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“NI UNA MÁS. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
AGAINST GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION: THE
FEMICIDE CASE IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ, CHIHUAHUA,
MEXICO”

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During all these years living abroad in a country that has just given me wonderful and unforgettable moments, at the end of the day, when darkness fell over my head and my heart was overwhelmed with tiredness, melancholy and emptiness, just the memories of my family gave me enough strength and courage to continue following my dream.

Now that my dream has come to an end, that another cycle has been completed in my life, and that the time of returning to my homeland has come, it is always the memory of my parents, my sister and my brothers, my great source of inspiration and serenity.

This is why I dedicate this work to my beloved father Marco Antonio, who taught us since we were children to love knowledge and to follow our dreams at any cost; to my mother Mary, whose love and brightness light up our lives, to my little sister and best friend Rebeca, who knows me better than anyone; to Marco, my independent brother who always makes us laugh; and to my dear Román, whose invaluable help allowed me to successfully finish this material on time:

Gracias Poeta!

*Just your permanent love, support and trust allowed me to make this dream come true:
thank you all from the bottom of my heart.*

INTRODUCTION

I would not be so interested in serial sexual femicide if not for a series of murders of women and girls that have taken place for more than 15 years now in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. Nor would it be the subject of my PhD research if not for the impunity that has prevailed and the meager information available regarding them, which let us realize that the only possible way these crimes are going to be solved is by a strong international pressure and by political as well as civil international cooperation actions .

Let me explain myself better: as a Mexican living abroad I suffer from a symptom that Salman Rushdie (Rushdie, Salman. 1991: 14) has described as a *perennial sense of loss, as a strong wish of re-appropriation, of looking back even if it may mean taking the risk of becoming a salt statue.* And this intermittent melancholy sensation lying in the bottom heart of almost all “*foreigners*” wherever they have moved in the world, has unconsciously made me create, in my effort to re-appropriate my infantile years, *invisible fictions, imaginary homelands*, instead of the real Mexico I left back more than eight years ago. And in this country of my imagination full of good-hearted people although the un-measurable economic, social and political differences present all over Mexico and the totally unfair wealth distribution common to developing countries, there was no place for such a terrible gender crime nor for the miserable impunity and indifference created among such *good-hearted* people. This is the first but not the only reason why I decided to explore the reality in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua regarding femicide. The other reason is my own female condition and my inconformity to accept that women continue being brutally assassinated paradoxically in a border city famous by its openness to industrialization thanks to its low-cost female labour. And once more I need to be more precise in order to clarify why in Ciudad Juárez the femicide acts have been even more tragic – if that can ever be possible – than everywhere else: Mexico is a country characterized by an ancient patriarchal society and this pre-Hispanic condition has provoked a long-lasting legacy of gender discrimination throughout generations in spite of the recent female conquests evident in the last decades. Up to this point there seems to be no much difference between the Mexican society and several other societies in the world as far as it is well-known that the devil consequences derived from the male superiority culture may arise to violent gender discrimination on women wherever this phenomenon takes place. And this physical, psychological or sexual violence on women – which is not a Mexican exclusivity – can be perpetrated not just within the family but also within the own community no matter the development level of the country under observation. Just to give a deeper idea in the year 2002 the European Council declared that in Europe the domestic violence was the main reason of death and invalidity on women from 16 to 44 years old, showing a higher incidence than the one provoked by cancer or by car accidents.¹ If this happens in the *civil* Europe it is clear that in other regions in the world such violence and discrimination on women can only be much more evident due to either the lack of a legal framework able to obligate the respect and observance of human rights, or to patriarchal cultural practices that tend to relegate women and exalt men.

So, why gender crimes in Ciudad Juárez are different from others and, moreover, why femicide in that society should be the subject of a PhD research? The answer lies on two facts that make them different from others: a) not all the femicides are the product of marital–domestic violence: some of these women and girls murders follow a serial sexual pattern that emphasizes a sort of *rite* understood not as the social reproduction practice present in most of the Rites theory useful to society to plainly ratify itself and to defend its own order and hegemony (García Canclini, Néstor. 1998: 38-39). On the contrary, *rite* as a movement towards a different order still forbidden or not

¹ “Domestic violence against women”. Observation 1582 (adopted on September 27th, 2002). European Council Parliamentary Assembly.

accepted by the community. And a considerable percentage of femicides in Ciudad Juárez (sharing common serial sexual features) belongs to this sort of *rite* practiced just in occasional and symbolic scenarios for being a brutal transgression unable to be carried out in a permanent and a *real* way. As Pierre Bourdieu stated²: the sort of *rite* able to separate and integrate those that practice the ritual (*femicide*), from those who remain outside and will never be accepted among the insiders, among the group, among the fraternity; and b) it seems that the impunity created in these 15 years derives precisely from the real power that such *fraternity* –whoever they are – has within the society and its political structures.

Finally I would like to point out to the last – but not least - reason behind my decision of studying femicide in Ciudad Juárez: in my need of re-appropriating the country where I was born there are still many broken pieces that need to be repaired in my mind to fully understand and – consequentially – re-appropriate the real Mexico. And to do so I need to build up a bridge that helps to understand the complex reality of a country that has always wanted to belong to the international “development” club³ although the *under-development* problems it faces everyday. And one of the most fearful problems deals with human rights violations north to south and east to west. So, how could I even think to focus my international cooperation studies in other fields different from human rights if this is one of the most sensitive problems Mexico suffers from? How could I privilege other topics such as economic, environmental, agricultural, educational, etc cooperation actions when hundreds of women have been brutally assassinated and other hundreds continue disappearing day after day in Ciudad Juárez? I guess my decision is a moral debt I have with the women in Juárez, with Mexican women in general and with the *good-hearted* people that would never accept such a painful crime against their own mothers, sisters or daughters... Maybe at the end of the road I might become a salt statue, but hopefully the risk is worthwhile.

This dissertation is divided into three different and interchangeable *Essays* instead of the traditional book-format following a beginning-end reading. As stated by Nèstor García Canclini⁴, “*the essay allows the exploration following not just one but different directions, allows adjusting the itinerary if something doesn't work properly without the need of defending oneself after one-hundred pages of previous exhibition, differently from what happens with a monograph or a treaty. But the scientific essay is different from the literary or philosophic ones because it is based on empiric research and the interpretation is based on a controlled used of data*” .

This is why my decision of using essays that would allow me to be more ductile and free to move from one side to the other without too much concern. But more than essays they are narrations that describe and put together the different collective representations, symbols, experiences and traditions of three symbolic women from Juárez: María Elena Chávez Caldera, who represents all the daughters assassinated in the city; Julia Caldera, María Elena's mother, who speaks for all the mothers who have tragically got a daughter killed; and Marisela Ortíz Rivera, co-founder and speaker of the Juárez civil association “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*”, who is a perfect example of the strength, tenacity and bravery of all the mothers who have not resigned themselves to keep their daughters' murders unpunished and unresolved.

But such narrations will not be complete without a scientific and more structured essay based on empiric research and on a controlled use of data. Therefore after each of the three narrations-life

² Bourdieu, Pierre. “Les rites comme actes d'institution”. In *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, N. 43, June 1982.

³ Mexico is an O.C.D.E. country, a NAFTA member and recently has been invited to the last G-8 Summit at Gleneagles, Scotland as an “outreach” nation, along with China, India, Brazil and South Africa.

⁴ García Canclini, Néstor. “*Culture Ibride: Strategia per entrare e uscire dalla modernità*”. Milan: Ed. Angelo Guerini, 1998. p. 22

stories- interviews, the reader will find the proper essays explaining and structuring the scientific facts.

Nevertheless, allow me a humble suggestion: try to read between the lines by focusing just on the stories called: 1. *MARIA ELENA... The daughter*; 2. *JULIA... The mother*; and 3. *NUESTRAS HIJAS DE REGRESO A CASA (NHRC)... The Mothers*. From their voices and experiences you will be able to get the main panorama of the most dangerous city for women in the world. Ignore as much as you can the proper scientific information included in the three complementary essays located right after each of these stories. They just provide cold although true facts that support what the mothers have roughly said before. Do it in this way because if we really want to be supportive with the mothers' fight, if we truly intend to have a gesture of solidarity with the women of Juárez, first we need to open our hearts and our minds to be able to do it. And there is no better way to do so that listening to the direct testimonies of the brave mothers, sisters and daughters that narrate their stories to the whole world.

Finally if the main question of this research will be: *How the international cooperation actions might contribute to effectively solve the femicide in Ciudad Juárez?*, then it is evident that just an anthropological approach – reached through narration, life stories and interviews – would not be enough to deal with the subject matter. It will also be necessary a historical analysis of the femicide in such a city to better understand its dynamics during the last 15 years and realize how the human interactions there –both with a national or an international origin and seen from different perspectives such as the economic, social, cultural, education, etc. ones – have contributed to make of Juárez an unsafe city for women. But still the analysis would not be complete if we did not include the role of the mass media not just locally but nationally as well as internationally, and the important role of the power (or powers) behind the perpetration (directly or indirectly) of such gender-based violence.

