cause of the aggression is not an ideological discrepancy, the possession of goods-be this a place of power or a concrete material object-; but the woman herself, her body and her life" (Sau 1998: 169).

The study of the body and criminology are central in the works of Foucault. The body, he says, is the territory of history, biology, of physiological investigation; but also of society, productive processes and of ideologies. The body is a political field, stretched between the power struggles that act and leave their mark on it, limit it, and subject it to torture, punishment, rituals. Violence is one of the mechanisms through which bodies of lesser power are subjected to the agonizing lessons of those with greater power (Foucault 1998: 32,35).

This author analyzes the creation and restructuring of criminality as a form of economy of illegal acts, and as a crucial element in the education and justice of the bourgeois class (1998: 277-278). In this way the emphasis is on the economics and class (Bellhouse 1999: 959). It is enough alone to mention the statements made by Juan Carlos Olivares Ramos, president of the Maquiladora Association A.C. (AMAC) (Asociación de Maquilas A.C.):

It is a very small - minimal - number, and [yet] for that reason we had people from the entire world interviewing us... The fact that the authorities informed the general public that most of these women worked at various companies, it taints the reputation of not only the city, but of industry in general, he commented. <sup>31</sup>

For that reason, the continuous killing of women is a kind of admissible illegal act in which, these "practices tend to constitute criminality in ways that are casual and serve to reinforce the creation of a new bourgeoisie on 'proper' and 'improper' identities of gender" (Bellhouse 1999: 959). Melissa Wright sustains that the practices of the maquiladora industry towards the workers reveal a *consume and dispose* cycle. This is a system that is maintained by the creation of disposable females, therefore it is no wonder that the authorities and industry use the same discourse concerning the murdered women (2001: 11). However, they also create the gendered identities of the women of the proletarian class. Because even though the murders may be for but a few, the most vulnerable, the message is for all of them. The obligatory question asked by anyone visiting Ciudad Juárez refers to the violent deaths of women. For the women visitors, the city terrorizes them; when they go out, they are warned about the risks they are taking. Although, they are told (by men), "don't worry, you are not the prototype; you're no longer young, you're not seventeen years old, you are not dark skinned." Obviously, this has different meanings for women and men, the men have nothing to worry about (Caputi 1990: 2-3).

If "crime is not a virtuality that special interests or passions have inscribed on the hearts of all men, but rather the almost exclusive undertaking of certain social class" (Foucault 1998: 281), <sup>32</sup> men are not any different from other social classes that resist losing their monopoly on power. Just as the whites of South Africa were against the black people who dug at the base of the racial structure of power, thus men react confronting the liberation of women: while more women gain access to jobs, financial growth and professional success, the violence of men against women increases, *although not necessarily against those who are successful* (Russell 1993: 258).

In addition to this, one has to take into account that "the courts of a society as a whole do not judge one of its members, but rather the social category responsible for order, sanctions another which is responsible for disorder..."(Foucault 1998: 281). The diversity of women's aspirations is denied (Selva 1998), aspirations, which have been subjected to male sexual desire, with an added value: productivity. The free display of female sexuality has been represented only through a productive attitude dictated by male desire. "Without it, any free demonstration of female sexuality appears as chaotic horror. It is never the other way around, because then disorder is established and chaos appears, which seems to be what is seen at the turn of this century "(1998: 177).

For that reason, when one speaks of the killing of women, the lives and actions of the victims are described, but not those of the killers. The violence cannot be understood without taking into account the dominant class behind the organization protecting its interests and privileges through a political system permeated in violence (Tecla 1999: 83). Therefore human violence is a destructive and annihilating force that dissipates or maintains a contradiction and prevents the development of one of its opponents or destroys it (Tecla 1999: 93). For the dominant classes, violence is a necessary value that contributes to maintain the existing order; it is the right of those who have the power (Devalle 2000: 22).

