

CRUCES ROSAS: THE FEMICIDE IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ

By

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A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors degree
With Honors in

Sociology

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

MAY 2013

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Abstract

This paper explores the contributing factors of the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, a city in Mexico just across the border from El Paso. This mass killing of women is an epidemic that has overtaken the city in the last two decades and has caused Ciudad Juárez to gain notoriety due to the high instances of violence and continued violation of women's rights that occur within its borders. More specifically, this paper examines the contributing factors of NAFTA and the maquiladora industry present in Ciudad Juárez, as well as the increased independence of Mexican women and their challenging of traditional gender roles. It will also analyze factors specific to this community, such as the corruption of the police force and government, as well as the general impunity of men in Mexico. Finally, it will examine the ways in which the people of Ciudad Juárez are reacting to this wave of violence, namely through activism and other coping mechanisms.

Introduction

It is undeniable that women hold a subordinate position to men in the majority of countries, communities, and societies around the globe. There are manifestations of this subordination all around us, whether it be the inability of American working women to break through the glass ceiling, the presence of elite “mens-only” clubs in Great Britain, or the restriction imposed on women in Bali to remain out of religious temples while menstruating. While this degradation can establish itself in economic, religious, or cultural fields, in many cases the oppression of women can result in or coincide with physical abuse. The inferiority of women worldwide can often rear its ugly head in the form of gendered violence against this minority group. While the particular forms of violence and the motives behind them may vary, what remains constant is the pervasive and devastating nature of this violence. In Ethiopia, 71% of women surveyed in 2012 reported being physically or sexually abused by a partner at some point in their life, while in rural areas of Bangladesh, 30% of women reported that their first sexual experience was forced (“Violence against women: Intimate partner and sexual violence against women”). Rape is shockingly widespread in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where 1.69-1.80 million women reported to have been raped at some point in their lifetime (Peterman et al. 1060). Even in our own country, approximately 1.3 million women are physically assaulted by a partner every year (Tjaden and Thoennes). The subordination of women and subsequent violence are not limited to a particular country, nationality, or culture, but rather littered throughout the world, taking different forms in different places. Violence against women is undoubtedly a worldwide epidemic, and one that can manifest itself in many ways, such as intimate partner violence, war rape, or even femicide, a violent practice that’s frequency in

Ciudad Juárez, located on the U.S.-Mexico border across from El Paso, has burdened the Mexican city with a disturbing reputation. Femicide is a harrowing example of such gendered violence, one that is “constituted by the whole set of violent misogynist acts against women that involve a violation of their human rights, represent an attack on their safety, and endanger their lives” (Lagarde y de los Ríos xxiii). Simply put, femicide is the killing of women because they are women (*On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez*).

At the hands of femicide, the reality for the women of Ciudad Juárez is disturbingly bleak. Throughout the last 20 years, Juárez (as Ciudad Juárez is commonly called), has garnered deplorable notoriety as more and more women were found murdered and disposed of in the desert. In 1995, Silvia Morales’ body was found ridden with evidence that she had been raped, stabbed, and strangled, with a broken neck and mutilated body (Rodriguez et al. 36). In 2004, the body of Alma Brisa Molina Baca, a worker from an assembly plant, or maquiladora, was discovered in an empty lot in the center of Juárez, the exact same spot where the body of a female victim had been recovered the year before (Segato 71). In 2012, Elvira González’s daughter, Perla, was last seen in conversation with a stranger downtown, before her body was discovered dumped in a valley on the outskirts of Juárez (Cave). These stories represent just a fraction of the instances of brutal violence that have befallen the women of this city at the hands of still-unidentified assailants, making women powerless in a society that continuously disparages them and their worth. Unfortunately, there is disturbing truth to activist Esther Chávez Cano’s words: “If you want to rape and kill a woman, there is no better place to do it than in Juárez” (Rodriguez 72).