**“NI UNA MAS. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGAINST GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION:
THE FEMICIDE CASE IN CIUDAD JUAREZ, CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO”**

1. MARÍA ELENA... The daughter

“24/10/00, María Elena Chávez Caldera, among 15 and 17 years old, 1.60 meters height, tint long hair, desertic spot, blue jeans, gray sweatshirt with green stripes, pink T-shirt with a U.F.O. front design, white tennis shoes, round earring in her left ear, heart-shaped charm with the inscription ‘Love’ on it, three to four months beeing dead, dressed”...(González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 259-260)



María Elena Chávez Caldera
Ciudad Juárez - 2000

I will never forget the expression of the taxi driver's face –mixture of disapproval and astonishment – when I first asked him to take me to *Puerto Anapra*, westward Ciudad Juárez. It was the same expression I had already noticed among the hotel employees when I asked them how to get to that remote, popular shanty town, famous for having the highest crime rate in the city:

-No, ma'am, you shouldn't go there, it's very dangerous, 'las muertas de Juarez' have been found around those places – said the receptionist behind the desk, with nervous voice, while turning worried eyes to the security guard, expecting for confirmation.

-I was born here and I have gone there only once, about five years ago, but I've never come back. Be careful, you're going to see a lot of cholitos¹ all around, so the best is to take a taxi, supposing someone wanted to take you, and don't take your chances by trying to get there by bus – was his immaculate uniform's comment, which I had more than once run into, walking through one of his several rounds during the day , making sure everything was all right and trouble of any kind wouldn't come up, because in Juárez, anything can happen²...

Once inside the cab, the driver, after checking every map, and having asked for the street "*Ballena*" to his headquarters, among the endless fish and sea creatures that identify the street names in '*Puerto Anapra*', - '*Merlusa*' (Hake), '*Pulpo*' (Octopus), '*Pez martillo*' (Hammerhead Shark), '*Pez Luna*' (Moon Fish), '*Huachinango*' (Red Snapper), '*Ostra*' (Oyster), '*Rémora*' (Hindrance), etc. – agrees to take me, making it cristal clear that he does it only because he already knows me and because it is midday, as long as he would never get in there again after dusk, even for twice the fare because some years before, he had gotten himself rid of a mugging right at the same spot thanks to the speed of his legs and to his quick reaction. Just that let him win his persecutors the race – they were more than three men who came out of the desert immensity, from nowhere – get into his cab and speed up back to Juárez, screeching tires, leaving his clients behind all alone, in spite they had asked him to wait for them outside one of the huts from where you can easily notice the car lights running through the freeway, in the U.S. side, right before the white buildings and the enormous parking lots of the Sunland Park Mall, in New Mexico.

*

Puerto Anapra is an irregular human settlement from which one can see, in a glimpse, the longed for american dream. It is a poverty belt where, overcrowded survive, approximately 50% of Juárez' inhabitants: almost 600 thousand people with particularly low economic level who tirelessly struggle against the bad weather conditions and the desert sand, in their zeal for overcoming the adversities found in this extraneous land that, much to their regret, have adopted as their own.

Puerto Anapra is a hill alternancy in the west border between Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and El Paso, Texas, of which the main character is sand – but the kinda earthy sand, dense, whitish and painful that would come into your eyes, sticks to your body and lacerates your skin, – and the supporting actors are the thousands of beings that, lacking of most of the basic services such as drainage system and drinking water, face anything in order to survive this desertic lands, as they get to cross to the "*otro lado*" (the other side), or meanwhile they save the necessary amount to go back to their homelands. And these two firm ideas, constant and fixed make these hundreds, thousands of people, to resist it all in their effort to get ahead in the middle of this uncolored and inhospitable scenario.

In spite of the evident misery of the dwellers of *Puerto Anapra* – most of them are *aviadores*³ established irregularly and abusively on this land located to the west of Juárez,– such a poverty belt is a strategical place since it is set as a bridge to several important points: once you leave the city behind and after a 15 to 20 minutes ride, the Cristo Rey hill arises, impressive, and opens the perspective. Texas lays to the north, with its Big River (called *Bravo River* in Mexico), almost dry to the mexican flowings; to the west, where the *mojoneras* (boundary stones) start – exactly 276 obelisks placed in a row to mark the ending of Mexican soil –on the desert's aridity, New México; to the east, among highly pollutant smoke and dust columns produced by about 300 brick local

manufacturers, Ciudad Juárez is discerned; and to the south, beyond the mountains, getting lost in the horizon, México emerges in all its glory and with all its millenary contradictions.

This is exactly the reason why *Puerto Anapra* occupies a special and unique geographical situation that, already since 1911, was exploited by the revolutionary leader Francisco I. Madero in his fight against the dictator Porfirio Díaz, who in his more than 30 years ruling the country planted the same subversive roots – due to the increasing socioeconomic inequalities and the repeated repression to the population who was hungry not just of bread, but of freedom and justice mostly – that gave birth to the revolution proclaimed on November 20th, 1910 by Madero himself, under the slogan of “*Effective suffrage. No reelection*”. It was then that Madero, being wanted not only by the Porfiriist army, but by the Texan law too – there was an imprisonment order with his name in Texas, – took shelter in Ciudad Juárez – right at the place known today as *Puerto Anapra*, – where he lived in a small *adobe* house with only two bedrooms that he shared with his wife, because in case of requirement by the Texan authorities or if he was pushed by the Mexican “*fедерales*”, he could have decided to go deep into Mexico: he was just twenty steps away from escape, to both sides.

This was possible because at the beginning of the XX century – period in which *Puerto Anapra* was known as rancho *Berumen* – there were adobe houses to both sides of the *mojoneras*, and those houses were used to give shelter to the brick manufacturer workers, both American and Mexican without distinction, only united by the solid purpose of keeping their jobs regardless their nationalities. It was this transborder coexistence between Mexico and the U. S. (remember that Ciudad Juárez has a natural border with El Paso, and a political one with New México) the one that let the Mexican revolutionary men to look for protection beyond the border, “*al otro lado*”, at the same time it made the everyday *gringo*(4) intrusions to Aztec soil easier, attracted by the revolution violence. Actually in El Paso, from the “*Sheldon*” and “*Paso del Norte*” hotels roof-gardens, the American interested in the Mexican revolutionary revolt would mitigate, comfortably sitting, their war and blood curiosity through binocular glasses as a means to have their glimpse of the bloody shootings.

So was announced by the sign put out of the “*Hotel Paso del Norte*”:

- “*The only hotel in the world offering their guests a comfortable place to watch the Mexican Revolution*”(5).

Unfortunately in where the strategic though modest ‘*Maderista*’ quarter once was, nowadays there is only a revolutionary leader bust – deprived of commemorative plaque thanks to the disrespectful hand of the thieves, – as the only history vestige that, even then, clearly pointed out the advantages of living in the border... .

*

The border had always represented a special attraction for the family of Daniel Chávez: native from Durango – a state located North of the Mexican Republic, but not as north as Chihuahua but to the south of it – it’s been many years that the Chávez Caldera family decided to move to Ciudad Juárez as they were trying to sneak away from the poverty of their homeland.

Theirs is a story as those hundreds stories of families from the rural zones of Mexico: careless of the consequences and with the innocent youth thoughtlessness that affects at a specific point of everyone’s life, to a greater o lesser extent, Julia Caldera got pregnant for the first time when she was still two years to be eighteen, age in Mexico in which you obtain the right to vote. To make amends to his honor Daniel asked for her hand in marriage and, almost without noticement, they started to bring children to the world with the same blessed unconsciousness of their earlier years. One after the other and shortly, Mario, Judith, Gabriel, María Elena, Brenda and, finally, 16 years ago, Martín, were born.

Daniel had thought about emigrating towards north looking for a not-so-dark future than the one luck had given him with birth. Towards north had emigrated, already since the early sixties(6),

some distant cousins – that attracted by the hopeful stories told by the emigrants that once in a while would come back to the town to visit those who were left behind, – who were the ones that had decided to try in their own flesh the benefits of emigrating to one of the cities considered a symbol of the flourishing transborder *maquiladora* industry: Juárez City, in the neighbor state of Chihuahua.

These distant land tales brought by his cousins had always been an almost magnetic attraction for Daniel, who used to listen to them as hypnotized in the reunions celebrated at the one and only place of town dedicated to its men's fun: the local '*cantina*' (bar). As he was listening, ecstatic, he convinced himself more and more that the only way he had if he wanted to stop being poor, was to leave behind the short opportunities offered by low productive lands, to add himself to the army of workers of the *maquila* in the Mexican-American border.

But for this to happen, first he had to meet Julia, a beautiful girl-almost-woman of fine features, long hair and sweet eyes, and those that had only been dreams became, all of a sudden, into harsh reality. Compeled by the imperative necessity of feeding his growing family, Daniel decided to emigrate without previous notice taking Julia and all his children with him too. This brave decision, much uncommon in his native community – in which generally was the head of the family the only one to go in pursuit of something better, at least, at the very beginning – far from helping them to open their way in their new home, only made things more difficult and threw them into a poverty spiral that would only increase as time moved on.

But then they didn't know it, and they wouldn't even imagine the high cost that destiny was about to charge them once they got to Juárez.

*

At first sight Ciudad Juárez lets herself be seen as an enormous backyard resenting the colossal economic asymmetry of the two countries that get united by four International Bridges: either going from Mexico to the U. S. – doesn't mean much if you are coming or going – through the *Reforma Bridge*, the International Bridge *Paso del Norte* or *Santa Fé* – located right in the heart of the city, at the end of the noisy Juárez Avenue, – the *Córdova-Américas Bridge* – also known as *Free Bridge*, – or the *Zaragoza-Ysleta Bridge*, it is always the bridge one of the most symbolic elements of the city.