Making use of these illegal acts is of a great benefit. "It can be so in relation to other illegal activities, independent, but with them, doubled over with their own separate internal organizations, concentrating on violent crime, whose primary victims are usually the poorer classes..."(Foucault 1998: 283). Critical feminism, and that of cultural investigations, has learned that the experience and the prevalence of gendered violence, including rape, are related - and vary in accordance to - social class, race, country and other socio-historic distinctions. Therefore, it has been concluded that aside from focussing on male domination and oppression one must take into account the analysis of the patriarchal hegemony as it relates to the capitalistic hegemony as well as other types of hegemonies, which arise depending on the historical and geographical context in which the gendered violence takes place (Steeves 1997: 13).

Delinquency, with all the policing it implies, guarantees submissiveness, and becomes a proxy for the subordinated illegal action of the dominant groups (Foucault 1998: 283-284). It is also necessary to analyze the impact and consequences of the individual assaults and repeated rape of individuals - female or male - as well as the cultural significance that the victimization has on women and girls in, and between, the cultures. There is a degree of frequency and continuity of violence in all cultures though: women and girls are made responsible for male sexuality, even though variations may exist in the make-up and manner for constructing it as well as to how it is opposed (Kelly and Radford 1998: 68).

On May 5, 1999, Governor Patricio Martínez, in a radio interview, declared:

We have something that was deplorable - 'fortunately it's over' -, it is something we can see now as a nightmare from which we are just waking up, a huge number of homicides in Ciudad Juárez as has never been seen before in any part of the country...that killing spree that overwhelmed Chihuahua and has now ended'; almost 190 women murdered in a period of 5 years....<sup>34</sup>

Crime directs and exploits criminality, and within this, it forms the implementation of power. "Crime works as a political observatory" (Foucault 1998: 285,287). The special public prosecutor, Suly Ponce, made the following statement in November, 2000: "There is a psychosis in Ciudad Juárez: [just] half an hour delay in a woman returning home is enough for her family to ask for help finding her."<sup>35</sup>

At that moment, three young women were missing; the body of one of them was found in the year 2000; two were said to be found on 6 November 2001. Currently Suly Ponce is acting as Coordinator for Agencies of the Public Ministry of the Northern Region, which means the complete authority of the Justice Department.<sup>36</sup> Observing this pattern of injustice, we can affirm that among the less privileged, the last ones of any privilege, usually are the most unjustly oppressed, with no - or limited - protection against the most flagrant local injustices (Gunder Frank 1999: 54).

The hierarchy of sexual exploitation that includes race, gender and class, in the end is reinforced through violence. Exploitation, torture and murder coming from this structure on the most part are distorted or ignored by the mainstream of the educational curricula and mass media (Domingo 1992: 199).

### ***Practice and Method***

The analysis presented in this paper is based on "secondary" sources, which could invalidate this endeavor. Another question could be raised: what need is there to repeat what the newspapers have been in charge of communicating throughout the years (Cameron and Frazer 1987: xii). Nevertheless, these secondary sources cease from being such and become "primary" because they are the experiences of women concerned about the massacre of other women (Daly 1990: 27). And, with these data resources for analysis, I have been able to understand and quantify sexual femicide against the girls and women of this city. On July 28, 1998, Esther Chávez Cano<sup>37</sup> provided me with the list of murdered women<sup>38</sup> from 1993 to 1998.

Other sources of information I could get and which document the murders of women from 1993 to 1998, are two published reports; the first, by the Assistant Prosecutor's office for the State for the Northern Region (Subprocuraduría de Justicia del Estado Zona Norte), and the second by the Attorney General's office

of the State (Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado).<sup>39</sup> It is important to emphasize that such reports were the result of pressure exerted by women's groups to end the femicide. With all this information, and a database produced by me, until the month of December of 2001, I calculated 110 victims of serial sexual femicide. (See table no. 1)

