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(Re)Living Femicide through Social Control: The Regulation of Life and Bodies through Fear and (In)Formal Social Control

Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze how violence and femicides have created a regime of gendered social control including the regulation of women's bodies in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. Hyper-vigilant forms of social control permeate popular culture, which is heavily influenced by the patriarchal hegemonic state. The State's discursive and local practices work to impact and shape quotidian life and movement for girls and women across Chihuahua. Formal and informal legal and social systems also regulate and control female bodies, thereby generating a categorical scale of social control for women and girls that include: femicide as 'denigrated body'; activist mother as 'denouncing body'; anti-femicide activist as 'disruptive body'; and finally, State as site of the production of 'docile' bodies. This article explores how the rhetoric of fear of femicide adds to an already normalized landscape of sexualized and gendered violence. This work also utilizes Richard Lawrence Miller's framework of the 'Chain of Destruction,' which describes mass violence through five phases: identification, isolation, ostracism, confiscation, and annihilation. Miller's framework offers an analytical framework for understanding the regulation and control of bodies.

Keywords: Femicidal State Rhetoric, femicide, activism, social control, state repression, chain of destruction

Introduction

For over twenty years, girls and women have gone missing or have been killed in Chihuahua. The numbers of murdered women have long surpassed one thousand, and still there is no consensus on the number still missing. The eruption of violence in Chihuahua during former Mexican President Felipe Calderón's 'War on Drugs' resulted in rival cartel killings, street level brutality, and military and federal police presence that included documented claims of human rights violations by soldiers and police (Meyer, De la Rosa Hickerson and Castro Rodríguez). The 13,000 plus killed in Juárez as a result of this War has left an indelible mark on how we understand social violence (INEGI). These deadly occurrences have overshadowed everyday violence against women and girls, including the continued disappearance and murder of girls and women in the Mexican state. When women were murdered or found dead during the 'great violence' [1] between 2008 and 2012, their death was popularly explained as the result of their involvement in the drug trade. Overwhelmed by the reality of so much death and bloodshed due to the Drug War, the feminicides and general violence against women were pushed aside by authorities, and any efforts or pretenses by the Mexican state to investigate these crimes were rechanneled to the widespread carnage that people experienced.

The aim of this article is to analyze how violence and femicides have created a regime of gendered social control including the regulation of women's bodies. In particular, I am focusing on the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez and the hyper-vigilant forms of social control permeating popular culture. [2] I will also detail how every day the hegemonic, patriarchal State and its local, discursive practices influence girls and women's movements in the region. This is salient because two generations of young people—especially girls—in Ciudad Juárez now experience hyper-vigilance as normative, and at times accept the spatial limits to their movements. Warnings of death, rape, and forced "disappearances" are naturalized as the self-evident consequences of venturing out at night. These warnings contain spatial prohibitions that limit the movement of girls beyond the domestic sphere and into the urban areas, which are the "realm of men" that are characterized as violent, chaotic, and dangerous. Similarly, nighttime is the time when perceived hyper-masculine behaviors such as drinking, carousing, and masculine confrontations occur: thus, it is the opposite of the feminine and the "safe" daytime hours in which women are allowed to be active in the public sphere. In short, women and girls are told indirectly by the State and, by extension, segments of society, that behaviors which transgress gender-conforming roles and spatial boundaries can result in their victimization and even femicide. Building on these preliminary observations, this article deconstructs the use of manipulation of "the femicides" as a controlling technology that works to limit the freedom—spatially, temporally, and otherwise—of women and girls in Juárez, Chihuahua, and throughout the borderlands more broadly.

In this article, I will argue that “Femicidal State Rhetoric” [3] is used as a subtle yet explicit mechanism deployed by State institutions to impose new societal pressures on women and girls, which focus on their movement—day and night—for their ‘own good.’ What I suggest by ‘Femicidal State Rhetoric’ is that hegemonic State forces and State actors use the reality of femicide as a way of controlling, curtailing and convincing women and girls to alter their activities and to limit their movement across the city. This also impacts women and girls’ confidence in their surroundings, and their sense of security and well-being. The transformation of earlier feminist notions of “femicide” as “the killing of females by males because they are female” (Russell 3) to the use of a feminist and human rights framework that articulates “feminicide” as a critique of sexual violence, patriarchy, misogyny, gender discrimination, and neo-liberal economic violence, are concepts used by families, activists, academics and legal scholars to address the most extreme form of violence and terror against women and girls.

Mexican Ciudad Juárez-based sociologist, Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, has tracked the murders of women and girls since 1993, and has worked to aggregate and typify the distinctions among these murders (Monárrez Fragoso 2005). Moreover, the Mexican feminist, cultural anthropologist and former federal Congresswoman, Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos has elaborated on the concept even further by preferring the term feminicidio to “name the ensemble of violations of women’s human rights, which contain the crimes against and the disappearances of women. [She] propose[s] that all these be considered as ‘crimes against humanity’” (xv). [4]

As an antithesis to the numerous interlocutors on femicide and feminicidal discourse involved in the anti-feminicide movement, the State has worked to use these deaths as a new tool of gender-based oppression—the threat of femicide. [5] In this work, I use the term ‘femicide’ to discuss ‘Femicidal State Rhetoric’ and how the State has used the concept as a form of social control threatening fear of death, but throughout the article, I prefer using the concept feminicide to describe the failure of the State to provide a life free from violence for women and girls. In building on the work of other scholars, Rosa-Linda Fregoso and I have further elaborated on feminicide as follows:

...the murders of women and girls [are] founded on a gender power structure...[that is] both public and private... implicating both the state (directly or indirectly) and individual perpetrators (private or State actors); it thus encompasses systematic, widespread, and everyday interpersonal violence... feminicide is systemic violence rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities...[and] the intersection of gender dynamics with the cruelties of racism and economic injustices in local as well as global contexts... Our framing follows [Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos] critical human rights formulation of feminicide as a “crime against humanity” (6)

In short, the institutions within the Mexican government and groups rebutting crimes against women critiqued for their passive or active participation in—or cover up of—the feminicides have hijacked the deaths of women and girls and transformed them into a tool of social control within society. This hegemonic rhetoric of ‘femicide’ and the social regulation of ‘female bodies’ through the social control of society make it increasingly difficult to address the sources of ongoing gender based violence. In an earlier work, I argue that:

The failure of nation-states to critically interrogate these crimes and the habitual lack of respect and due diligence in investigations granted to victims in Mexico...manifests itself in their arenas of justice (courts, police precincts, prosecutor’s offices)...[This lackadaisical response facilitates] gender-based violence, especially femicide, as a tool of informal social control for women...by institutions within society and societal members. (Bejarano 120, translation mine)

Subsequently, Mexican authorities do not use femicidal rhetoric as a cry of moral outrage. Their use of femicidal discourse reveals a pervasive belief in the futility of fighting femicide and the appropriation of language to exert power and incite fear in society. Discourse is used in formal and informal systems to regulate and classify female bodies, producing the categories of: ‘denigrated,’ ‘denouncing,’ ‘disruptive,’ and ‘docile’ bodies. In the section below, I explore how the rhetoric of fear of femicide adds to an already normalized landscape of sexualized and gendered violence. I also examine how the regulation of bodies can be understood within the context of Richard Lawrence Miller’s framework of the ‘Chain of Destruction’ (1996) which charts mass violence through five phases: identification, isolation, ostracism, confiscation, and annihilation.

1. Widespread Fear and Social Control

At the Mexico-U.S. border, globalization has created a strong network for corruption, underground economies, state malfeasance, and ungovernability (Olivera). Forced disappearances and everyday street crime are rampant as organized crime syndicates fight with rivals and State entities for trafficking corridors. Ciudad Juárez remains a city plagued by poverty, domestic and structural violence and unbridled fear. This untenable situation is directly tied to the appetite for drugs in the U.S., weapons trafficking from the U.S. into Mexico, and billions of dollars associated with these two illicit trades (O’Rourke and Byrd; Payan). Rarely are connections made between U.S. drug consumption and the 13,000 approximate murders in Ciudad Juárez and the greater claims of over 100,000 deaths throughout Mexico (INEGI). Instead of State and global actors working to find linkages among various forms of violence to disrupt its deleterious effects, Chihuahuan communities experience the natural upheaval that accompanies daily violence and the threat of death and victimization with little international intervention. So much bloodshed translates into forms of survivability that dramatically change the social fabric of society and how ordinary people

live their lives. As everyday people are swept into the violence in Ciudad Juárez, life is altered with stories of unabridged terror and macabre stories of death. In Fragoso Monárrez's work titled, *Death in a Transnational Metropolitan Region*, she states:

Ciudad Juárez resembles a public cemetery; it is a modern necropolis. Yet these are not natural deaths but artificial ones, and we experience them as socially symbolic events, like a sacrifice "through the will of the group" (Baudrillard, 1993:165). The executed—the ones that are connected to the criminal groups—will sooner or later die, because in Ciudad Juárez, social memory has been engaged through personal experiences or through the eyes of newspapers and mass media that report the killings. (28)

The social violence and ungovernability experienced in Cd. Juárez is coupled with a parallel governing power through organized crime syndicates that, independently and in concert with the State, the Mexican military, and federal and State police, make conditions for people at minimum uncomfortable and for most intolerable. Although the Mexican military and federal police presence dissipated after 2012, their inefaceable footprint of human rights violations and intimidation tactics remain embedded in people's memories. Now, human rights violations and the fear of violence and death preoccupy many people; ordinary citizens try to disengage from the violence by not raising their voices against it because to do so can pose great risk. Stopping feminicides has taken a backseat to a larger-than-life fear that interrupts everyday living; speaking out against feminicide can mean harassment and even death.

Typically, "[s]tates seek to administer a citizenry which obeys the law not only because of the threat of punishment, but [because] it is 'the right thing to do'" (Chriss 22). But what if the State is a reflection of the severe negligence of its citizens? The work of Juárez sociologist Luis Alfonso Herrera Robles looks at the impact of citizen abandonment by the State through the lack of city infrastructure and public spaces. He also proclaims the overabundance of bars and 'drug houses' (*picaderos*) as an additional source of societal problems and institutional negligence. Herrera Robles asserts:

violence is becoming naturalized by the public because it is becoming part of the everyday. The generations born to this sub-culture of violence understand violence as part of the political and social landscape of the City, and come to understand it as 'convivencia' o mal-vivencia; [ostensibly] people learn to negotiate this within society itself. In other words, the generations born during this time period or who were raised during this currently violent period of Juárez, come to socially understand violence as a means of survival and a means of resolving conflict. (81-82; translation mine)

Herrera Robles further claims that apathy and lack of political will are proof of both the normalization of violence and the acquiescence of ordinary people. Conversely, apathy or the lack of political will within certain segments of society likely serve to mask their fear of death and simultaneously explain their non-participation in civil movements to curb violence. Despite these

fears, a valiant and determined subset of society, comprised of seasoned and youth activists that form part of Mexican civil groups, remains unflinchingly committed to stopping the violence that plagues their communities in the face of great risk to themselves.

As abandonment and violence become the 'new normal' in Juárez, societal norms adjust and people conform to widespread violence and its concomitant fear—real and imagined. As norms regulate behavior and work as a form of social control, fear and conformity dictate routine activities, gendered practices and all aspects of socio-cultural life. The 'new normal' is informally passed on through socialization and customs, which then forms part of norms passed down through generations as tradition, imitation, and authority (Chriss). As life becomes more restricted because of violence and fear, people become more isolated and more removed from life as they once understood it. Ordinary people will generally conform to these expectations because of fear of being labeled as deviant—or worse, blamed for their own victimization. In the next section, I argue that violence is a methodology used by the State to reproduce State power and femicide is used as a tool to control segments of society.

2. Violence as Power, Femicide as a Tool of Social Control

An ongoing atmosphere of femicidal fear adds to a normalized landscape of sexualized and gendered violence that is downplayed by authorities even as victims are continuously found. A Juárez family-based organization called the Mothers and Relatives Committee of Disappeared Daughters are demanding investigations into the cases of 40 teenage girls and young women that have gone missing since 2009 in Ciudad Juárez (Paterson). In the spring of 2012, the remains of sixteen young women, possibly victims of forced prostitution were recovered from the Valle de Juárez outside of the city in a wash called the Arroyo Navaho. Several male and female remains were found at this site, yet the vast majority of bodies are still unidentified, and there is no clear indication of the gender breakdown of the remains discovered.