It is precisely the bridges the Juárez primary symbols, only followed by the *maquila*, and it is estimated that altogether they can attract three hundred people daily to the city⁽⁷⁾, having as an outcome a floating population approximately of 110,000 inhabitants who live segregated within the urban social limits.

The bridge is the element which puts together those living in the north with those coming from the south; those who were born in the abundance of the "American dream" with the others who desperately try to escape from their ancestral misery in strive of a better life. But it also separates two completely different lifestyles and stresses, from an American perspective, the Mexican ghettos poverty portraying it almost as if it were one of their southern neighbors' folkloric details.

On the other side Mexicans witness a full of comfort lifestyle beyond the bridge, made of neon signs and frenetic prosperity, and sometimes feel jealous of the opportunities that at this side of the river their own country denies them. And at this side of the river the Americans find, in front of their eyes, a distressing scene set in the middle of the desert sand. Such a desertic scenario has always been able to take in its lap an army of homeless people that would improvise their homes with carton, boxes, plates, old mattresses, second hand wood and everything that a garbage dump and the wastes of the *maquiladoras* offer them to survive. This side of the bridge even the air seems grayier, the landscape drier and perversions more violent than at El Paso, which is considered the third safest city of the U. S., only after Hawaii, and San José, California⁽⁸⁾.

Perhaps to understand the real meaning of the bridge it is essential to cross it, time after time, until you are not afraid of it anymore, until you fully understand it, until you get to cross it naturally, not

fearing the cops guarding it both this and the other side of the Brave. Before you start an about 4-kilometer journey – across the *Santa Fe Bridge*– that comes out onto the heart of El Paso, you can see some signs on the Mexican side: “*Prepare your fare*”, that will be set according with the vehicle you are driving. And once after the toll-gate, where the Mexican staff wishes you farewell, another huge sign shows for the last time the friendly nature of Mexicans: “*Happy Journey*” and “*Return soon, paisano*”.

If, on the other hand, the way across the bridge is done by foot, one will have to take the under cover corridor located at its right side , which is the one for everyone going to El Paso – while the left corridor is reserved just for those coming back from El Paso to Ciudad Juárez. Even by foot there is a three-peso fare for crossing, as much as 25 dollar cents, deposited in a rudimentary slot machine that unlocks a small bar and opens the first door to the most developed country in the world. Once the first obstacle is passed – after a short waiting time, because generally there are people patiently queueing at each of the three slot machines there – the traveler experiences the very essence of this no man’s land: it is right at this point that you find yourself in a territory where the Mexican becomes one with the American so much, that the differences between both cultures seem to vanish.

It is precisely here where the mixes, pollutions and the north-south cultural grafts are there for everyone to see: Mexican people, proudly dressed as cowboys but speaking English to each other⁽⁹⁾ – almost as a sign of national identity that bragging in the other side, – go to work as gardeners, shop assistants, agriculturers, janitors, etc. beyond the border; and American people that look Mexican while listening to the newest hits of the *norteña* music, running away from the restraints at El Paso in search of alcohol, gasoline, medicine and cheap sex in a land where every excess is allowed.

Everyone and everything gets mixed in the everyday madness coming back and forth, and the border becomes the perfect synthesis of the coexistence of milenary roots along the 3200 kilometers that divide two completely different worlds, complementary in all times.

After the slot machines, the first half of the approximately 4 kilometers separating Ciudad Juárez from El Paso, is guarded by the Mexican *Federal Preventive Police* elements⁽¹⁰⁾ (*PFP*), supervising their half of the bridge with the help of trained dogs, specially able to detect drugs. But once in the half of the journey, right at the highest point of the *Santa Fe bridge*, the black *PFP* Mexican uniforms are replaced by the also black uniforms of the American Border Police, that give the impression to be more concerned of their surveillance and control duty. Watching them in action might be frightening for the tourist crossing for the first time, since they speed up scanning the few meters they have under custody, obsessively scrutinizing with their eyes at every detail of the hundreds of people and cars going into the American territory minute after minute. If stopping to watch the dry flowings of the Brave River comes to the tourist mind, which represents the real natural border between the two nations, there will be an authoritarian voice commanding to their backs:

- *Go ahead ma’am. Don’t stop. You can’t take pictures here.*

And instantly disappears any intention of taking pictures or video of the messages left there on the concrete edges of the river by someone who was able to evade, for a moment only, the border patrol surveillance ... and you get the impression of stepping into a frenetic world with fast feet, a world where time is never wasted, not even to think about one of these messages’ enormous writing, to the feet of which one can see dozens of crosses silhouettes: “*Las víctimas del capital en las maquiladoras están muertas*”.

The rest of the 500 meters are severely watched over by the American police, and just before you arrive at the customs, the signs appear: “*You are entering into the American territory. Don’t run. Prepare your documents*”, and immediately after you can see the last of the doors from where you can get a glimpse at the other side, the longed for American world. Now you only need to deal with the customs officers, that treat you by your looks:

- *Good morning. Why are you coming into the United States of America? How long are you staying here? Do you have any relatives in the U.S.A.? Your documents please... Oh, your passport was issued in Italy! Why? Do you really live there? What do you do there?*

And after you have come across the final barrier – once the optic scan reads your visa without pointing you as a threat for the American country, and the officer double-checks your face to verify if it really belongs to the one of your passport photo – you hear him say, with a friendly voice:

- *OK ma'am. Welcome to the United States of America. Have a pleasant stay.*

And finally, as you step onto solid ground on the other side of the bridge leaving definitely behind the hustle and bustle of Juárez, the tension dragged along with you for nearly four kilometers separating these parallel universes, that are complementary to each other, disappears completely.

*

As many other Mexican cities, Ciudad Juárez alternates within its limits a great deal of socioeconomic inequalities: there are the great masses on one side, obsolete houses decadency, streets with irregular asphalt, dusty roads, and junk cars being used in normal traffic; while the effectiveness of the machines, the beauty of the new five-star hotels and some wealthy neighborhoods, the first world modern services, the state-of-the-art communication and economic prosperity of a few families that, historically, have always been on top of the high class social circle, are highlighted on the other side.

Walking across the city one can watch an infinite succession of old, unstable buildings that pile thousands of people in search of a better future inside their walls. It is a no man's land in which every excess is tolerated, and the body is exploited every day as another survival means.

The essence of the city is made out of a great variety of colored mosaics – the *maquiladora* plants that hire mainly female workers, the international bridges, the drug addiction, the waste lands used as garbage public dumps, the poverty, Mexico's most powerful drug cartel under the command of the Carrillo Fuentes brothers, the one-night-stand hotels, the strident *norteña* music or *nor-tec* (originated in Tijuana, Baja California, but now widespread across all the country, mixing the accordion rhythms, the drums and the double bass of the *norteño* bands, with latin echoes and the traditional Sinaloa bands), the hundreds of money exchange dealers mostly located in the Juárez Avenue, the joyful nightlife at the noisy joints downtown, the prostitution, the *polleros*⁽¹¹⁾, the numerous taxi bases changing names at will from a street to the next without failing to follow any seemed logics, the *yonques*⁽¹²⁾ or car junks, the ancient catholic churches and the modern protestant temples, the sacred and the profane, among many other things – that make it the ideal scenario in which perversions, vices, abuses, and all kind of felonies will not only remain unpunished, but tolerated as the price one must pay for living in this first world waiting room.

These changing colored mosaics that due to their enormity make almost impossible to define the most basic essence of the city, only worsen the social drama of almost a million and a half people sharing a life full of the border contrasts that, for the just arrived foreign eye, are generally seen with the shallow accent of folklore, while emigration keeps non-stop and insecurity can be felt on the skin.

Insecurity, which is not new, could be considered proportional to the immense dimensions of the conurbation zone formed by Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, that conglomerate together approximately three million people due to the “floating” population arriving in the city every day,– number that puts it as the fifth urban gathering of the Mexican Republic, only behind Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla – and the inefficient Police structure on the Mexican side.

The violence and insecurity have – in spite of been intensified from the 90's decade when the Amado Carrillo Fuentes⁽¹³⁾ cartel, best known as “*El señor de los cielos*” (*The Lord of the Skies*), got more powerful and became one of the main cartels of the country – always been in this border

town precisely for being a migrating territory, made of smugglings and transits linked to the city's history, known as "*Paso del Norte*" until 1888.

"*Paso del Norte*" had been a mission in Colonial times (1521 – 1821), but after the Spanish Crown retreat from Mexican ground, the mirage of the national control over the north territory vanished thanks to the American expansionist ambition, that in 1845 annexed Texas, in 1847 invaded Mexico, and in 1848 definitely carried out their plundering by drawing the new border line by jeans of the *Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty*⁽¹⁴⁾, leaving Mexico without half of its territory simultaneously making foreigners of their own land, more than 100,000 Mexican people – a total of 2,378,539 Km² divided among the states of California, Arizona, Nevada and Utah, and a part of Colorado, New México and Wyoming as they are constituted today – in exchange of just a "compensation" of fifteen million *pesos*. By this treaty *Paso del Norte* became a Mexican national border, but regardless the XI article of such a treaty which committed the United States to control the indigenous tribes within their territory and stopping them from coming to Mexico, Americans in fact kept with their habit of throwing the "*savage indians*" and the lowlifes to the south of their borders.

And so the criminal and smuggling community tried to make from *Paso del Norte* their headquarter, which moved the Mexican government to order the establishment of a military base in 1848 with the main objective of stopping them.