TABLE No. 1.  
Serial Sexual Femicide in Ciudad Juárez 1993-2001

Year	Cases	Serial Killings	Cases Solved	Arrested Offender/s	Serial Killings	Cases Solved	Arrested Offender/s
1993	8	6	0		2	2	4 men*/1 son
1994	7	5	0		2	2	2 men/1neighbor
1995	17	15	3	Shariff/Rebeldes	2	1	Step father
1996	19	16	6	Rebeldes	3	3	2 men**
1997	16	11	0		5	5	Uncle***/3youths/2men/ close kin-friend/lover
1998	16	15	3	Tolteca/Choferes	1	0	
1999	9	6	4	Tolteca/Choferes	3	2	stepson/client
2000	6	6	0		0	0	
2001	12	9	8	Ruteros	3	0	
	110	89	24		21	15	

SOURCE: Compiled by the author, data base Femicide 1993-2001, *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*

\* 4 men who took part in the murder of a minor.

\*\* 1killed two minors, an actual prison term not handed down due to his being a minor.

\*\*\* This perpetrator is serving a sentence

The classification of serial femicide was based on the following indicators: the location where the victim was found, generally a vacant locality; if the coroner's report indicated a rape had occurred; when no such information was available, the fact that the body was unclothed, the state in which the body was left as well as the various tortures or mutilations the body was subjected to were all taken into account.

Eighty-nine cases have been recorded from 1993 to 2001, and several men proven to be the physical and intellectual perpetrators of these are in custody. In 1995, Omar Shariff Latiff and the "Los Rebeldes"<sup>40</sup> gang were detained. In 1999 the "El Tolteca y los Choferes"<sup>41</sup> gang was apprehended, as were Víctor Javier García Uribe and Gustavo González Meza<sup>42</sup> in the year 2001. With the exception of Omar Shariff Latiff who was sentenced to a 30-year prison term, no other prison terms have been handed down. Yet, in the year 2000 it was known that the body of Elizabeth Castro García, whose murder was attribute to Omar Shariff Latiff, does not belong to her. All of these cases add up to 24 "presumed solved cases," of the remaining 65, nothing is known. In addition to that, 39 of the victims remain as unidentified.

As for the victims of non-serial sexual femicide, the same classification criteria was used. A significant fact is that some of these crimes are committed in the home. These sexual assaults total 21, of which, in 15 of the cases some arrests have been made. We could ask ourselves if there are any differences between sexual femicide and serial [sexual femicide]. No, there are not. Both mean the same: the complete destruction and subjugation of woman (Caputi 1987: 7). But we have to take into account that if we really believe that the so-called serial killers<sup>43</sup> and the non-serial killers are truly those under arrest, [then] only 35.1% of the cases have been "closed" and 64.8% remain unsolved.

As to the origin of the girls and women, 35.5% remain unidentified; the place of origin of 40% is not known, and the remaining 24.5 % are from the following states: 10 from Chihuahua; 7 from Ciudad Juárez; 5 from Zacatecas; 4 from Durango; 3 from Veracruz; 3 from Coahuila; 1 from Puebla; and 1 from Sinaloa.

Even though the number is very small, in order to reach any conclusions, we can presume that 39 unknown females and another 20 women coming from other states of the Republic, and from the very State of Chihuahua, reflect the migratory phenomenon of this city which has a population of 1,217,818 inhabitants. According the year 2000 census, 58.9% of the inhabitants were born there; 32% elsewhere; 2.6% in another country, and the origin of 6.5% is not known. The numbers are similar when they are separated by sex: 33.8% of the total women come from another locality or country, and 59.6% are local.<sup>44</sup>

The women, whether they are adults or girls, are raped, prostituted and murdered, or killed then raped. This degradation is so common that the victims, their names or the places where they were assassinated, are forgotten from one day to the next (Dworkin 1997: 188-189). Forgetting is a part of those who remain as observers or of those parties who carry out the aggression. By contrast, the victim's sentiments and body are imprinted with everything she has to remember.

Their ages range from 10 to 42 years old. (See Table No. 2) The age group where women are most likely to be murdered is between 11 and 22, which represents an aggregate percentage of 72.7%; with the group of young women 17 years of age leading at 11 victims. Although we must make it clear that we only have available data on 77 cases, as far as the remaining 12 cases all, of [the victims] are described as very young women.