Authorities initially showed little interest in this case, as girls and young women who had gone missing from 2008-2011 were identified through DNA as the individuals found in the Arroyo Navaho. The Arroyo Navaho case is emblematic of the types of intersections referenced, above, where State actors neglect to investigate, including possible drug trafficking, forced disappearances, and sex-slave trafficking and prostitution. The Chihuahua City-based women's human rights center, *Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres*, claims that the *fiscalía* (district attorney's office) reportedly continues to mix-up the remains of women victims and continues to mistreat victims' families. Recently, a trafficking ring was arrested for these Arroyo Navaho

femicidas, but it remains to be seen whether there will be claims of scapegoating by the individuals in custody. If they are in fact culpable for so much death, then the question remains, how will they legally be punished? Elsewhere I have argued, “As systems of justice fail to ensure rights and provide due process and due diligence in investigations, people lose faith in these systems” (Bejarano 121). Consequently, fear and impunity as social control reign in the city. The 2001 feminicides of eight women and girls found in a cotton field now known as the Campo Algodonero remains unresolved despite the three femicide victims’ mothers taking their cases to the InterAmerican Court. The InterAmerican court ruling of González et. al. v. Mexico, “found Mexico guilty of failure to comply with its obligations to guarantee human rights, of gender stereotyping and discrimination, and of negligence to investigate these crimes including broad sweeping impunity, among other key rulings” (Memory of Struggle 199). The lack of due diligence and fulfillment of the court issued resolutions, along with the obscene disregard for the international protocols cited in this landmark case, and the 2012 Arroyo Navaho case make evident the Mexican State’s sheer, unadulterated impunity.

Given the apathy of the State and the normalization of violence resulting in citizen abandonment, it is not surprising that two generations of girls living in the border area of Ciudad Juárez are taught not to venture out at night, alone, or to the downtown district of the city, or they may become the next victim of femicide. In the late 1990s, local media ads on billboards once asked parents in Ciudad Juárez if they knew where their daughters were, encouraging (it seemed) a stronghold on the whereabouts and activities of their daughters. Also, campaigns like *ponte vida*, a popular safety campaign ‘taught’ girls how to be aware of their surroundings and how to protect themselves by using keychain whistles. The campaign restricted the freedoms of girls and young women by situating them within the stringent control and regulation of familial, religious, education, economic, and legal systems, all the while arguing that surveillance and restrictions were measures for their own protection. In effect, feminicides heightened already rigid controls and made these systems even stronger by better controlling female bodies.

Although feminicides are popularly understood as part of Mexico’s current crisis of governability (Olivera), they are also a mechanism of gendered control. According to James Chriss, “[s]ocialization...then is the single important and efficient mechanism by which moral and legal rules are inculcated in and internalized by citizens” (22). Social violence frequently works hand in hand with social control. As Chriss further notes, “Ruling is made easier if those being ruled assent to the system of regulations being imposed” (ibid.). In Ciudad Juárez, a quasi-informal structure materializes where people living in terror are governed by an unwritten set of informal regulations—social norms—influenced by violence, which becomes the common rule of order in

the region. There is no trust in government, so people avoid legal systems and government agents entirely for their own protection and self-preservation. Yet, they remain influenced by how State structures conceptualize threats and violence, and people learn restricted routines and adapt to violence through their own cautionary practices. Morrison et.al. assert that, “[v]iolence is woven into the cultural fabric of many societies and becomes a part of a set of norms that guides behavior and helps shape group’s identities” (103). In the next section, I examine how social control influences segments of society in such a way as to produce derisive categories in which to classify women within the anti-femicide movement.

3. (De)Coding the Regulation of Bodies in the Anti-Femicide Movement

'Femicidal State Rhetoric' combined with formal and informal systems regulate and control female bodies, producing categories of social control that include the 'denigrated body', the 'denouncing body', the 'disruptive body,' and the 'docile body.' These categories are largely inspired by misogynistic underpinnings manifested in routine life. I argue that this taxonomy also reflects what women engaged in the anti-femicide movement have endured for over twenty years in Chihuahua. Femicide is the most extreme form of gender-based violence that I will call the 'denigrated body,' the final control and power often elicited through the sexual violence and murder of a woman. The female body is desecrated and left with no mechanism for justice and no pronouncement of emotion except for her violent image of death. Femicide insures that silence is maintained. Only witness-survivors, such as the families of these women, are left to seek justice. Femicides in Juárez represent the juxtaposition of the failure of the State to protect, and the State's ability and power to control the female body even after death. Assassins involved in femicides and other gender-based violence—both private actors and agents of the State—are guaranteed safety from imprisonment, since 98% of crimes are unresolved in Mexico (Pachico).

The next category is the 'denouncing body' of the mother. As the mother of a femicide victim denounces the State for its inept investigations, the denouncing mother is ridiculed and often met with hostile confrontations by police and other State actors. She is belittled and minimized for her demands for justice. The mother as 'denouncing body' is persecuted as blameworthy and responsible for her daughter's death, for, in effect, letting her 'go out at night,' for working a late shift, for taking public transportation out of necessity and a litany of other reasons. She is questioned for not protecting her daughter from death, and is characterized as a meddlesome woman during police investigations, as a profiteer for speaking to the public and international human rights workers, and as someone in need of further surveillance and control.

The following category is of human rights activist. This category classifies the human rights activist as a 'disruptive body' since the activist confronts the State, demanding accountability and due process within legal systems. As feminicides have generated international interest and support, mainly women have been at the forefront of the anti-feminicide movement to counter the patriarchal forces in place that ignored investigations through negligence, which further articulated a misogynist agenda in covering up crimes. Anti-feminicide activists, then, have become targets of State control. As their work is questioned by authorities, they too become subject to surveillance and often harassment.