This particular wave of crime began to come to light in 1993, when the media first reported on the discovery of the bodies of a number of women who had been raped, murdered, mutilated, and dumped in the open deserts surrounding Ciudad Juárez (Prieto-Carrón et al. 25). Since then, activists have watched in horror from all around the world as more and more gruesome discoveries were made over the next decade or more, with little investigative or prosecutorial action taken by authority figures and even fewer measures taken to ensure the safety of women in Juárez. Though the exact number of women killed in Ciudad Juárez is subject to debate, the estimates are that since 1993, approximately 500 women have been murdered in the state of Chihuahua and hundreds more have gone missing (Fregoso and Bejarano 6). About one-third of these reported murders have disturbing similarities to one another and the women targeted fall within a similar demographic (Garwood 2). The bodies are often found mutilated, wrought with evidence of rape, torture, and gruesome abuse: “raped, strangled or gagged. Mutilated, with nipples and breasts cut off, buttocks lacerated like cattle, or penetrated with objects” (Livingston 59). The women found murdered and dumped in the desert are often young, poor, dark-haired women with little economic means who have traveled to the region to find employment in Juárez’s maquiladoras (Garwood 2). The other two-thirds of the female victims in this city are likely murdered by someone they know, “at the hands of husbands, boyfriends, partners, or perhaps opportunistic friends or neighbors who transformed interpersonal violence into murders” (Staudt 2). Whether through brutal rape and murder or escalated instances of domestic violence, femicide seems to have overtaken Juárez and has caused this Mexican city to become one of the most dangerous places on earth for women.

What is it about the social, economic, and legal environment in Ciudad Juárez that allows such atrocities to run rampant, with such apathetic reactions by those in authority? There are a myriad of theories about who is committing these crimes, for what purpose, and to what end. Are these mostly cases of domestic violence, or is there a string of serial killers on the streets? Is this a group sending a message to all women who are challenging their traditional role in Mexican society? Is this violence the work of an organized crime group or drug traffickers? The hopeless truth, however, is that there is very little conclusive evidence being provided to answer these questions and the case of Ciudad Juárez is still one with few answers.

It is beneficial, however, to look at the sociological environment and examine things such as the economic conditions in Mexico, the role of globalization and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the presence of a gradual reversal in Mexico's traditional gender roles. Similarly, there are a number of individual factors specific to Juárez that permit the continuance of these crimes, such as the incompetence and indifference of the police force and government, as well as the impunity of the men in this society. All of these elements add up to make violence against women inherent to Ciudad Juárez and provide a prime example of a society that seems to continuously disregard women's rights and safety.

NAFTA and the Maquiladoras

When examining the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, it is impossible to do so without acknowledging the role of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the maquiladora industry. Both NAFTA and the increased number of these American-owned factories popping up in Northern Mexico are significant when examining the general mistreatment of women in

Juárez and the escalated instances of murder that have come to define this city. Though NAFTA has not directly led to or caused the femicide in this city, it has indirectly influenced the economy of Mexico and caused an explosion of growth for the maquiladora industry. The maquiladoras themselves, on the other hand, are impacting the safety of Juárez's women in a number of more direct ways. The labor rights of women working in these factories are nonexistent, the women found murdered are often maquiladora workers who were on their way home from a late night or early morning shift, and despite this fact, the maquiladora bosses have done little to ensure the safety of their employees (*On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez*). Additionally, these factories primarily employ women, a phenomenon that has caused a disruption of the traditional gender roles in Mexico and a subsequent violent reaction from the men of Juárez who are not privy to this gendered change in the labor force. Whether it be the ripples created with the implementation of NAFTA or the general treatment of maquiladora workers, an acknowledgement of these economic players is crucial to understanding the mystery of Juárez's femicide.