Later, when the American expansionist intentions were replaced by the ambition of France and the national government, with Benito Juárez as head, settled in *Paso del Norte* until 1866 to command from that place his offensive against the French intervention and the Empire, headed by Maximiliano of Habsburg in Mexico City, the border city became of historic relevance.

And it was in 1888 when *Paso del Norte* reached the category of a "city" taking off the military neighborhood attire, and took the name of Juárez in honor of the *Benemérito* that had fought from there the "usurper" foreigner until finally executing him, in July 17th 1867, at the "*Cerro de las Campanas*" in the State of Queretaro.

Nevertheless, before the city was rebaptised with the name of Juárez, in 1885 El Paso became a "free zone" and there were installed not just some world famous casinos such as *Tívoli, Moulin Rouge, Diamond Electric Keno, Esmerald Electric Deno, Hotel Casino*, etc., but also growing brothels and dives for the less wealthy pockets and less selective taste, that would fill their vices well enough mainly in the Mexican side. This strip placed between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez lost its 'free zone' condition in 1905, although the casinos and other amusement places kept operating until 1935, as well as the businesses emerged with the alcohol prohibition in the United States, such as whiskey manufacturing in the Waterfill Company.

Subsequently, when the American economy needed cheap handwork to reorganize their economy ravages after their participation in the World War II, Ciudad Juárez registered the biggest increase in population dedicated to the industrial sector, being females mostly involved. That was how Ciudad Juárez consolidated as the most dynamic city of Chihuahua, thanks to the *Programa Maquilador* (twin industry program), signed up in the 1960's.

Currently Juárez has the lowest unemployment rate in Mexico: barely 0.6% ⁽¹⁵⁾ – against the 2.5 – 3% observed in the rest of the country – and it is considered the most important border town of the state. However, this primacy has been substituted, in the past 14 years, by another that unfortunately has given it worldwide fame: it is the city with the highest number of female workers assassinations, not only in Mexico, but in the whole world.

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María Elena, in spite of had just turned 15, was already able to feel that insecurity every time she left her house – located in *Puerto Anapra* – to go to work.

Since she had started with her job as a factory operator in the *maquiladora ADC International* when she was just fourteen years old – to get the job she had to impersonate her sister Judith, who was

two years older than her so legally allowed to work – María Elena would vividly scent the danger of going out very early in the morning to catch the *ruta*⁽¹⁶⁾ taking her to work. To get to the main street in where the buses pass, which by the way is the only paved street of *Rancho Anapra* up today, she had to walk through sandy paths adding herself to the army of men and women eager to arrive punctual to the first shift in the *maquiladoras*, as long as *maquiladoras'* strict rules don't allow the workers the entrance if they arrive late, even when it is only a few minutes delay.

Nevertheless, when she had to work the second shift that started at 3:00 p. m., the fear of coming back to her house in the middle of the night became even more evident, which was reason enough for Julia, her mother, to go and wait for her in the main street of the neighborhood to walk back home together.

That was the reason that moved María Elena to start looking for a different job, one that would not impose the *maquiladora* shifts and would also let her enough money to help her big family, that counted only with the occasional income that her father made as a building worker, and, every now and then, with the help of her oldest brother whenever he was able to find a job.

Being the third in order of birth, she gave herself the responsibility of contributing to the family's economy without reluctance, especially now that Judith, her older sister, was about to become a single mother for the second time, which had stopped her from going to work. Besides María Elena was certain that with a better paid job, even if it had not been much, both of her younger siblings would be able to continue studying and then her effort would have been worth it, since Brenda, the youngest of her sisters, was a very good student and there was no way she would let her and the sacrifice she had done down, but quite the contrary, she would keep improving her grades and finish the secondary school, becoming the first member of the family going to accomplish this goal.

In fact Brenda, after had recently and shortly featured in a documentary of a woman named Lourdes Portillo⁽¹⁷⁾ – a *chicana*⁽¹⁸⁾ who was going all across *Puerto Anapra*, North to South and East to West, advancing all the way into the desert depths trying to disentangle the complicated plot of the hundreds of murders and missing young women cases in Ciudad Juárez, – was very excited because she had been able to answer without hesitation to every of the reporter's questions, and knew that the key to get a good job in the future, as the one that woman had, consisted in the continuance of her studies, so she would not have to end up as a *maquiladora* worker, as her older sisters have.

It was wandering around Puerto Anapra and its surroundings, to be known as one of the most frequently used places to get rid of corpses as one gets rid of trash, that Portillo's production staff had found themselves at a place known as *Lomas de Poleo*, facing right to the Chávez Caldera family's home, just two kilometers away. As they were coming back to Juárez from that solitary spot, they had stopped at the “*Ballena*” street, randomly choosing Brenda and one of her neighbors to appear in the documentary just because they had been out of their houses precisely then, and because they constituted a clear example of female youth at risk in a city that fed herself with her own daughters.

- *Do you go out?* – was Portillo's straight question to Brenda.

- *But I don't go far. Just to talk to my friends* – said Brenda, as if she feared the disapproval of the journalist for not staying at home, despite of the rumors about the women's bodies that had appeared less than two kilometers away.

- *¿And, does every girl have a boyfriend?* – asked again the communicator.

- *Yes*

- *Have you heard about any woman assassinated here, within the neighborhood?*

- *No* – was Brenda's sharp answer, who kept looking straight to the camera with some distrust.

So, when she was asked by Lourdes Portillo if she personally knew any woman that had been murdered, without hesitating Brenda answered ‘no’, although she could not quite hide to the camera her amazement by a *chicana* intrusion so close to her house, placed at the end of *Rancho Anapra*.

Anyhow after this brief participation in a film-documentary that, according to the author was not only going to be distributed in Mexico, but also in the United States, was more evident than never

the need of supporting Brenda in order for her to finish her academic studies, planning her future wishes in her.

And now on top of that, with Judith's pregnancy, their expenses were much higher and the money was never enough to fulfill the basic needs of the family, for which her 50-peso a day salary⁽¹⁹⁾ at *ADC International* – a flourishing trans-national telecommunication company having two plants in Juárez and another one in Delicias, Chihuahua – was not enough for her nephew to be raised without anaemia and to be able to buy the ointment the doctor had prescribed for him, after a bad infection on his delicate child skin provoked by the sudden temperature changes and the constant exposure to the sand of the desert, from which was impossible to protect because they lived in the middle of its vastness.

This urgent hardship joined to the fear she felt walking back home so early in the morning, after her second shift at the *maquiladora* – a two-part journey because at midnight, as she was off from the *ADC International* she used to take the first of the buses that would leave her downtown, where then she would take the other one going towards *Rancho Anapra-Lomas del Polo*: twelve more kilometers of cold wind beaten streets and unpaved roads – made her look for a different sort of job with a more convenient schedule that would let her go back home when there was still sunlight, because the wild night in Ciudad Juárez had taken with her a lot of women without ever letting them return to their homes and, in many cases, without even leaving any clues about their terrible destinies to their families.

That was at least the quiet but constant rumor, heard all over the city, that her co-workers would sometimes discuss while rolling the wires at the production line, fixing the screws, or assembling the components of the satellite telephony machines that *ADC International*⁽²⁰⁾ supplied to special clients, such as the *US Department of Defense, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, (N. A. T. O.)*, and even the *American Peace Force*, formed in 1960 by the Senator then John F. Kennedy, which mission consisted in recruiting students eager to live and work in developing countries in the pursuit of setting better life conditions within them.

And with so many young lives torn to pieces because of gangs violence, narco-traffic settling scores, police brutality, or the homicidal hate of men that would not stand to see themselves supported by their wives, lovers, or whoever they were living with under those conditions, Marfa Elena shared with the Juárez women the fear of not going back home alive, although she never openly told so to Julia, her mother, nor Judith or Brenda, her sisters.

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She was afraid that in any given night, while the *ruta* was taking her back to *Rancho Anapra*, they would suddenly change routes ignoring why, getting deep into a desert lonely spot where in few and brief moments her dreams and most intimate wishes would be ravaged by the killer rage of her executioner, as he, aroused by the smell of her fear and the panick in her eyes, would leave her lifeless in that godforsaken land after having cowardly raped, beaten and strangled her to death.

Just as it had happened a year before to a teenager, who was left in the desert given her up for dead, but who had been able to stand up and walk in the middle of nowhere until she found someone to cry for help to.

Nancy Villalba Gonzalez, being only thirteen years old, in the early hours of March 18th, 1999 was kidnapped by the substitute driver of one of the buses owned by the *Motores Eléctricos* association, – located at one of the Ciudad Juárez Industrial Parks – the *maquiladora* where she used to work then. As she finished her shift on the job, Nancy, just as the rest of her co-workers, boarded the bus hired by the company to take its workers to their houses at night. Unfortunately that night Nancy was left as the last passenger to be taken home, and when she saw by herself with the bus driver, horrified, noticed that he had gotten onto a different way, leaving behind the last houses of the city, and was leading them deep into paths that she could not recognize being so dark outside the bus. When she finally overcame the terror she was feeling, and almost voiceless asked him

where they were going, he simply answered that he needed to put gas, while speeding up the unit belonging to the route *El Mirador* towards the *Granjas de Santa Elena* neighborhood, in the kilometer 17 of the road to *Casas Grandes*, where more than a dozen brutally murdered women had been found before.