The final category is the 'docile' female body, which is the attempt by the State to shape women in the image of prescribed heteronormative gender roles. These gender roles place women in the domestic sphere as childbearing, childrearing, submissive and dutiful wives and daughters. The 'docile' body lacks agency, voice, and to a great extent, personhood. Additionally, the docile body accepts the "natural" place of men at the center of power, enjoying full autonomy and decision-making within the home. On a public level, these hegemonic patriarchal tendencies warn women that acting outside of standard cultural and social conventions as activists or by engaging in everyday behaviors that contradict traditional or normative activities, place women at the margins of socially acceptable behavior. The argument goes that women that work or that work late, and who travel alone or to entertainment districts, hence, seek danger, and by stating this aloud, femicides become an effortless and natural social control tool to argue blame and culpability onto victims. It is the desire of the State and other segments of society to use femicide as a tool to encourage women to act in the socially measured and acceptable ways of 'gente decente.' Gente decente become the benchmark for cultural and social scripts that influence societal governance. The taming of society and women and girls in particular allows for governance that is more oligarchical and authoritarian, despite living in a democracy. It also allows for the further construction of 'gente decente' or as the popular culture term insinuates "the right sort of people" to rule a society and to live in it. According to this discourse, 'gente decente' would not protest in the streets of Ciudad Juárez or Chihuahua City like the 'denouncing' and 'disruptive' bodies of feminicide victims' mothers and women activists.

4. Richard Lawrence Miller's Chain of Destruction

Building upon my analysis of social control and the categorization of female bodies in sections one through three above, I want to turn to an examination of Richard Lawrence Miller's framework called the "chain of destruction" to explain how throughout history and across different societies, marginalized people have been oppressed and considered disposable. Central to these examples,

is how violence has intentionally been orchestrated to obstruct them. In some settings, ordinary people have been both complicit in this violence and victims of it. Historian Richard Lawrence Miller has investigated the ways in which ordinary people are targeted for destruction. In his work, Miller discusses the Holocaust and its applicability in terms of understanding the mass incarceration of people of color in the U.S. His framework and analytical thinking coincide with the arguments made about femicide victims in particular and the anti-femicide movement in general. Miller's analysis is useful in helping us to understand victims' families as 'ordinary' women that are targeted for destruction because they are perceived as a nuisance by the State apparatus, along with the activists that accompany them in their fight for justice. In this way, Miller's discussion of everyday people and their persecution can be utilized to argue that 'ordinary' people in the anti-femicide movement are persecuted for their demands for justice, accountability and transparency, even while other 'ordinary' people remain aloof to the femicide atrocity, or minimize it or even deny it in efforts to remain nonaligned with anyone involved in this justice movement for their own self-preservation. In this sense and on a much smaller scale than what Miller analyzes in his own work, these women are targeted through what he calls a 'chain of destruction' that includes the identification, isolation, ostracism, confiscation, and annihilation of groups within society.

Miller's framework is useful in explaining how ordinary people like women activists and femicide victims' families are beleaguered. His work also describes how ordinary people themselves can be indoctrinated by governments to target particular groups of citizens. In this sense, I consider how the concept of 'gente decente' is useful in understanding how some segments of society—mainly the elite classes and business world—yearn for the anti-femicide movement to end, thereby reestablishing a façade that Chihuahua is on the mend, that femicides never existed, and that border zones like Ciudad Juárez are vibrant, thriving industrialized urban centers where 'gente decente' are rearticulating a sanitized image of this city (Morales and Bejarano).

For self-proclaimed 'gente decente' in Chihuahua, the women of this movement are troublemakers and deviants, and are personified as a paradox to their everyday and 'ordinary' law-abiding existence. These women counter the idea of obedient 'gente decente.' As Monárrez states, "[l]aw-abiding citizen[s] dismissed the constant homicides perpetuated before 2008, and 'little by little, the dead cease to exist'" (Baudrillard 126, as cited in Monárrez Fragoso 30). In effect, privilege provides the ability not only to ignore death, but to categorize death and afford it meaning. As Monárrez goes on to argue:

Authorities and some segments of society categorized values associated with life and death: which bodies are worthy of importance; what lifestyles are considered to be a "life"; what lives are worth protecting; what lives are worth saving; and what lives deserve to be mourned? (Butler, as cited in Monárrez Fragoso 31).

While self-identified law-abiding 'gente decente' attempt to forget feminicides and forge a different imaginary of their city and state, the State and its agents work to undo the legitimacy and moral authority that these women and groups have in fighting for justice and due diligence. Miller's 'chain of destruction' framework helps feminicidal scholars discern certain identifying and targeting techniques designed to defame if not destroy the momentum of the anti-feminicide movement and its protagonists.

Miller's 'chain of destruction' template links identification, ostracism, confiscation, concentration, and annihilation. His work is, as he says, 'inspired' by Raul Hilberg's book, *The Destruction of the European Jews* published in 1961, in which Hilberg analyzes the destruction process as applied to the Holocaust. Although I am not a student of the Holocaust, I have contemplated its relevance to the U.S.-Mexico Border area through my invitation to participate in a University of New Mexico symposium sponsored by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies in 2013. This symposium investigated the ways in which research on the Holocaust has inspired scholarship on mass dispossession, violence, and ethnic cleansing throughout the Western Hemisphere. I spoke about (un)silencing sexualized violence at the U.S.-Mexico borderlands since the symposium's intent was to "explore emerging Holocaust research on historical trauma and its aftermaths, as well as current research on these topics in the American southwest and its borderlands" ((UN)Silencing the Past). Presenters discussed colonization and decolonization in American Indian communities, historical trauma, relocation of African-origin populations, and mass murders of women in Guatemala. Despite the horrors contemplated in this symposium and the pain analyzed in my work, the large-scale atrocities of the Holocaust are unlike any other.

Neither this chapter nor the papers presented at the conference claim moral or historical equivalence with the Holocaust. However, what the Holocaust can do is help us to critically contemplate the great suffering that humans endure as well as how this widespread havoc is masterminded. Such is the basis for Miller implementing his framework to analyze the U.S.-based War on Drugs and the massive incarceration of people of color through the prison-industrial complex. Similarly, my use of Miller's framework serves solely as a heuristic to understand the systematic processes of "destruction" associated with the violence against women, children, and their families in Ciudad Juárez. I found Miller's comparison and 'his chain of destruction' framework eerily fitting to the social violence and feminicides that plague Ciudad Juárez. Miller states that the:

elements of destruction can be visualized as a chain. Once the targeted group is identified, members can be ostracized from community life through the boycott of social and business relations, and through the revocation of legal rights. The next link in the chain of destruction is property confiscation, followed by concentration of

the group's members into geographic localities. The final element of destruction is annihilation, by prevention of birth and infliction of death (xi)

Each element of his framework pertains to eradicating the anti-femicide movement, as well as to the categorization of (re)gulating bodies by the State as mentioned earlier. Femicidal State Rhetoric is used to tame bodies and attempt to make them into acceptable '*gente decente*.' I trace the various links of the chain of femicidal violence in the next sections.