TABLE No. 2  
Serial Sexual Femicide 1993-2001 by Victim's Age

Age	Incidents	Percentage	Aggregate percentage
10	3	3.9	3.9
13	5	6.5	10.4
14	1	1.3	11.7
15	8	10.4	22.1
16	7	9.1	31.2
17	11	14.3	45.5
18	5	6.5	51.9
19	5	6.5	58.4
20	5	6.5	64.9
21	1	1.3	66.2
22	5	6.5	72.7
23	4	5.2	77.9
24	3	3.9	81.8
25	1	1.3	83.1
28	2	2.6	85.7
29	1	1.3	87.0
30	3	3.9	90.9
33	2	2.6	93.5
34	1	1.3	94.8
35	2	2.6	97.4
42	2	2.6	100.0
Total	77	100.0	

SOURCE: Compiled by the author, data base Femicide 1993-2001, *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*

The ideology of the patriarchy cries out against rape, nevertheless, it legitimizes it when it sustains the myths of male sexuality as being uncontrolled and aggressive against the myth that female sexuality is passive and receptive. However, in all social contexts, rape is a violent act through which sex is used as a weapon (Steeves 1997: 10-11,13). For that reason, certain forms of sexual assault have been legitimized by the state. The normalization of this policy makes one ponder about the risk of sexual assault relative to the importance of the various categories of women, e.g., adult women, women with special needs, women of different ethnic groups, impoverished women, etc. (Kelly and Radford 1998: 74-75). (See Table No. 3)

TABLE No.3  
Serial Sexual Femicide by Occupation and Description of the Victims

Occupation	Incidents	Percentage
Homemaker	1	1.1
Bar employee	2	2.2

Drug addict	1	1.1
Laborer	1	1.1
Domestic employee	2	2.2
Laborer/student	3	3.4
Student	5	5.6
Sought work/maquiladora	4	4.5
Homeless	1	1.1
Maquiladora	14	13.5
Maquiladora/student	2	2.2
Secretary	1	1.1
Prostitute	1	1.1
Supermarket employee	1	1.1
Occupation not specified	50	58.4
Total	89	100.0

SOURCE: Compiled by the author, data base Femicide 1993-2001, *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*

"In an environment of violence, it is necessary to explain it through private property, the distribution of the wealth and ideology. Other aspects such as the material attributes of the population, the levels of industrialization and education of that society, must be left out of the analysis "(Tecla 1999: 79). This statement is completely erroneous, because it does not take into account the sexual exploitation hierarchy, which includes race, gender and class.

In modern western society the differences between sex, gender, social class and race are facts that are made biological, making social inequality normal. It deals with an ideological process used to overcome the inherent contradictions of a society of classes, and it especially manifests itself when there are conflicts, contradictions and tensions in the system, which are neutralized as the victims themselves are blamed for their own inferiority (Stolcke 2000: 42).

The young women who show a greater risk and vulnerability to be attacked, are those who work in the maquiladora industry - 22.2%. In addition to being women, they are migrants; they walk for long distances and at late hours of the night. The *maquila* represents the highest percentage of the economically active population.<sup>45</sup> Women, as objects of male violence, suffer from it for a primary cause, that is: the difference in the physical strength between men and women, and for a secondary cause, that is; the social inequality of women (Izquierdo 1998: 77).

### *Conclusion*

Sexual serial femicide in this city is a social problem that is real. It has something to do with what is "unfixable" and with what is "owed". Women, as the objects of male violence, are suffering from it, from their gender identity and from their position in the system of social classes. And, although we as feminists avoid using the term "victim," it is certainly a fact in the implementation of femicide. Therefore, this sanctioned criminality follows a series of discourses in which there is a meaning, and a direction based on material conditions that support it.

The statements made by government officials responsible for the judiciary power, business spokespersons and churches, allow us to see how the limits of tolerance are drawn up and carried out against a wave of femicide and forms of submission to which the victims are subjected. But worst of all is the message of an alarming moment in time when the unsolved crimes become a power, because it is established that those who enforce the law are not interested in apprehending those who break it and who kill girls and women.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Ana Luisa Arredondo Escárzaga's assistance in the production of this work.