When the bus finally stopped, Nancy recalls (21) that, in spite of her screams, she saw the man approaching oblivious and before he stripped, raped, hit and gave her up for dead, leaving her without any documents in the middle of the desert, in the most clinical way he asked her:

- *been fucked before?*

The next day Nancy managed to stand up from where, according to the plans of his attacker, should have been her grave, walked for miles until she found some houses from where she was taken to the General Hospital, and once safe there she could press charges against the man, later to be identified as Jesús Manuel Guardado Márquez, aka *el Tolteca, el Drácula* or *el Chacal*, aged 25 and alleged to be a former agent of the *Policía Judicial del Estado* (PJE), version that the authorities would deny afterwards.

Despite the formal complaint against him, Jesús Manuel Guardado Márquez managed to escape to Gomez Palacio, Durango, where he was found by chance in the late March thanks to his wife, Carmen Flores de la Rocha, who reported him to the police after have been beaten to a pulp as she had so many other times before. Once Guardado was detained he gave an assumed name and general information, but the civil servant in shift recognized him from the posters showing his photograph that the Ciudad Juárez Police had sent them, in order to look for the suspect of at least six murders of women involving rape.

In the early April 1999 the authorities of the *Subprocuraduría* of Justice of the Chihuahua State accused him of seven murders, occurred somewhere between June 1998 and March 1999. The victims were Brenda Patricia Méndez Vázquez, age 14; María Mendoza Arias, age 28; Celia Guadalupe Gómez de la Cruz, age 14; Rosalbi López Espinoza, age 25; Irma Angélica Rosales Lozano, age 13; Elena García Alvarado, age 35; and an unidentified adolescent among 14 and 16 years old.

Along with him other drivers of the route *El Mirador* were put in prison: José Gaspar Cevallos aka *el Gaspy*; Agustín Toribio Castillo, *el Kiani*; Víctor Moreno Rivera, *el Narco*; and Bernardo Hernández, *el Samber*.

For the Chihuahua authorities these rapists and supposed murderers included two more of the Guardado Márquez brothers, members of the Municipal Police – although their involvement in the homicides trail was never really followed, – and since their capture they were known *in vox populi* as the *Los Ruteritos* gang. Nevertheless, the most spectacular announcement about them was their alleged link with the Egyptian chemist Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif, who, according to the Police statements and the Special Attorney for Ciudad Juárez Women Homicides Investigation, Suly Ponce herself, perpetrated all from inside the prison in his eagerness to prove himself innocent to the law and then paid *Los Ruteritos* gang for every woman they killed, claiming from his “new, high security” cell, in the penitentiary of the city (*Centro de Readaptación Social CERESO*), that he did not have anything to do with those killings and that “*each corpse that was found was another contundent proof of his innocence*”(22).

This was the second time that *El Egipcio* – in prison since October 3rd, 1995, accused of murdering young Elizabeth Castro García, whose body was never entirely identified by her family because there was obvious physical discrepancy between the characteristics of Elizabeth’s body, and those of the one that was being taken by hers – was declared to be involved with the women homicides despite he was incarcerated, because in 1996 he had also been accused of committing serial killings to women through another gang called *Los Rebeldes*.

According to the reports of the *Procurador* (Attorney Special) Arturo Chávez Chávez in 1996, Sharif had met the *Los Rebeldes* gang leader at the Joe’s Place bar, a “hole” in Juárez downtown. A regular costumer to these kind of places, *El Egipcio* met Sergio Armendáriz, aka *El Diablo* there, and called him, once in prison, requesting him to kill young women to try to confuse the police and

claim his innocence. The police assured that for every young woman sacrificed Sharif gave the Rebeldes 1200 dollars, and that it was for this reason that the murders kept going in the city. However, regardless the imprisonment of the band members, assassinated women continued to be found up and down the city and on April 23rd, 1996, Javier López Molinar, the *Subprocurador*, was obliged to announce the presence of a third psychopath in Juárez.

Exactly three years later, in 1999, the same plot would repeat itself, only this time involving *Los Ruteiros*. Same story, different characters.

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That was why María Elena avoided going to the crowded dance halls too, discoteques and bars mostly spread through the Juárez Avenue, main street that dividing the city in two sides, – East and West – leads directly to the *Santa Fé Bridge*, right before one makes it to the heart of El Paso, in Texas.

These night clubs her production line co-workers frequently went to, generally on fridays, pay-days after a long tiring week of hard work– with everyday shifts from three p. m., until midnight – are well known across the city because in them they can buy or sell anything – alcohol, drugs, sex and even eager-to-cross-the-border human lives, – to the rythm of the strident music heard, full blasting constantly, all over the Juárez downtown as the sun starts to set.

At night as well as during the day the Juárez Avenue depicts a never ending gathering of explosive energy and vitality, walked through daily by hundreds of Mexicans, Americans, *pochos*(23), *cholos*, *chicanos*, *cowboys*, indigenous and other Latin-Americans pulled by the city that represents the biggest human pole in the northern border of Mexico.

Crossing it means crossing the last meters that move apart the underdevelopment from the developed world and, probably, the rush which the five or six blocks leading from the Cathedral, on the September 16 Avenue, to the *Paso del Norte - Santa Fé International Bridge* are walked, is the same that overwhelms you knowing that the faster you make it the faster you will improve your life thanks to the multiplier effect of the green dollars awaiting for you on the other side of the river. And then it becomes really worth it to walk fast, run, almost fly, chasing the American mirage vindicating all kinds of sacrifices, all kinds of prejudices against the “southern latinos” – against the *brownies* worse than blacks themselves, – all kinds of underpaid jobs compared to what a legitimate *gringo* makes (although their Hispanic looks and last names “betray” them, despite the fact that they were born in the abundant Texan soil).

Then the importance of risking one’s life in going through the last few meters that divide the United States of Mexico from the United States of America truly seems unimportant. How can it not be worth it if there, for a hard work journey (be it as a peasant gathering lettuces, tomatoes or strawberries on the fields, be it as a house maid, gardener or clerk in one of the hundreds of the cross-border Wal-Marts), at least 20 dollars a day are made without documents, compared to the maximum five or six dollars made by a well established, big *maquiladora* worker in Mexico, working shifts of at least 10 hours a day in production lines that only stop their frenetic motion to announce, three times a day, the coming of the new shift:

- “Attention. *The shift is over. We ask the workers to leave their places of work and move quickly to the exit gate, no stopping or delaying. A new shift is about to start. Thank you*”.

And it is because of this illusion created thanks to the American mirage reflection cast in the tranquil waters of the Brave River – of which the luminous beams extend their arms to every city in the border with Mexico, but which glitter shines all across the Continent, until the most distant latitudes to the south – that the people who walk during the day by the Juárez Avenue seem compelled by the same unique frenzy. They all walk in a rush, without ever stopping too much, without looking to the eyes to the others due to a certain distrust caused by so many episodes of bordering violence. A river of people trying to survive the best they can, regardless of the fact that in doing so they will have to step over the rest without any kind of guilt or remorse. A human river

that immerses in its din and drunkens in its everyday whirl: many come, but hundreds go beyond the bridge confusing among each other so much, that they almost lose the few certainties that the border has let them.

And the ones that did not make it across the border during the day, but were left at the other side of the bridge looking jealous to the ones that did make it, conceal their intentions to swim their ways under the shadows of the night, for not having the rights provided by the *American Visa*.

And it is precisely the night the shelter of men and women that, trying to forget the sorrows and common harms hunting the metropolis as apocalyptic riders, overflow their meagre existences by the Juárez Avenue and the surrounding streets, downtown the city. There daily life demons are exorcised in one big collective catharsis that is repeated restlessly night after night, as a ritual that had to be performed in order to forget the misery through the colossal binge.

Even before the sun sets the streets are illuminated with fluorescent neon signs that seem to fight each other for customers, showing multicolored posters full of the Mexican spirit characteristic vivacity. These flashy signs, with peculiar figures as a background for not less peculiar names, would almost every time depict the female body as an eye-catching preview of what can be found inside.

Names such as “*Princesitas*”, “*Joe’s Place*”, “*La Tuna Country*”, the “*Safar Bar*”, “*La Estrella*”, “*Paralelo 38*”, “*Monterrey Bar*”, “*Azteca*”, “*Parral*”, the “*Club Rueda*” – where it is well known that police officers and *narcos* get together, according to the rumors around the city – the “*Casino Deportivo*”, “*La Fiesta*”, the “*Kentucky Club*” – which was inaugurated in 1920, being one of the oldest in town, known in better days for being prestigious and elegant. As a matter of fact it used to be visited by movie stars, politicians and artists, – “*La Maledón*”, “*El Nebraska*”, “*La Casa Colorada*”, “*El Vértigo*”, “*El Alive*”, the “*Willys*” bar, “*Manhattan*”, the “*Noa Noa*”, the “*Club Sinaloense*”, the “*Bar Pachangas*”, among many others, are spread for anyone who is looking for some fun in the city night life, both legal and illegal.

Because illegality makes progresses at the same time than legality does in this border land, and sometimes the first one seems to run over the other in its frantic move. So, if you are only looking for some fun “in the good way”, enjoying a drink to the tune of a latin rythm or northern music, the market’s offer will copiously exceed the expectations of the clients, who will be able to find anything in these scraggy night dives: prostitution hidden behind dance-hall signs, sale and use of drugs in the more than a thousand “*picaderos*”⁽²⁴⁾ spread all over the city, swing exchanges with authentic Mexican *machos* and with hot-blooded women, people offering to “cross you” to the American side avoiding the most strict border control regulations, smuggling of all kinds of weapons arrived to the city mostly from the United States, as a part of the resources destined for the lords of narco-trafficking.