5. Identification and Ostracism

The analogy of war is frequently made about the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as it relates to drug violence and State's responses to crime; and like communities riddled with war-time atrocities, Ciudad Juárez also comes to represent a conflict zone. In the 'chain of destruction' framework, Miller begins by discussing "identification" and "ostracism." Before Felipe Calderon initiated the Mexican-based War on Drugs, women and girls disappeared. They were ostensibly identified and selected for their vulnerability, their youth, and their attractiveness; they were all killed senselessly. Whether through serial sexual killings or through domestic violence, women and girls have gone missing and have been found murdered.

Vulnerable bodies are identified for abuse and ultimately death (denigrated bodies), and left, as Rita Laura Segato has suggested, as a complex system of communication between powerful figures in the local society who have authored their demise. Segato explains, "Sovereignty's mark par excellence is not the power of death over the subjugated but, rather, the psychological and moral defeat of the subjugated and their transformation into a receptive audience for the dominator's exhibition of its discretionary death power" (75). Consequently, those women involved in the anti-femicide movement are marked and identified as 'Other' and targeted for persecution because of their search for justice and accountability. Femicides as a form of social messaging simultaneously represent the State's negligence, gender discrimination and failure to protect its citizenry, and serve to identify the families and activists associated with that victim for further targeting and surveillance. [7]

Once mothers, victims' families and activists have been identified and associated with the anti-femicide movement, the process of ostracizing them begins. Both subtle and overt practices are found where claims-makers like authority figures will refer to the mothers as '*viejas escandalosas*' (exaggerative women). The mother becomes the 'denouncing body' that despite having the moral authority to criticize and demand justice from the State, is eventually questioned for her demands and is perceived and constructed as a mere nuisance. For over a decade, the mothers' accounts

that I have heard detailing their search for their missing daughters confirm that they were told by authorities to wait for more than 72 hours before looking for them. Police argued that their daughters had likely run off with a boyfriend or were leading a double life—a common script by Juárez law enforcement. [8]

Activists in the anti-femicide movement have also fallen under this identification system and have been ostracized and called ‘Malinches’ to Juárez, “who betray the City’s newfound image as a haven for tourism and modernity” (Morales and Bejarano 191). Attempts to ostracize activists by claiming they profit from the ‘pain of the families of the murdered’ garner public support from the ‘gente decente’ and ‘obedient’ citizenry that decry the negative depictions of their beloved city. The more activists defiantly confront the State, demanding accountability, the more they become transformed in the public purview as deviant and unlikeable. Their work in exposing corruption, negligence, and the brutal techniques that various appendages of the State have used against women and society at large place them perpetually in harms’ way. In the words of long-time anti-femicide activist, lawyer, human rights defender, and co-founder of the *Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres* in Chihuahua City, Lucha Castro Rodríguez:

[As] human rights defenders, despite our fear, we leave our homes to demand, accompany, and to listen to suggestions, to discuss, and to denounce, in order to hope for a better life for all, yet we recognize the challenge of documenting human rights violations. We document these violations so we do not forget, so that we preserve a historical memory in our heads and in our hearts of those who torture, those who burn our homes, and who threaten, rape, disappear and murder our sons and daughters (Castro Rodríguez 6; translation mine)

Like the mothers of the murdered and disappeared, activists become targets for control and regulation, especially at a time of tremendous loss of life over the past two decades. As the State proves unsuccessful in its attempts at co-opting them, or even worse, harassing and killing these activist mothers and their supporters, it becomes further vexed in their pursuit against them.

For various State and non-state actors like the police, the military, organized crime syndicates, sexual offenders and domestic violence abusers, anti-femicide activists are a nuisance. Anti-femicide activists denounce these State and non-State actors for crimes against women which activists argue are crimes against humanity. Activists become in some ways a useful scapegoat to blame for the slow progress on revitalization efforts in Ciudad Juárez and for its never ending eruption of social problems. The scapegoating fits Miller’s claims regarding the chain of destruction:

For authoritarians a crucial benefit of scapegoating is that directing public anger toward scapegoats assures continuance of public anger, because problems creating fear and anger thereby remain unaddressed and will continue. In contrast to a

confident and contented citizenry, a fearful and angry citizenry is more susceptible to authoritarian demands, therefore, scapegoats are crucial for maintaining social turmoil needed by authoritarians. (192)

For years, human rights activists have endured defamation campaigns both personally and against their civil society organizations for allegedly profiting from the pain of the families of murdered and disappeared women. They have also worked despite great risks to themselves in seeking justice. Organizations like the *Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres* have been threatened so much so that they have submitted a petition seeking protection by the InterAmerican Commission and InterAmerican Court of Human Rights (www.cedehm.org.mx).

The fear of threats and harassment against these women has been enough to alter life-as-people-know-it. Fear—direct or indirect—and social control work hand in hand. In 2010, there were rumors that a blacklist was created by local authorities targeting 42 activists for arrest. Authorities temporarily detained Cipriana Herrera, a long-time union and human rights activist in Juárez; she was the only individual arrested at that time. She had been denouncing military human rights violations and had worked closely with the well-known activist Josefina Reyes who was murdered along with several other members of her family before and after her death (Figueroa). Both women were also involved in the anti-femicide movement. Cipriana quickly began receiving death threats and random, unjustifiable visits by the military at her home. She was purportedly arrested for a civil protest she was involved in years before but was released several hours later.