<sup>2</sup> In the first place, I would like to establish the correct term "femicide" for referring to these murders of women. This term must be utilized because of the need to make women visible, in as much from the point of view of the term from the crime that has been committed against them.

<sup>3</sup> In any case, for feminists, femicide is one of the most "hideous and sensitive areas of male violence" (Radford 1992: 5).

<sup>4</sup> Alnico Acura Harrier, "They left me 21 bags with bones: Governor", *Norte*, 20/06/99, p. 10b.

<sup>5</sup> "...an integrated strategy against crime must be based not only on an able diagnosis of the inadequacy of the institutionalized structure, but also on the social problems facing the specific regions. The reason for this is clear: as we better understand the reality of a region, we will better identify its problems; we will be able to differentiate with more clarity its fundamental problems from those connected to them and we will better understand which are the causes and the effects of a specific problem (Brugués, Cortez y Fuentes 1998: 18).

<sup>6</sup> There are no official documents or reports that enable us to recover the analysis from the various criminologists. The conclusions arrived at are made known through the media. An interview with Lic. Jorge Ostos, Director of the Police Academy of Ciudad Juárez, February 12, 1999.

March 15<sup>th</sup>, The State Attorney General's Office, and the Assistant Prosecutor's Office Northern Zone and the Special Prosecutor for the investigation of women [quote] sent out to the media the following information relative to the presence of investigators of National Center for Violence and Crime of the F.B.I. (Federal Bureau of Investigation), relating to the crimes against women: "After reviewing, together, 78 files of these cases, 23 were of mayor interest, but we are assured that it was premature and irresponsible to speak of a serial killer. For them, the majority of these cases are isolated crimes."

For Robert K. Ressler, a multiple killer is responsible for at least 6 or 12 murders of women. Rafael Nuñez, "Reséndez killed 12 in Juárez", *Norte*, 10/07/99, p. 7b. For Spanish criminologist, José Antonio Parra Molina, this city is the substance in a laboratory culture dish that enables favorably the creation of repeat or psychotic murderers, and in his opinion there were indeed serial killings. Armando Rodríguez: "Spanish criminologist earns two thousand five hundred dollars a month", *El Diario Juárez*, 21/08/98, p. 10c. Alejandro Gutiérrez, "Reports of women killings are submitted", *El Diario Juárez*, 30/09/98, p. 2a.

Criminologists Oscar Defassioux Trechuelo and Eduardo Muriel Melero, confirmed that the attorney general's office staff denied any type of help in the investigation and that the murders would continue due to the inadequacies of the investigation. "Criminologists left not giving a notice of resignation. Nahúm", *Norte*, 28/02/99, p. 6b.

<sup>7</sup> Lic. Suly Ponce Pardo, assistant prosecutor since 1998. The first one was Lic. Ma. Antonieta Esparza, then, Lic. Silvia Loya and two temporary attorneys: Lic. Manuel Adolfo Esparza Navarrete and Lic. Marina Aspeitia de Meléndez. *Norte*, 10/09/98, p. 1h. *El Diario Juárez*, 09/09/1998 and *Norte*, 21/10/98. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Lic. Zulema Bolívar was sworn in.

<sup>8</sup> The two main newspapers in this city: *Norte* and *El Diario Juárez*, document this type of statements from 1993 to date.

<sup>9</sup> On March 30, 2001, five individuals known as the "Choferes" gang were arrested, and charged with seven murders. It was said that with this, the killings of women were ending.

<sup>10</sup> From 1985 to 1997, a total of 1677 people have died. 198 were women. INEGI, *Mortalidad. Estadísticas sociodemográficas*, vol. III. To date, though, no one has taken this topic to conduct a serious investigation of how many men have died, and what the circumstances of their death in this city were.