The North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect on January 1, 1994 and created a free trade coalition among the United States, Mexico, and Canada, eliminating most tariffs for trade among these countries ("North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)"). With the implementation of NAFTA, many American companies were able to move their processing factories across the border to Mexico, where labor and production would be cheaper (Pantaleo 351). 80% of these assembly plants are American-owned (*Señorita Extraviada*). As such, Juárez has become the "largest export zone on the US-Mexico border and, since the ratification of NAFTA, roughly 350 export processing plants owned by transnational

corporations are now in operation, hiring 175,000 workers” (Fregoso 140). In theory, it seems as though an increase in the availability of jobs in Northern Mexico would be beneficial to the residents and the Mexican economy, but it has actually had the opposite effect in Ciudad Juárez. While the companies whose factories are based in this city are certainly benefitting from the cheap labor and docile workforce that Juárez provides, the Mexican people, especially women, are subject to serious social harm at the hands of this agreement (Pantaleo 350). NAFTA is, in fact, playing a large role in the violence exercised against women in Juárez and the general environment of disorder that haunts this city. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that the first wave of bodies was discovered in the outskirts of Juárez just one year after NAFTA was established.

When word began to spread that jobs would be readily available in Northern Mexico with the arrival of factories that would need to be staffed, women from all over the country began to migrate to Juárez and the surrounding areas to look for work. Even today, amidst the well-acknowledged fact that women in this city are in grave danger, girls continue to arrive in Juárez from the poorest areas of Mexico to find a job in these factories (*Señorita Extraviada*). Many times, women are moving here with few connections, no social network and little economic and social resources. Women from poor and working class backgrounds are really the ideal candidates to fill these jobs, as they represent the most docile of workers, are unlikely to request higher wages and are even less likely to unionize (*On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez*). Not surprisingly then, women represent the large majority of those employed in Juárez’s maquiladoras. By employing such large numbers of women in Juárez, “NAFTA has not only increased jobs but also increased opportunities for criminal victimization and exploitation in the

maquiladoras” (Pantaleo 351). While it seems like a positive thing that women are finally being afforded the opportunity to exercise a level of financial independence and challenge their traditional role in the gender structure, it is this entering into the workforce that is, in a number of ways, endangering their lives.

As employees in these factories, women are subjected to violations of labor rights on a daily basis, as well as inadvertently being thrust into circumstances that increase their susceptibility to be victimized (Pantaleo 350). Despite the consistent reports of women being found murdered or disappearing altogether, the heads of the maquiladoras in Juárez have done little to preserve the rights of their employees while they are at work and are doing even less to protect them on their commute to and from their jobs at these factories. In a country consumed by poverty, the maquiladoras grossly underpay their workers, with most maquiladora employees making approximately \$23 per week (Fregoso 140). The female workers are subject to sexual harassment and overall unjust working conditions, without union protection and barely making enough money to survive. Additionally, those in charge at the maquiladoras are not doing their part to protect female employees in a city that has become so dangerous for women.

Maquiladora workers are often scheduled for shifts that end very early in the morning or very late at night and are forced to walk home or to the bus stop in remote areas with poor lighting (*On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez*). As more women became employed in the maquiladoras and were sometimes living in an unfamiliar city with few resources, they were often out alone at night and thus quite susceptible to danger (Pantaleo 350). Many of Juárez’s femicide victims have been young employees at a maquiladora who simply disappeared on their way home from work.

In Mexico's struggling economy, the high rates of employment for women in these areas and the simultaneous unemployment of men has stressed the relationship between men and women in Juárez. It has certainly been frustrating for men to see the women around them employed while their own employment prospects are so dim. The arrival of the maquiladoras has really "aided in the disruption of the social fabric of Mexican society", which is something that will be further explored in another section of this paper (Pantaleo 363).

It seems a bit peculiar that a piece of economic legislation would be having such a large impact on Mexico's social structure and the safety of women in general. The reality is, however, that when looking at the contributing factors to Juárez's femicide, the role NAFTA has played in its development cannot be ignored. NAFTA expanded free trade in North America and has directly caused a barrage of factories to set up shop on Juárez's soil. The maquiladoras themselves play a significant role in the cruelty that occurs on a daily basis in Juárez, as the women employed there are often subject to dangerous conditions that increase their chances of victimization. Additionally, the sheer fact that women are employed in such high numbers is causing violent backlash in Mexico's male population. Whether it be through direct or indirect means, it is impossible to discount the role of NAFTA and the maquiladora industry when analyzing the femicide in Juárez.