Fearing for her life, she sought political asylum in the U.S. and received it in 2011 (Figueroa). Although it was never confirmed whether the blacklist existed, it powerfully worked to impose fear on people, families, activists, and other ancillary groups. Ostracism through social stigmatization has worked to perpetuate fear and to create a sense of isolation from every day, ordinary people, marginalizing these women for their activism. In Cipriana Jurado's case it meant leaving behind everything she knew. On September 22, 2014, I participated as a judge for the *Tribunal Permanente de los Pueblos* in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, and I heard countless testimonials of human rights atrocities, forced disappearances, gender-based violence, and feminicides. Cipriana Jurado skyped into the tribunal from the U.S. and shared her testimonial saying, "*Perdí todo...lo que perdimos fue nuestra patria...vivir acá es vivir una vida sola*" (I lost everything...what we lost was our homeland...to live here [in the U.S.] is to live alone; translation mine). Others representing families of femicide victims left Juárez seeking asylum in the U.S. or relocated to the interior of Mexico for their safety. [7] Living in exile or fleeing the prospect of death is unmistakably a drastic form of isolation and ostracism and in some ways is a kind of social death.

6. Confiscation and Concentration

The following two elements in Miller's 'chain of destruction' include 'confiscation' and 'concentration.' Within Miller's construct of 'confiscation' lies the revocation of legal rights that translates into the lack of due diligence and a disregard for the rule of law. Cipriana Jurado's case also falls within these two constructs of 'confiscation' and 'concentration.' She was granted political asylum in the U.S. in June of 2011 (Figueroa). As an exile, she was taken from her home, stripped from her belongings and everything she knew; she was forced to flee her homeland. In some respects, it is as if her belongings were confiscated from her and she was detained (process of concentration) in a foreign country. The political asylum process prohibits an applicant from returning to her homeland during the application process. Cipriana's case became known internationally; if she returned to Mexico, she would clearly be identified, ostracized, and possibly arrested (detained and confiscated) and even placed in custody (confinement) or worse. She was targeted for speaking out against human rights violations by the military that included the abduction and murder of Mexican citizens. In essence, her life as she lived it in Mexico was confiscated from her. Although she remains active in revealing Mexico's human rights violations and working with other exiles through the organization, *Mexicanos en el Exilio*, she was displaced. She survived these attacks, while her colleague, Josefina Reyes, was brutally murdered.

On January 3, 2010, Josefina Reyes was assassinated by an armed group outside of Ciudad Juárez. Josefina had publicly reported the disappearance of one of her sons at the hands of the Mexican Army. From 2008 until the time of her death, Josefina actively participated in protests against violence in the city and violations of human rights perpetrated by the military. Before her death, she would publicly state that if she were to be disappeared or killed, it would be at the hands of the military. According to witnesses, Josefina was fighting against the men who tried to kidnap her. They told her, "you think you are tough because you are with the organizations" and then they shot her in the head.

The assassination of Josefina remains in impunity and the authorities have not provided any information regarding progress made in investigating those responsible (Meyer, De la Rosa Hickerson, and Castro Rodríguez). Josefina was simply a woman who was an activist that fought against feminicides and the military presence within Chihuahua. She sought justice for the murder of her son and, as a consequence, several members of her family were annihilated. At one point, more than thirty members of her family were seeking political asylum across several countries (Figueroa). In the Reyes' family case, life was taken, confiscated and their movement was contained barring all access to the life that people had known. This upheaval was due to one

person asserting their civil and human rights, which led to the decimation of family members and the deracination of those still alive that were forced to forge a new life in a foreign land. As people are identified, ostracized, confiscated and contained, these mechanisms assure the State that 'Femicidal State Rhetoric' and the overall fear of violence keep people silenced. Fewer people are willing to speak openly against the State and other appendages of power for fear of being targeted for victimization or death.

The disregard of and attacks on civil liberties impact human rights and provide blatant impunity for authorities. Miller claims that, "[a]ttacks on civil liberties are basic if ordinary people are to be destroyed. Attacks have two premises. First, civil liberties interfere with the destruction effort and must be eliminated. Second, civil liberties are inherently undesirable because they give citizens power to affect government actions" (Miller 36). In the case of Juárez, the confiscation of basic civil and human rights and access to the Mexican legal system translate into the difficulties that mothers and activists endure in demanding justice through juridical channels. The apathetic response of police, investigators, prosecutors, and judges has led to gender-based violence, especially femicide, as a tool of informal social control for women and as a way of commandeering women's access to justice.

The confiscation of rights also deteriorates into the tendency of 'blaming the victim' and 'blaming the mother and families rather than scrutinizing the failures within the State or, again, pursuing the original perpetrators of the violence. The persistent questioning of what a woman wore when she was victimized, how late she was out, who she was with, are all pervasive questions that transcend justice. Women victims are often re-victimized by the very systems intended to safeguard their rights through law enforcement interrogations, the lack of due diligence in investigations, and the overall paternalistic or patriarchal attitudes of officers, other agents of the State, and society (Bejarano). Since justice systems are based on heteronormative patriarchal powers primarily designed and articulated by men, the lack of gender perspectives explain the obstacles women face in obtaining positive results from the criminal justice system itself.

In another blatant example of the deployment of confiscation as a mechanism of social control is the confiscation of not only rights, but the difficulty of moving freely to assert one's rights which is pervasive (containment). The families of femicide victims often made the painful decision to either make weekly visits to the *fiscalía*, to attend social protests, or to save their money for bus fare, rent or groceries. One very suspicious move by the local government was to offer cheaply made homes atop of a city landfill called *Los Ojitos*, in the southern part of Juárez, a massive urban and impoverished part of the City. Families were offered cheaply-made, two-bedroom

homes as a sign of atonement for neglected femicide cases. Many families refused to move there since they felt this move was a way to bribe the families to end their activism. A few others moved there for economic survivability.

A critical perspective, based on the framework of the chain of destruction would offer the obvious analysis of the isolation of these families in the outskirts of Ciudad Juárez and away from the public eye, the authorities' offices, and the city center, which is the heart of the activist movement. The concentration of these 'ordinary people' turned dissident activists into a distinctly desolate geographic location is suspect. One could claim that the government thus knew exactly where some of the most vocal and 'troublesome' families and specifically mothers lived. Their movement could easily be monitored as well as who they kept company with. Hence, the concentration of these families into concentric geographic localities further marginalized people from activism, from investigating their daughters' cases, and pushed them further from the social service resources primarily located in central Juárez. These ordinary people, forced to become activists, were punished, marginalized and contained in the same perimeter in a marginalized and extremely impoverished area of Juárez. The mothers and their families were punished for denouncing their daughters' killings and asserting their rights. *Los Ojitos* was not an act of atonement, but an act of controlling, containing and taming the denouncing bodies that caused them so much grief. Activists were always suspicious of this action by the local government arguing that *Los Ojitos* served as a perfect surveillance technique of the families' comings and goings.