Paradoxically all this endless list of amusements, most of them extreme but certainly all of them illegal, sticks within the small downtown of Juárez, where the organized crime has gotten to coexist with the economic power. They have mutual benefits. The one serves the other in the zone that starts at the intersection of the Juárez Avenue and the *16 de Septiembre* Avenue, in the city centre in front of the *Plaza de Armas* where the kiosk, the fountain and the Cathedral, consecrated to the *Guadalupe Virgin*, arise as mute and unemotional witnesses, and keeps doing so for four more blocks, until getting to the *Mariscal* neighborhood. Not far from the *Santa Fé Bridge*, well watched over by both sides police forces.

And it is inside this tiny territory, this red light district that is covered in less than a ten-minute fast walk, that the most basic instincts are unleashed concealed under the shadows of the night. In this ghetto the marihuana and cocaine pushers traffic with them, under the watchful sight of the police that should watch over the border. Many of these clandestine activities are carried out precisely in the back rooms of some of the so called bars of the *La Mariscal* neighborhood, and, as if that were not bad enough, a lot of the frequent kidnappings of these murdered young women happened right here, in front of everyone’s eyes.

That is why María Elena did not go dancing downtown on Friday nights... that is why she felt afraid of going out of the *maquiladora* at midnight and right downtown had to switch of *ruta* to make it home... that is why she decided to look for another job which could be done during the day-time that would let her go back to *Anapra* before the sunset.

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Even if the darkness of the night may hide under its veil conducts that may look for sneaking out from the rules at any time, the daylight brightness fails to fully destroy the amazing night energy characteristic of the Juárez Avenue.

In the corner across from the *Plaza de Armas*, in front of one of the many branches of the “*Zapatería 3 Hermanos*” – one of the most spread and cheapest shoe stores in Mexico, in which have been seen for the last time some of the girls that were later found assassinated, not counting two ex-employees that disappeared under unclear circumstances up today, – stands the old Border Custom building, used nowadays as a museum administered by the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH)*, as a symbol of the frequent trade exchanges that have characterized the Mexican-American border throughout the time.

From this point, right at the intersection of the *16 de Septiembre* and *Juárez* avenues, the fluorescent neon lights that were shining all over the night hide timidly, as the sun comes out, and they get replaced by the signs of bars, restaurants and other entertainment places frequently visited by the *gringos* before the sun sets again.

Farmacias, Dentistas, Tatoos, Vinos y Licores, Ópticas, Bancos, Escuelas de Idiomas, Compra y Venta-Cambio de Dólares and *Apuestas Legales* (Drugstores, Dentists, Tatoos, Liquors, Optician's shops, Banks, Language Schools, Dollar Exchange and Legal Bets), for not mentioning the uncountable restaurants and bars that in spite of keeping open twenty-four hours a day, only become really profitable at night, are some of the most frequently found businesses on the Juárez Avenue, just before you get to the sentry box of the *Santa Fé Bridge*.

At that point the Americans take advantage of the low prices found in Mexico to buy their supplies, usually consisting in: beer and liquor in bulk, prescription glasses, medicines in the popular drugstores “*Farmacias Benavides*”, dental works that are definitely cheaper at this side of the river, besides handcrafts and *souvenirs* that are also exhibited, colorful and eye-catching, at the small handmade goods market located right in the middle of the avenue.

Nevertheless, perhaps what most gets the attention of the amateur eye just come to town, are the low-class, Godforsaken hotels announcing rooms for only 99 *pesos* – less than 10 dollars – per night. You realize they are hotels just because the mural signs tell you so, since they actually look like some of the many decadent houses located in the city centre. The dirty windows of these so-called hotels do not let you see through, but one do not need to go passed the front gates to know they are crowded at all times, all the year long.

Out of their narrow doors, sitting on the sidewalk of the Juárez Avenue, you can see both young Mexicans clearly coming from the south with the intention to cross the border, and older Americans from El Paso looking for easily obtainable sexual transgressions available in a city where drugs, alcohol and sex are widely tolerated. The first ones are normally found in groups, as if that gave them some kind of security when dealing with the zone *polleros* that promised to cross them to the American side, after paying in advance solid amounts of money. The second group, on the other hand, consists usually of alone individuals in the habit of hanging out of their hotels to watch people walk around, as if they were continuously lying in wait for their next prey. The first ones turn their faces aside when you look at them, being it a good idea to go unnoticed in there, not to make people suspect them. The others, on the contrary, stare at you with lascivious eyes as asking you to join them in their erotic adventures for some dollars.

But the most amazing thing is not seeing all these men lurking around in the shadows, as hoping for a miracolous event to change ther lives once and forever. After all so much stillness could not be

considered dangerous. What makes you really fear around that place is the frantic motion hidden behind those apparently static, steady and inert figures. Cars, *trocas*⁽²⁵⁾, *vans* that park for a few moments outside of the mentioned hotels, waiting for someone to come out of there, usually in a rush, to hand them something hardly noticeable for the untrained eye. It is only a moment during the interchange, in which the small scale drug dealing business scores another point at plain daylight and in front of everyone's eyes.

And at the end of the avenue, right at the entrance of the toll fares of the '*PC-51 Puente Internacional Paso del Norte*' – best known as *Santa Fé* – a big wood board painted in pink with a wooden cross centered on it, sadly stands, and around the cross there are hundreds of nails that originally had ribbons tied up with some women names written down. To each nail there was a ribbon that corresponded to a name of a different woman, as a way of commemorating each of the women murdered just a few meters from El Paso. Moreover many of them were precisely seen for the last time at some point of the Juárez Avenue. And in the middle of the cross a pink sign saying: "**Ni una más**", seems to beg the ones who look at it not to forget these pink murders that everybody knows, but that most of the people ignore.

And behind the enormous cross, beyond the bridge, the *American Interstate 10* – a freeway that connects Texas with New México and California, – the South Pacific Rail Road Company – transporting thousands of merchandise from the East to the West Coast, – and the impressive building of the *Wells Fargo*, the three of them perfectly visible from Mexico, appear to remind the Mexicans that kept trapped in the Juárez Avenue that the border is not the promised land for them, but on the contrary, it is strictly forbidden to cross it.

*

The huge wooden cross with the central letters "**Ni una más**", was put there at the end of an activists demonstration in which the Human Right Commission of Chihuahua, the State capital, added themselves to the voices of the people from Juárez denouncing the terrible gender crimes that from 1993 had been recorded in the city⁽²⁶⁾.

In february 2003 the "*Mujeres de Negro*" association manifested on the streets by means of an emotional march that left from the State's capital, some 380 kilometers from Juárez, and ended at the *Paso del Norte International Bridge*, in the city that had sadly become the world's capital of femicide within the previous ten years.

The march, named "*Éxodo por la vida*" (Exodus for Life), joined mothers of women assassinated that, dressed in black and wearing big pink hats, showed the population their permanent mourn. Their message was clear: due to the impunity and the poor results of the official investigations, the civil society was protesting out on the street because they did not want the homicides to be forgotten. However, perhaps the most alarming message they were sending was that the crimes against young, working women, that at the very beginning had taken place only in Ciudad Juárez, were now expanding all across the State, and unfortunately were beginning to be repeated in the city of Chihuahua too.

When the participants arrived at the limits of Juárez, a political shock group was already waiting for them entrusted not to let them pass. In their attempt to stop the "Exodus for Life" some anti-manifestants pushed some of the women to the ground in the struggle. In order to avoid that these aggressions continued, some citizens of Chihuahua put themselves between both factions creating a sort of human fence capable of neutralizing the efforts of the political group, as much as letting the protesters continue with their way until the *Santa Fé International Bridge*, just as it had been planned.

Once in the city the crowd that joined the participants became spectacular, and as they got to the 16 of September Avenue, a little bit before they turned on the Juárez Avenue, the thousands of people in the protest started singing in memory of the victims, at the same time that they delivered furious claims against the alleged intentions of the State Governor, Patricio Martínez, of stopping them.

When they reached the *Paso del Norte International Bridge*, where the demonstration was supposed to finish, a group of men and women took out the immense cross, brought from Chihuahua, and put it on a metallic base that had been covered with a pink board more than three meters tall. To the feet of the cross the monument against oblivion included a plastic female bust, besides of hundreds of nails labeled with the names of the victims, or with the inscription “*no identificada*” (unidentified) as a symbol of all those bodies whose identities had not been determined yet.

In the meantime, employees of the international bridge as much as uniformed police officers, wrote down the names of the speakers and interrogated the participants about who had organized the protest demonstration, that for some hours stopped the international traffic.

Human-right activist Samira Izaguirre, a radio speaker at one of the local stations – that some time after the march would consider the option of political asylum in the United States because of the incessant threats that her family had to suffer, as a consequence of her brave support to the mothers of the victims, – announced through the megaphone, raising her voice versus every one attempting to pulling down the cross: “*Si la tiran, regresaremos a colocar una más grande*” (“If you knock it down, we’ll come back and place a bigger one!”).

*

On June 20th, 2000 – a little less than three years before that great cross was put on the border, commemorating the hundreds of missing and assassinated women in the State of Chihuahua, – María Elena left her house to work without possibly thinking that three years later, Julia, her mother, would be among the women involved in the “Exodus for Life” march, and even less so that her name: *María Elena Chávez Caldera*, would hang from one of the hundreds of nails around such a cross.