Women Challenging their Traditional Gender Roles

The previous section of this paper reviewed the role of NAFTA and the maquiladora industry on the high instances of murder and disappearances of women in Juárez. As was previously stated, many theorists argue that the high levels of gendered violence in this society

are due to women's entrance into the labor market, largely through employment in maquiladoras. Thus, an important thing to consider when examining the increased violence against women in Ciudad Juárez is analyzing it as a possible reaction to women's challenging of traditional gender roles in Mexican society. This theory holds that the gendered change in the sociological environment may account for a feeling of unrest and resentment in the male population, as they are no longer the sole providers, feeling as though women are perhaps taking their jobs or stepping outside their bounds (*On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez*). In Mexico's struggling economy, men often find themselves in positions of unemployment and the women around them are more often entering the workforce, exercising independence that traditionally has not been afforded to them. When men find themselves lacking in job opportunities while women are employed, the result is an abnormal reversal of traditional gender roles. Men are no longer the sole breadwinners and women no longer need a husband to be financially secure. Norma Andrade, an activist fighting for justice in Juárez who founded *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* (May Our Daughters Return Home), says the increased numbers of women in the labor force "leads to a situation where men have somehow increased their sexism towards women, when they see that women have engaged in the labor force and became some sort of bigger power" (Andrade and Osborn 23). Perhaps, then, it is the reluctance of men in Juárez to accept the gradual blurring of the lines between gender roles within Mexican society that is to blame for the violence that is so prevalent in Ciudad Juárez.

The traditional Mexican society is undoubtedly patriarchal and dominated by a mindset of *machismo* or "manliness", with men being the economic providers for the family and women holding an inferior and passive role (Prieto-Carrón et al. 26). The arrival of maquiladoras has

given women the opportunity to work for wages themselves and be in control of their economic situation, without relying on a husband or other patriarchal figure (Staudt 45). Women in Mexico are more and more frequently becoming employed in places like the maquiladoras, challenging the traditional preconceptions of their social role: “Women, mostly very young women, earned money and spent money, nudging at a gender system of men as household breadwinners exercising authority in the home” (Staudt 45). Many women have traveled from all over Mexico to gain employment in the maquiladoras, which is playing a significant role in the violence that is overwhelmingly exercised against them. The fact that women are taking initiative, controlling their own finances, and exploring other options outside of the domestic sphere is perhaps something that men in Mexico are unable to cope with. Filmmaker and activist Lourdes Portillo, describing the cultural value that Mexico carries towards women writes, “...there’s a veneration of the mother and there’s a degradation of the whore. Any woman who is not a mother is a whore or a potential whore” (Driver 219). The bottom line is that if you are a woman who lives in Juárez, you should be having children, not looking for employment outside the home. The social structure in Mexico is based on the idea that men are the dominant figures in the workplace sphere and that as women are “attempting to enter the realm of paid labor” and take action that makes them “unattached to a male protector”, they are seen as stepping outside of their bounds (Livingston 66). If it is indeed the disruption of the gender roles that is generating the violent physical attacks against the female population in Ciudad Juárez, the fact that women are taking more assertive and independent roles in society is having devastating consequences.

Looking at this case of Juárez with this explanation in mind, it can be argued that as the women in Juárez have begun to work outside the home, the ego of the male population has taken a hit. The result is that the men of Mexico are trying to send a message to any women considering challenging these internalized roles (Luevano 72). As Mercedes Olivera writes, “The massive integration of women into the labor force in search of a wage has effectively destroyed the traditional model of a sexual division of labor without changing the collective imaginary that women are dependent on men and that their obligations are in the home” (Olivera 53). In other words, even though women are growing more independent, both financially and socially, the traditional societal expectations remain stagnant. Men in Mexico still believe that a woman’s place is in the home, not in the labor force. With more and more women becoming aware of the independence available to them, men believe they are instead neglecting their maternal duties or obligations (Olivera 54). In this society, it is assumed that women will adopt a maternal role, one in which they are reliant upon their husbands for financial security. Similarly, the insecurity and frustration that men have at the dim prospects of their own employment situations may be driving them to engage in domestic violence against the women in their households (Staudt 45). While this shift in the gender roles in the Mexican population is not the only contributing factor to the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, it is a significant one that deserves attention.