<sup>11</sup> The use of violence is higher among men than among women. For men violence is found in a mesh of physical and cultural experiences; the male culture uses it as an easy and available resource. It is a man's activity and men are more prone and capable to use it (Dobash y Dobash 1998: 164-166).

<sup>12</sup> This term was used in Spanish by Victoria Sau. "When we use the word "man" to refer to men and women and even to human beings in general, this makes us incapable of differentiating and making women visible in their activities and in their death. We use the word "homicide" to refer to the killings of women, "parricide" when a daughter is killed, as if the father were the victim, and "fratricide" when a sister is killed. The correct terms are femicide, filicide and sororicide". But it is Marcela Lagarde who uses the term femicide. (1997: 10-12; 1999: 58-62). See also Monárrez 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Robert K. Ressler is considered an authority in sex crimes; we owe to him the term *serial killer* coined in the 70's (Ressler and Shachtman 1993: 32). Though Jenkins states that the concept, not the term, has existed for more than a century, and was spread during the 80's by the Behavioral Sciences Unit group (BSU) from the Quantico, Virginia office of the Justice Department and the FBI's National Academy. This unit was established during the 70's to create the profile of violent aggressors. The media was responsible for making the term popular. Nevertheless, the language and the theory of the serial killer were developed in Quantico (Jenkins 1994: 7-8, 21, 55-56).

The concept of the serial murder, establishes differences in the various types of multiple homicides, depending on the time occurred between attacks. This way, it is possible to perceive other terms. For example, *mass murders*, are the murders committed in one place and in a brief period of time. Those carried out during a few days or weeks are called *spree-killings* (an unusual number of killings committed in a limited amount of time). On the contrary, a serial crime is believed to consist of crimes carried out and multiplied over several months or years, including periods when they disappear (Jenkins 1994: 21).

<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, there are affirmations that define the conduct of multiple killers as insane or as a psychiatric or genetic rarity, or as the product of a possession by a malign spirit, as being part of satanic cults or witchcraft. These explanations vanish all blame, placing it beyond personal responsibility. If they are classified as mentally ill, how is it explained that their clinical symptoms are undetected by society? And if we are to say that any person committing a crime has lost all sanity and reason, this position is essentially a moral one and it takes us to investigate objectively the causes and the meaning of such acts (Leyton 1995: 21).

<sup>15</sup> "The idea of a universal patriarchy has been highly criticized in recent years due to the fact that it does not reflect the operatives of gender oppression in the cultural contexts in which it exists." (Butler 2001: 36) Nevertheless, every time that this is mentioned, the conception of theorists of violence is respected, especially those theorists who have dedicated their efforts to the analysis of femicide.

<sup>16</sup> Gender violence is a reality that kills and hurts millions of women and girls around the world. Those who are not directly affected remain in constant fear of violence (Steeves 1997: 96).

<sup>17</sup> I differ from this statement, since the term erotic refers to: "...some material sexually appealing or exciting which is free of sexism, racism, homophobia and respectful of all human beings..." (Russell 1993: 3).

<sup>18</sup> All of the theorists mentioned concur with these facts.

<sup>19</sup> Assistant Prosecutor's Office Northern Zone, *Informe de Homicidios en perjuicio de mujeres en Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. 1993-1998*.

<sup>20</sup> Armando Rodríguez, *El Diario Juárez*, 24/02/99, p. 9c. Arturo González Rascón was attorney general of the state of Chihuahua from 1998 to January of 2002.

<sup>21</sup> The text in Italics is mine.

<sup>22</sup> Approximately 67 962 people established their home here between 1994 and 1995. *Encuesta sobre migración internacional en la frontera norte*, EMIF, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

<sup>23</sup> The Amado Carrillo cartel comes here from Sinaloa; it is said that presently there is a power struggle between the people of Carrillo and the Arellano Felix brothers from Tijuana.