7. Annihilation

The final category of Miller's framework is 'annihilation' which needs no further elaboration. Miller states that, "[d]eath can be inflicted by indirect or direct means. Indirect means include withholding of medical care. Direct means include death squads and central killing operations (camp)" (Miller xi). In Chihuahua, there is the social death that families endure in losing a loved one. Families are compelled to investigate their daughters' cases and to do the investigative work of the State. They are also made to publicly mourn instead of remembering their daughters privately with loved ones. Annihilation through indirect means has taken its toll on mothers and activists when considering the resources they expend to fight for justice that can tear families apart and bankrupt them. Their desire to find their daughters and their understandable obsession in seeking justice can also take its toll emotionally, psychologically and physically, including the fear that entire families and even their communities can suffer harassment, injury and even death. This too was evident when I heard testimonials by families of femicide victims at the September 2014 *Tribunal Permanente de los Pueblos* in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua.

There is a cadence to death, an undeniable intonation to how disruptive, denouncing, and denigrated bodies materialize. In the state of Chihuahua, they are identified, ostracized, and found suspect. They are isolated, their lives at any moment can be taken from them, confiscated and terrorized, and they are contained and categorized as deviants, as troublemakers, as *Viejas Escandalosas* by the Mexican State. In some instances, as we have witnessed, activists are annihilated like the women and girls that they work to vindicate. As Miller argues about the Holocaust and the U.S. War on Drugs, "...mass murder is probable once a society decides to eliminate a group of ordinary people, as was the case in Nazi Germany" (xi). This is where 'Femicidal State Rhetoric' works best: in terrorizing a community to the point of complacency with the rhetoric of murder. If you go out at night alone, you can be murdered; if you align yourself with activists and family-based organizations, your families are in danger; and if you speak too loudly against the State or any other associated entity or shadow governing body, you might even experience death. The denigrated bodies, the victims of femicide through serial sexual killings, domestic violence, *narco* violence, and sexualized and gender-based violence, have suffered annihilation.

The death of the activist Susana Chávez offers an example of 'Femicidal State Rhetoric' to plant fear in society that anyone can be a victim of femicide. Susana, a poet and activist, who is credited for coining the rallying cry of the anti-femicide movement "Ni Una Más!" was killed on January 3, 2011 in Ciudad Juárez by three young men, two of which were minors. They severed her left hand and suffocated her with a plastic bag (Villalpando; Nájjar), purportedly to make her death look like a *narco* murder. Although the State was not directly involved in her femicide, and authorities refuted that her murder was attributed to her anti-femicide activism, her murder worked to condemn her for going out late alone and partying with men. For the State and even '*gente decente*,' she placed herself in harm's way and was the author of her own demise. To the activists and segments of society comprised of ordinary, everyday people, however, it was another poignant example of the State's failure to provide safety for its citizenry. The State refuted that she was a victim of femicide, yet the irony is irrefutable. Norma Ledezma, mother of femicide victim Paloma Ledezma and founder of *Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas* in Chihuahua City said, "The motive matters, but she was killed because she was a woman. It is part of the climate of impunity in which we live" (Nájjar; translation mine).

The final example of annihilation that pulls every aspect of what I have argued in this article together is the emblematic femicide cases of Rubí Marisol Frayre Escobedo and her mother, Marisela Escobedo from Ciudad Juárez. At the *Tribunal Permanente de los Pueblos*, Lucha Castro—fellow activist and attorney of Marisela Escobedo—recounted to an audience of more than

two hundred people how twenty days prior to Marisela's death, she had explained to authorities from the office of the Secretary of the Interior in Mexico City the great risk to her life. On December 8, 2010, after meeting with the Attorney General of Chihuahua, she stated that she would hold a silent protest at the *Plaza de Armas* across the street from the government offices where the Chihuahua Governor's office is located. A permanent installation by the organization *Mujeres de Negro* of Chihuahua, called *La Cruz de Clavos NI UNA MÁS*, is in the *Plaza de Armas* facing the Governor's Palace in Chihuahua where Marisela staged a peaceful protest for several days before her death. She stated that she would hold the protest until authorities apprehended her daughter's assassin. Sergio Rafael, the perpetrator of her daughter was initially detained by authorities but was later exonerated by a Juárez court. However, a second appeal found Rafael guilty of killing Rubí. Still, he managed to escape apprehension despite Marisela escorting police to his location in another Mexican State (CEDEHM).

On December 16, 2010, Rubí's mother, Marisela would be the target. Marisela Escobedo was gunned down in front of the Governor's Palace in Chihuahua as she held her protest late that evening. Security cameras caught her murder as a man exits a waiting car and walks up to Marisela who then runs to the Governor's Palace pleading for help; she was shot point blank in front of the palace sidewalk. Before her death she had requested protection from the State government but was denied protective measures. Like Josefina Reyes before her, Marisela publicly stated that if she were killed, the government would be responsible for her murder. Again, like Josefina Reyes, members of her family received death threats and fled for their lives. They are currently exiled from Mexico in the U.S. Sixteen-year-old Rubí was killed by her boyfriend. Meanwhile, Marisela and Rubí's memories are all that are left. Marisela's legacy as denouncing mother and then disruptive activist point to the dangers in place for women and men activists; she became the denigrated body, a femicide victim like her daughter. Years before her death, when she stood before the court that was to sentence Rubí's murderer, Marisela stated, "I would like to see that the death of my daughter was not in vain, and that it was the last femicide of this city" (CEDEHM, 3).