What allows this to continue?

While there are a number of issues present in the sociological and economic environment that seem to lay the groundwork for the occurrence of these violent acts against women, there are

also a number of factors specific to this community that have permitted the continuance of femicide. The sad truth is that although the number of bodies discovered and disappearances of women have decreased over the years, the violence and danger characteristic of femicide are still present in Ciudad Juárez even today. This violence has remained constant in this city over the years for a number of reasons, including a lack of investigative action taken by the local police force, the similar lack of prosecutorial action or protective measures taken by the Mexican government, and the general air of men's impunity that has settled over this city.

One of such issues is the widespread corruption of the police force that is inherent to those in charge of investigating these murders and protecting the rest of the community. The National Commission for Human Rights released a report in the late 1990s that provided shocking evidence that investigators of the Ciudad Juárez femicide had been guilty of "mis-identification of corpses; failure to obtain expert tests on forensic evidence; failure to conduct autopsies or obtain semen analysis; failure to file written reports" among others (Fregoso 138). The disheartening truth is that Juárez's police force is careless and apathetic towards investigating these atrocities against such vulnerable members of the community and are not serving the role they should be in this city. In a community that could benefit in immense ways from an honest and trustworthy police force, Juárez is instead at the hands of a crooked and unreliable one.

Whether the police are botching investigations, withholding information from families, or being paid off by drug traffickers, it is certain that the corruption of the police force in Ciudad Juárez is having detrimental effects on the safety of women. It is not uncommon for the police officers called upon to investigate the disappearance and murder of women to intentionally

mishandle or falsify evidence (Schmidt Camacho 268). Not only do the police in Juárez seem to be entirely disinterested in bringing the perpetrators of these crimes to justice, but they are often guilty of practices that actually destroy any hope of a just and conclusive investigation. It has been documented, for example, that police officers are guilty of the “manipulation of crime scenes, intimidation of witnesses, and use of torture to procure false confessions” (Schmidt Camacho 268). Similarly, the police are terribly insensitive and unhelpful to the families of those who have gone missing, often disregarding the case entirely and informing families that their daughters were likely leading double lives as prostitutes or have simply run off with their boyfriends (Wright 714). Additionally, some argue that the police are being bribed by those involved in the drug trafficking industry that is so common in Ciudad Juárez and other communities along the U.S.-Mexico border. Because police officers in this city barely make sufficient wages to feed their families, they are easily bribed by drug traffickers who need them to turn a blind eye to their illegal activities (*On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez*). For police officers in Juárez, corruption is just an inherent part of the job. It is impossible to make any real headway in solving the mystery of the femicide in Juárez when the police are bought with such ease and are so terribly disinterested in solving these crimes.

Just as the police in Ciudad Juárez have been unwilling to act in the best interest of the city’s women and their families, the Mexican government has not been particularly helpful in bringing this violence to an end. The political leaders of this city are subject to the same corruption, inefficiency, back dealings, and tendency toward inaction that plague the police department. Also, very few steps have been taken by the government to ensure the safety and protection of women in Juárez. The Mexican government instead attempts to keep the families’

questions and demands at bay by feeding them the same backwards reasoning and offensive excuses that they are given by the law enforcement officials. What are the women of Juárez to do when their police force and their government have failed to take the necessary steps to protect them? In a report filed by Amnesty International in 2003, the organization claims that improvement of such inept governmental body and law enforcement agencies is vital if the violence in this city is to cease, and that demands for quicker investigations and immediacy in action have been repeatedly ignored by those in charge (“Mexico Intolerable Killings: Ten years of abductions and murders in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua”). The described inaction and disregard has played a detrimental role in the violent occurrences in Ciudad Juárez.