After all she had gotten a new job as a domestic employee in the house of an upper-middle class family, whose father was a well known guard in the maximum security prison of the city.

This new job, that allowed her to go out from and back home when there was still sunlight, put her at a minor risk than her previous job at the *maquiladora*, besides of giving her the chance of earning a little bit more than the 50 daily pesos that she was making at the *ADC International*.

She would finally be able to help Brenda through the school year, and she would now buy the skin ointments for the rash on her nephew, the first-born of her sister Judith. And as time moved on, if she excelled at her job and proved to the family that they could trust her because they would never find another maid as her – as clean and neat, responsible, punctual, docile, diligent and with such a good will to do things – she might be able to continue studying someday without stopping work, because deep inside she had always liked the school she had to quit on, just as she finished Elementary school, in order to help her large family.

Because the Chávez Caldera family shared the same luck with other thousands of families that had emigrated to the north searching for a less meagre life, thanks to the jobs created with the *maquiladoras*, unimagining the plaintive misery to what the hard reality would face them. The reality of an extreme poverty existence in the poorest areas of Ciudad Juárez, right in the middle of the desert loneliness.

That is why, on Tuesday June 20th, 2000, María Elena said good-bye to Julia as every other day, happy to go to the house of the family for which she was working as a maid – people who were the last to see her alive – and never came back home again...

**

¹Cholo: The slang of the border refers as *cholo* (*cholito*) to the urban gang members whose attires are characterized by baggy pants and very loose t-shirts, tennis shoes or explorer boots and baseball caps. In Ciudad Juárez the young men that usually attend the popular night clubs can be separated, according to their clothes, in *cholos* or *cheros*.

Look at the brilliant description made by Octavio Paz, in his book “*El Laberinto de la Soledad*” of the “*pachucos*” or *cholos*: “*As it is known, the “pachucos” are young male gang members, generally born in Mexico, that live in the southern (United States) cities that single out as much because of their clothing as because of their language and behaviour. Instinctive rebels, it is against them that the American racism has more than once been fatten. But the “pachucos” do not vindicate their race nor their ancestors’ nationality. The “pachuco” does not want to return to its Mexican origin; at the same time he does not want – apparently, at least – to be joined to the north American life. All in him is the impulse that denies himself, contradiction knot, enigma*”. (Paz, Octavio. Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993).

²Hester van Nierop, Dutch-woman that was at Ciudad Juárez before continuing her trip to the United States, was found murdered, on September 20th 1998, in a room at the Hotel Plaza, on the Ugarte street downtown, located next to the Juárez Avenue and only some meters from the Paso del Norte International Bridge. She seems to be the only European woman among the victims. Her case has not been resolved regardless her parent’s frequent appeals, as much as those made by the Dutch government. Nevertheless, she is not the only woman that has been killed inside one of these hotel rooms. In Spring of the same year the body of *Perla Patricia Hernández* was also found, in similar circumstances as the ones of Hester, but this time in the Cabin 25 of the *Motel Fronterizo*. (González Rodríguez, Sergio. Anagrama, 2002)

³Aviador : colloquial name received by the people that irregularly settle down in lands that do not belong to them and that, usually, lack of the basic services such as drinkable water, electric light, sewers, etc.

⁴Gringo: during the 1847 American invasion to Mexico the Mexican soldiers would call so the North American ones that tried to conquer Mexico, referring to their green military uniforms. It is the phonetic result of *green – go (home)*.

⁵Look at the masterly description done by Rafael Loret de Mola in his book “*Ciudad Juárez*” – Parte primera, *El drama histórico*. (Loret de Mola, Rafael. Océano, 2005)

⁶In the early sixties the Mexican government created the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (1961) and *Industrialización de la Frontera* (1965), that would set the foundations of the twin plant industry in Mexico. The maquiladoras purpose was to reduce costs thanks to the exploitation of the cheap handwork in charge of assembling the components of their products.

⁷Look at the figures that Sergio González Rodríguez provides in the second chapter of his book, named “*El Mapa difícil*”. (González Rodríguez, Sergio. Anagrama, 2002)

⁸Official information supplied by the Government of Ciudad Juárez (web site: www.juarez.gob.mx)

⁹Vaquero : people whose appearance reminds the looks of *cowboys* and *cowgirls* in the old western style, with some elements of the Mexican ranchers. In Ciudad Juárez they are known as “*cheros*” too, wearing at every time cowboy hats and blue jeans, squared shirts with fringes under the elbow, bolos on the neck, leather jackets with elaborated figures adorning their chests, boots that resound at the dance halls following the tune of the “*norteña*” ballads – marked by the constant voice of the accordion – and flaunting golden jewelry to complete their attires.

¹⁰In Mexico, where the Government regime is a Presidential, Democratic and Federal Republic, the police is constituted at three levels: federal, state and municipal. The border surveillance and the fight against the organized crime that jeopardizes the national sovereignty (as narco-trafficking, or as the crimes against humanity), are exclusively an issue of the federal police.

¹¹Pollero: that is how people smugglers are known at the border between Mexico and the U. S. They are responsible for crossing illegally hundreds of people without documents that day after day make their way to the American territory. They are also called: “*coyotes*”.

¹²Yonque: all over the Northern border of Mexico the second hand-automotive spare parts dealers or junk yards are named like that. Derived from the American pronunciation of “*junk*”, precisely for selling junk spare parts from wrecked, crashed or stolen cars.

¹³About narco-trafficking in Mexico, specifically on the Cartel of Ciudad Juárez originally commanded by Amado Carrillo Fuentes, “*El Señor de los Cielos*” (“The Lord of the Skies”) – who apparently died on July 4th, 1997, after a plastic surgery operation at the Santa Monica Hospital in Mexico City (story retold by Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones in the American movie “*Traffic*”), – take a look at the book of José Alfredo Andrade Bojorges, “*La Historia secreta del narco. Desde Navolato vengo*”. (Andrade Bojorges, José Alfredo. Océano, 1999)

¹⁴With the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty signed by Mexico and the United States in 1848, the Bravo River was designated to be the new natural border between both countries. The treaty also stipulated the civil rights protection and guaranteed the rights of property of the Mexicans that stayed within the new American territory. Nevertheless, when the American Senate ratified the treaty, the article X that guaranteed the protection of the land concessions given to the Mexicans by the governments of Spain and Mexico, was canceled. At the same time it weakened the article IX, that guaranteed the citizenship rights awarded to them. This had as a consequence an anti Mexican atmosphere that in the end led to the civil rights violations against the Mexican people there. In Texas, they were restricted to vote; in New Mexico they were victims of violence; and in California the authorities approved laws against them (Greaser Laws, – disparagingly

referring to them). Look at, “*Apuntes para la historia de la guerra entre México y Estados Unidos*”. (Semo, Enrique. Siglo XXI, 1999)

15 Official information provided by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (I.N.E.G.I.) (web site: www.inegi.gob.mx)

16 **Ruta:** in Ciudad Juárez the urban buses are known like that. These buses – privately franchised – are generally old and in dreadful conditions.

17 Reference to the movie documentary “*Señorita extraviada*” (Missing Young Woman) (Xochitl Films Production); director and producer , Lourdes Portillo. New York, NY Distributed by Women Make Movies, 2001. Portillo is a woman from Chihuahua living in the United States since 1960. This documentary has won several awards, such as the Jury’s Special Award given in the Sundance Festival of the U. S., and the Néstor Almendro Prize of Human Rights Watch, at the New York Festival. In Mexico its distribution has not had the expected attention.

18 **Chicano/a:** word generally used to represent the ethnic-cultural identity of the Mexican-American people. It is specially used to name the American with Mexican descent, and involves the social consciousness of the political battle – started in the sixties – that they have had to accomplish to be seen not only as foreigners without rights, but as legitimate American citizens with Mexican descent. Paradoxically in Mexico the term has a negative meaning: the *chicanos* are Mexican-American people of a low class and weak moral values.

19 The monthly minimum salary of a twin plant worker in the North of Mexico is 1,200.00 Mexican pesos. (Approximately 120 US dollars). In the United States the minimum salary per hour is 5.15 dollars (Source: Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (I.N.E.G.I.) (web site: www.inegi.gob.mx)

20 Source: ADC International (web site: www.adc.com)

21 Speaking about the kidnapping and attempted murder of Nancy Villalba González, refer to the books by: Sergio González Rodríguez, “*Huesos en el desierto*” (Chapter 11. *Muertas sin Fin* p. 144-145); Diana Washington Valdés, “*Cosecha de Mujeres*” (Cap. *Atrocidades*. p. 55-56); and Víctor Ronquillo, “*Las muertas de Juárez*” (Cap. XI. *La banda de los Ruteiros*. p. 227-245).

22 About the alleged guilt of Latif Sharif in the homicides, also refer to the book by Gregorio Ortega, “*El caso de Elizabeth Castro García y Abdel Latif Sharif*”, (Ortega, Gregorio. Fontamara, 1999); besides the well documented research done by Lourdes Portillo in her documentary “*Señorita extraviada*”.

23 **Pocho:** with this name are known, in the rest of Mexico, the Northern border inhabitants due to their “American-style” accent. It has a derogatory connotation and the *pochos* are characterised by *mexicanizing* some Anglo-Saxon words (e. g. *Troca* (for truck); *yonque* (for junk), etc.).