<sup>24</sup> I have no data about the percentage of men and women working in the maquiladora coming from other areas of the country. Even though it is estimated at approximately 80%. The AMAC —Asociación de Maquiladoras— says that they do not have that information. Presently, the maquiladora industry has generated 245,000 jobs. 55% of the people who work there are women, 45% are men. Statistics of rotation, absenteeism and other. Source: AMAC. August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> As of November 5, 1995 the Municipality of Juárez reported a population 1,011,786, of which 98.4% is concentrated in Ciudad Juárez City proper. 33.1% of the population is younger than 15 years of age and 3.4% over the age of 65. The average age is 22. One third of the population is situated in the 15-29 age group. 35% of the residents are immigrants. 22 out of every 100 persons between the ages of 0 and 14 living in the city were born out of state. The strongest immigration is in young persons between 15 and 24, with 39.1%.

<sup>26</sup> The main population flows come from the state of Chihuahua with 26%, followed by Durango at 15%, Coahuila with 9%, Sonora with 9.7%. It is interesting to observe the tendencies of the migration flows of Veracruz, which were 1.9% and 1.8% in the years between 1994 and 1995. But the period between 1996-1997 it increased to 7.6%. *Cfr. Encuesta sobre migración internacional en la frontera norte*, EMIF, El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. At this time this survey cannot measure the migration flows of a large portion of the migration who come from the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas y Veracruz. These persons are brought to the border by bus solely to work directly in the maquiladora industry.

<sup>27</sup> To give an exact number of women who have been killed in this way always represents entering into a polemic. Yet, according to the data base "Feminicidio" of *El Colegio de la Frontera Norte*, I can confirm that of 258 girls and women, 110 are sexual femicides, of which I consider 89 could be identified according to the depiction previously described.

<sup>28</sup> The text in Italics belongs to the author.

<sup>29</sup> The text in Italics is mine.

<sup>30</sup> Armando Rodríguez, *El Diario de Juárez*, 24/02/99, p. 9c.

<sup>31</sup> César Ruiz García, *Norte*, 19/05/2001, p. 3b

<sup>32</sup> The text in Italics is mine.

<sup>33</sup> The text in Italics is mine.

<sup>34</sup> Interviewed by Pedro Ferriz De Con, in "Para empezar", May 5, 1999, Mexico, D.F. The text in italics is mine.

<sup>35</sup> Edgar Prado Calahorra, *Norte*, 15/11/2000, 1st.

<sup>36</sup> Lucy Sosa and Alex Quintero, "Remueven a fiscal de mujeres", *El Diario*, 29/07/2001, 1st.

<sup>37</sup> Esther is a feminist activist from *Grupo 8 de marzo*, and is well known both nationally and internationally for her fight against the killing of women. Currently she is the director of the "Casa Amiga" crisis center, the first of its kind to help the victims of sexual assault in this city.

<sup>38</sup> The chronological documentation was prepared based on the information provided by the newspaper *El Diario de Juárez* and it was prepared by the gender study groups of the UACJ, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, El Comité Independiente (The independent committee of Chihuahua for Human Rights) and by the Grupo 8 de Marzo from Ciudad Juárez. At the present time, it is Esther Chávez Cano who is in charge of computing data on the murders against women.

<sup>39</sup> *Informe de homicidios en perjuicio de mujeres en Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. 1993-1998*, State Vice Department of Justice Northern Zone, February 1998. *Homicidios cometidos en perjuicio de mujeres en Cd. Juárez, Chih; en el periodo de 1993-1998*, State Attorney General's Office/Assistant Prosecutors Office Northern Zone, Preliminary hearings.

<sup>40</sup> A murder committed by Shariff and another by "Rebeldes". Salvador Castro, "Orden de aprehensión contra violador en serie", *Norte*, 27/09/2001, p. 9. Armando Rodríguez, "Otra vez Sharif en la mira", *El Diario Juárez*, 04/11/01, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Accused of seven murders.

<sup>42</sup> Accused of eight murders.

<sup>43</sup> Currently there have been a series of protests, demonstrations and other activities, demanding evidence showing these men are truly guilty. The nacional and international press are present at every one of these events.

<sup>44</sup> *Perfil sociodemográfico de Chihuahua*, INEGI, 1995.

<sup>45</sup> 50% according to the 1990 Census.