Unfortunately, Ciudad Juárez is a city in which gendered violence is “trivialized and normalized”, by those in legal and political authority (Staudt 114). In 1995, a few years after the femicide epidemic began to come to light and concern for women’s safety began to grow, Chihuahua’s governor Francisco Barrio failed to devote any real time or effort to investigating these murders and disappearances. Instead, he claimed that no extended amount of attention or resources should be spent on these women and that as long as families knew their daughters’ whereabouts, there was nothing to fear (Wright 712-713). Time and time again, politicians and leaders in government blame the victims, implying that women are asking for trouble when they are out alone on the streets at night or dressed a certain way, and that there is nothing that can be done to protect such women. Similarly shocking was Chihuahua State Public Prosecutor Arturo González Rascón’s response to the violence in 1999: “Women with a nightlife who go out very late and come into contact with drinkers are at risk. It’s hard to go out on the street when it’s raining and not get wet” (“Mexico Intolerable Killings: Ten years of abductions and murders in

Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua”). Blaming the women themselves, the victims, is perhaps the simplest way for the government to wash its hands of the situation and avoid doing any real investigating or productive work.

Finally, relating to both the previous arguments that it is the lack of action by the police and the government is the idea that these crimes continue to such high degrees simply because the men of Mexico know they will get away with it. The impunity of men in Mexico is serving as a breeding ground for the continuance of these crimes: “Impunity permits violence to escalate and remake social relations so that as the index of crime rises, the rate of denunciation drops” (Schmidt Camacho 269). There may be some individuals acting violently against women because they see no one around them being arrested or prosecuted for these crimes. When looking at the philosophy behind Mexico’s legal code, the fact of the matter is that men exercising violence against woman is something that is widely accepted as a “mechanism of punishment and control” (Fregoso 143). Too often, men simply aren’t held accountable for their violent actions against women. This impunity creates a community in which such violence is seen as normal and as such, action does not need to be taken to control the brutal abuse to which women are subjected. The inaction of both the local police force and the Mexican government has created the precedent that “there is no penalty for the commission of such crimes and therefore impunity may be creating the conditions for more men to become perpetrators” (Swanger 114). Residents of Ciudad Juárez simply are not seeing the law enforced around them and thus are given free reign to act as they wish.

The corruption of the police force, the inaction of the Mexican government, and the impunity of men in Mexico combine to form a toxic combination that allows the violent

injustices against women to continue. While it is easy to blame NAFTA, the maquiladoras, or drug traffickers for the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, great problems also lie in both the law enforcement and governmental institutions in this city, as well as skewed gender expectations and the infallibility of men.

The reaction of Mexico: Activism and coping

It is undeniable that the continued degradation of women's safety in Ciudad Juárez has had devastating ramifications for the city and its residents. On the other hand, it is also important to recognize the good being done by activists, particularly female activists, to shed light on the issue, take measures of prevention, call for investigatory action, and work to heal a city that has been ravaged by violence. Pink crosses have come to represent the anti-femicide movement and serve as a remembrance of the women who have been killed, while the phrase *Ni una más* (not one more) is commonly chanted at rallies and protests (Staudt 82). Activism is just one way that the Mexican people are coping with these disturbing instances of violence. Additionally, the writing and performing of *corridos*, or Mexican ballads, by Mexican singers is another example of positive, cathartic steps that have been taken to alleviate the pain that hangs over this city. While there are certainly great lengths that need to be made to uncover the truth about the femicide in Juárez and a greater need to forever abolish the practice in this city, it is important to acknowledge those who have been working towards justice and safety from the time the first bodies were discovered.

One group that has made great lengths to shed light on the danger to women in Juárez and work to solve the crimes that have been so frequent in this city is *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso*

a Casa. This organization was founded by the mother of a 17 year old girl who was abducted and murdered, Norma Andrade (Ensalaco 420). Norma Andrade and her group have attended forums, called on the United Nations, met with Mexican congresspeople, and traveled around the world calling attention to this issue, all in the interest of gaining justice for their daughters and the other women who have gone missing (Andrade and Osborn 25). This organization also provides services to the families of girls who have been murdered or who have gone missing in Juárez, such as counseling (Ensalaco 430). *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* is a prime example of the tremendous activism that can come out of such a grim situation.