Conclusion

In a report by Margaret Sekaggya, the Human Rights Rapporteur for the United Nations stated that Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries for human rights defenders, "who are fighting against impunity in cases of alleged violations of human rights" (Almada 1). She additionally noted that "although the general identity of the perpetrators of human rights violations is unknown, that it

is known that between them, there are members of the police, the army, and armed groups" (ibid). Despite the dangers discussed in this article, ordinary public citizens are defying forms of social control by the State. Although 'Femicidal State Rhetoric' and incessant violence pulverize hopes for a peaceful future and life free from violence, the denouncing and disruptive bodies that work to undo so much injustice continue their work. Although the State and '*gente decente*' work to change images and breed a different kind of citizenry that is tamed and controlled, a dissident segment of society will work to heal its people and to create a reality that is not governed or illustrated by brutality.

The urgency with which activists and femicide victims' families work to curb the multiple forms of social violence that spur feminicides and other gender-based violence is evident in pivotal events like the *Tribunal Permanente de los Pueblos*. People are wary of existing systems of justice, which lead them to join responses by civic society groups, feminist and women's rights groups, and private citizens to create alternate strategies for justice with a gendered perspective in mind. The TPP in Chihuahua City was hosted by 49 civil society organizations in Northern Mexico to stop feminicides, human rights violations and impunity. The Chihuahua City TPP, like others before it, marked the numerous instances of rights violations that the Mexican people endure: the right to live a life free from violence or the threat of it is absent in contemporary life in Chihuahua, but the need to tell the histories of these atrocities lives on.

In the words of Salvador Salazar Gutiérrez and Martha Mónica Curiel García, "Existe una urgente necesidad de despertar las historias que duermen en las calles" (There exists an urgent need to awaken the histories that sleep on the streets) (9; translation mine). At the end of the day, it is really the Chihuahuenses, the activists and families who defend their rights and demand accountability from the State that are the true '*gente decente*' in its most literal translation. Decent people do not allow death and destruction to rule a society; they assert their rights and demand justice for all.

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Endnotes

[1] The 'Great Violence' references Felipe Calderón's War on Drugs according to Kent Paterson, journalist and writer for the online news service *Frontera Norte Sur*. He states that, "In terms of the 'drug war,' the broader, national conflict really flared during the Fox administration as early as 2003, i.e. Nuevo Laredo, but escalated under Calderon. When I [Kent Paterson] speak of the drug war beginning in 2008, I am specifically referring to the war in Juárez" (Personal Communication, September 13, 2014). Other journalists and scholars point to 2006 or 2007 as the impetus for the Mexican government-led War on Drugs against Mexican-based drug cartels. Data varies on the number of people killed during former President Felipe Calderon's anti-drug trafficking war that was launched when he took office in 2006. Roughly 67,050 people were killed in México and over 13,000 were murdered in Juárez from 2006-2013 (3,075 in 2010). Other non-government affiliated accounts place the death count much higher at over 100,000 people. This violence between rival Mexican drug cartels over trafficking corridors into the U.S. also resulted in the mass departure of people from México (Payan). Although the U.S. drug market is valued at between \$63 and \$81 billion (O'Rourke and Byrd), a clear indication of why cartels are killing for control of the market, little conversation directly connects the carnage in Mexico and its responsibility back to the U.S. and the U.S. drug consumer market.

[2] I will be using 'femicide' when referring to the tactics by the State and non-State actors to incite fear of gender-based violence, and in contrast, I will use 'feminicide' in my critique of the strategies and discursive practices that the State uses, while also using 'feminicide' to describe the push back of women involved in the anti-feminicide movement against the State and other gender-based violence aggressors.

[3] I use the idea of 'Femicide State Rhetoric' to stand separately from femicide or feminicide. The term femicide alone is used to describe the deaths of women and girls and draws on the groundbreaking work of Diana Russell (2001), but does not explicitly capture the feminicides that occurred after her initial writings on 'femicide.' The original discussion on femicide does not directly make the connections between the systemic and systematic representations of gender-based violence that implicates both State and individual perpetrators, that encompasses the systematic, widespread, and everyday violence rooted in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities (Fregoso and Bejarano). Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos elaborates even further by calling feminicides in Mexico crimes against humanity (2010). Femicide and feminicidal discourse has evolved for decades with robust debate over the use of either term and has grown in strength and in its legal importance. Feminicide has been codified into law in various Mexican States and recognized as a crime at the Mexican federal level.

[4] For a comprehensive debate and discussion of the use of femicide and feminicide across Latin America, see *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas* (Fregoso and Bejarano, 2010) and Alice Driver's *More or Less Dead: Femicide, Haunting, and the Ethics of Representation in Mexico* (2015.)

[5] For more on Richard Lawrence Miller's arguments on mass incarceration in the U.S., see his contribution to the 2012 documentary, *The House I Live In* directed by Eugene Jarecki.

[6] Another poignant example is that of the State denying or misidentifying the bodies of feminicide victims. In December of 2009, the InterAmerican Court wrote their scathing sentence of the Mexican government's irregularities in their investigations, negligence and exhibiting gender discrimination in the feminicide cases of Claudia Iveth González, Esmeralda Herrera Monreal and Laura Bernice Ramos Monárrez who were three of the feminicide victims found in the Campo Algodonero. See Bejarano's "Memory of Struggle in Ciudad Juárez: Mothers' Resistance and Transborder Activism in the Case of the Campo Algodonero" footnote four (202) for a description of the misidentification of bodies in that case. Similar claims are made by the *Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres* about the Arroyo Navaho cases (www.cedehm.mx.org).

[7] Since 1998, I have followed the feminicides in Ciudad Juárez and have worked with families of the missing and murdered. Most of my involvement stemmed from my activism with *Amigos de las Mujeres de Juárez*, a local border organization I co-founded in 2001. We were the most active in Chihuahua, primarily

supporting the efforts of women's rights, human rights and family based organizations in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua City from 2001-2009. Several of the examples given in these next segments are based on years of activism, advocacy, and research, and hearing families' testimonials.

[8] Co-founders of the organization, *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*, Norma Andrade, mother of Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, Maria Luisa (Malu) García Andrade, sister of Lilia Alejandra Andrade murdered in 2001, and Marisela Ortiz, Lilia Alejandra's school teacher fled from Ciudad Juárez after receiving death threats because of their work through that organization. (For additional information on the organization's efforts see their website: <http://nuestrashijasderegresoacasa.blogspot.com/p/quienes-somos.html>).

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