Casa Amiga (Friendly House) is another organization that has played an invaluable role in protecting the women of this city and shedding light on the danger of being a woman in Juárez. *Casa Amiga* is the first crisis center for women that was established in this city and gives specific attention to issues of domestic violence and femicide (Swanger 109). Esther Chávez Cano, one of the best known female activists for the violence in Juárez, founded this center in 1999 and when asked what the mission of *Casa Amiga* was, she responded: “transforming the culture of this city” (Swanger 116). This organization is essentially taking on the work that the government and the law enforcement agencies will not. Employees at *Casa Amiga* have compiled accurate descriptions of the crimes, generated data on the exact numbers of women that have been murdered or are missing, and campaigned for the government to take action (Ensalaco 430). The *Casa Amiga* Crisis Center also provides services such as harboring and counseling rape victims and women subjected to domestic abuse (Ensalaco 430). Whether it be working to solve crimes that have already been committed or providing services for those who are still subjected to violence, *Casa Amiga* has been invaluable resource for women in Juárez.

Individuals have also harnessed the frustration and injustice of femicide through the writing and singing of *corridos* (“songs with a message”) dedicated to spreading messages and awareness about the injustices occurring in their country (Staudt 89). One of such ballads is called “*Cruces Rosas*” (Pink Crosses) and was written and performed by Guillermo Sáenz. His song describes much of what has been discussed in this paper, including the brutal manner in which the women are murdered, the maquiladoras, and the issues of impunity. Sáenz sings: “*Hoy en Ciudad Juárez se ven cruces rosas de mujeres quedando en la nada*” which roughly translates to “Today in Ciudad Juárez, there are pink crosses of women coming to nothing” (Guillermo Sáenz). Additionally, a highly-known band called *Los Tigres del Norte* released a *corrido* entitled “Las Mujeres de Juárez” (The Women of Juárez) in which they lament (translated to English): “The bones in the desert demonstrate the stark truth of the untouchable impunity, that the dead women of Juárez are a national shame” (Staudt 89). The writers and performers of these poetic songs are working to call attention to this issue, as well as demonstrate a sort of criticism for the way these murders are being handled.

Methods of activism can take many forms, whether it be through providing services to victims of domestic violence, calling upon local politicians to take action, or raising awareness through the singing of emotional ballads called *corridos*. Though the situation in Juárez is certainly very stark, there are indeed a great deal of people working to usher change into this city and raise awareness of these injustices worldwide. The tireless efforts of such activists elicit powerful messages about the morbid reality of the femicide in Juárez, the ineptness of those in charge, and the true worth of women in Mexican society.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that there is no specific solution to solving these crimes, no one perpetrator to catch, and no single organization to blame for its continuance. However, there are certainly a number of players that can be identified which have had an enormous impact on the femicide in Juárez, such as the maquiladora industry, the implementation of NAFTA, the corruption of the police force, the inaction of the government, and the impunity of men. One very important factor is the role of NAFTA and subsequent establishment of the maquiladoras, creating a society in which women are more often exercising financial independence, angering the men of Juárez whose lives are dominated by a mindset of *machismo*. Or perhaps more important is the inaction of the government and the corruption of the police force, which have allotted men a sense of impunity. It is beneficial, also, to recognize the lengths that have been taken by organizations such as *Casa Amiga* and *Nuestras Hijias de Regreso a Casa* to take the steps that the government will not and call for an end to these violent crimes, as well as the role of *corridos* for their therapeutic value for the people of Mexico.

While it is difficult to understand these atrocities that have occurred for two decades, it is beneficial to look at the femicide as a “perfect storm” of conditions that have combined to form an environment that has come to be deplorable for women and adverse to their safety and protection. Why does the government continue to take inefficient steps to protect the women of this city? Does the key to this problem lie in the patriarchy that defines this society? If so, what can be done to alter that mindset? What steps need to be taken to solve this mystery and ensure justice for the 500 or more women who have been murdered or gone missing? These are all questions yet without answers. What is important, however, is to analyze and explore all of the

contributing factors that have laid the groundwork for and allowed the continuance of the femicide in Juárez. Perhaps, then, steps can be made to alleviate the impact that each one of these has on the oppression and violence towards women, creating a safer and more hopeful future for the women of Ciudad Juárez.

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