24 **Picaderos:** retail selling spots of hard drugs. They are named so because in them the drugs are not only bought, but they are also shot in poor and unhealthy conditions. It is estimated that in Juárez for each school there are five bars, in addition to the more than a thousand ‘picaderos’ spread across the city. (González Rodríguez, Sergio. Anagrama, 2002)

25 **Troca:** name that the North population of Mexico give to vans. It is a Spanish adaptation of the English word “truck”.

26 Look at the emotional description of the “*Éxodo por la vida*” march made by the Mexican journalist living in El Paso, Diana Washington Valdés, in her book “*Cosecha de Mujeres. Safari en el desierto mexicano*” (Cap. *La muerte de un abogado*. p. 78-81)

I. FEMICIDE IN CIUDAD JUAREZ, CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO.

"There are some crimes that must not be forgotten, there are some victims whose suffering claims more narration than revenge. Just the will of remembering may allow these crimes not to be repeated ever again "

- Paul Ricoeur, *Tiempo y Narración*

Getting to Ciudad Juarez may not be as simple as we may think: from Mexico city there are no direct flights to this metropolis and it is much easier to get a non-stop flight to El Paso, in Texas, which is just across the international border bridge. Instead you have to stopover in Monterrey, in the state of Nuevo Leon, and then take another plane to the final destination.

But once arrived at the airport there is a big poster welcoming visitors:

- "*Bienvenidos a Juárez la ciudad de los negocios*"

and such a warming welcome may never make you suspect that you are entering into the city that has become, in the last fourteen years, one of the most dangerous places for women in the world.

But entering into the city may not be easy for everyone due to the fact that border locations have increasingly become staging areas for entry of undocumented persons into the United States, and what was once a trickle has become a flood: right in the airport corridor, before getting into the Immigration Control Office, there is a couple of men wearing suit and tie that ask you the motivation of your stay in spite of the validity of your mexican passport into your own country. Maybe it is the only place in Mexico where mexicans have to justify their stay, but if your physical features seem more from Central America to these men, then the questions become harder and even more aggressive. This is what happened to a family of apparently poor people that could have been from any indigenous region of any mexican southern state, but who seemed to be illegal foreigners to the controllers probably due to their very short height. These family members – apparently it was the elder brother with his three youngest sisters, who were traveling in the same plane I was – were trying to explain that 'No', they were not from Guatemala neither from Belize and that 'Yes', they were mexican and did not have their passports with them because there is no need for mexicans to carry their passports into the Mexican territory.

Ciudad Juarez, as any other border region, represents a challenge for both: the native people that still live there and the immigrants that everyday arrive into the city looking either to get a job into the hundred of 'twin plants' that boost the regional economy, or to cross the border for tourism, academic or labour purposes. Juarez is Mexico. The space and the time, the war and the peace, the abundance and the debauchery. All the extremes get together into the same small territory that separates Mexico from the United States of America.

LA FRONTERA...

The U.S. – Mexico borderlands generally, and Ciudad Juarez particularly, seem to be the microcosm of the world. The postnational dynamics of the interplay between two strong and stable independent states has created a hybrid society which, despite its surface pathologies, displays astonishing hybrid vigor and local variation. Spaulding and Audley wrote in their introduction to their article *La Frontera* (The Border), that "the Mexico-U.S. border region offers the irony created by the juxtaposition of so diverse an ecosystem and wildlife habitat, incredible industrial and agricultural wealth, yet unimaginable human poverty and environmental degradation... But for regional natives, the roughly 100 km. wide area is the synthesis of these contrasts. Woven together

by its unique political and cultural history, La Frontera is a place like nowhere else on earth” (Spaulding and Audley. 2001: 103).

Effectively the border zone between Mexico and the United States is a forbidding physical scenario not hospitable to human settlement due to the immensity of “The Great American Desert” that crosses both regions, but the zone has counterbalanced its lack of conventional resources, its pervasive aridity and its reliance of nonrenewable reserves of groundwater, with locational advantages for industry and trade, tourism and recreation. The borderlands exemplify forces linking nation-states at unequal levels of development. In Mexico it combines rapid industrialization with a flood of youthful economic refugees seeking work in a set of ‘instant border megacities’ with terrible levels of pollution. Equally rapid growth is found in retirement havens in the United States, superimposed on an older stratum of border cattle ranches, timber concessions, tourism centers, and mineral claims.

In the last decade in *La Frontera* “*along with rapid industrialization and accompanying population growth came additional pollution and waste burdens on this fragile ecosystem... There were fewer than 5 million people living in the 2000 mile region ten years ago. That figure has now more than doubled. Factors compelling migration to the region include relocation of retirees to the warm southwest climate; migration of Mexican seeking jobs; and industry relocation seeking inexpensive labour while not sacrificing direct access to the U.S. markets... Between 1970 and 1988, the population in Mexican border states grew at an annual average rate of 36%*”. (Spaulding and Audley. 2001: 98).

Mexico and the United States share a 2000-mile boundary divided by the *Rio Grande* – known as *Rio Bravo* in Mexico – and along this border there are six major twin-city pairings of significant size. From west to east they are: Tijuana-San Diego, Mexicali-Calexico, Ciudad Juárez-El Paso, Nuevo Laredo-Laredo, Reynosa-McAllen, and Matamoros-Brownsville.

These and other cities along the U.S.-Mexico border have exploded at geometric rates: Nogales, in the State of Sonora, expanded from 25,000 people in 1970 to an estimated 300,000-400,000 in 2000, but paradoxically the city still relies on the same water system originally installed in 1945.

All this incredible population growth of the Mexican border cities took place on a platform of economic expansion. Since the end of the Mexican Revolution (1910 - 1917) to the presidential term of Manuel Avila Camacho – who was the first civil president after the revolution – in 1940, the country set up the foundation on which current institutions that deal with peasants, workers, social security, welfare, central banking, civil control of the armed forces, the formation of unions, the political party and land reform, rest (Aguilar Camín and Meyer. 1993: 125-126). These institutions, that made Mexico independent, were later used to facilitate the movement of value and wealth to the core, but this is not to say that the Mexican citizenry was excluded from the immediate benefits of these programs. As a proof of this from the 1940s through the 1960s, the development of agriculture in northern Mexico increased significantly just as a reflection of the recent formed institutions.

In fact after the revolution native Sonoran⁵ revolutionaries returned to claim large tracts of confiscated properties and, after getting them, these elites intermarried with the rising urban middle

⁵ Sonora (the capital city is Hermosillo) is a Mexican northern state located in the northwest of the country. It borders with the United States (Arizona and Nuevo Mexico) to the north, Sinaloa state to the south, Chihuahua state to the east and the Sea of Cortes (Gulf of California) to the west. Sonora is the second largest state in land-mass in Mexico –just after Chihuahua - with 184,934 square kilometres. In the 2000 it had 2,216,969 inhabitants (which represented the 2.3% of the total Mexican population).

class to form a new farming and land-owning caste that developed a lifestyle of luxurious consumption comparable to the upper urban classes elsewhere in the country. They had the highest savings rate in the nation and some of their gains were channelled to the United States, and to a lesser extent to Europe, in the form of investments, savings, health care, education and vacation trips. The farming elites were members of the best clubs. Some lived in urban splendour in the best residential areas and commuted to their farms by air. Their children went to school in the best private schools in Mexico city, Guadalajara, Arizona and California. Women went to Tucson to have their babies. And for sure no one made more money in the world from agriculture than Sonorans (Hewitt de Alcántara. 1978: 127-128).

All this agricultural development that made of Sonora the breadbasket of Mexico – known as the “golden age of Mexican agriculture” because the government supported this sector by providing loans, water, the necessary infrastructure such as the improvement of railroads, paved highways and roads, wells, irrigation systems, and the introduction of electricity, for not mentioning the different subsidies to price of products such as wheat and corn, represented one-quarter of the national budget from 1926 through the 1960s, within the “Mexican Miracle” period (1934-1965) – based on the alliance of political, agency and financial groups, was enhanced by the fact that five of Sonora’s governors had been Presidents of the Republic or relatives of presidents. So it was evident that the revolution’s goal of agrarian reform that was supposed to end with large estate ownership, ideally evoked by the popular revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, was defeated by permitting the corporate appropriation of communal lands.

Even if this “golden age” period of agriculture attracted a lot of people to the north, significant urbanization of the northern border states did not begin until the advent, from the 1940s to the mid-1960s, of some phenomena that boosted, altogether, the concentrated migration: agricultural development, the advent of the World War II, the *Bracero*⁶ Program, and the return of *braceros* from the United States to border towns after 1964. These events acted as mechanisms that extracted labour from the surrounding countryside and nearby states. The urban area first, and later the city, reproduced and moved excess labour in the form of servants and male workers to the border and into the neighbouring U.S. border cities and states.

The World War II marked the beginning of a period of rapid economic growth for both countries, though more for the U.S. than for Mexico as a whole. The War gave a boost to industrialization and when the American continent, geographically located so far from the armed conflict, was attacked by the Japanese Aviation Force and the American youth had to say goodbye for a while to their normal lives to fight the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis forces in Europe, they were replaced by Mexican workers through the “*Bracero Accord*”. This bilateral Accord, signed in 1942, allowed the recruitment of labourers legally through labour contractors in Mexico’s northern cities. It was the consequence of the great need of agricultural field labourers and railroad workers during the War. This Program produced the legal movement of over four million migrants to the U.S. and this need of labour continued after the war as agriculture developed in the southwest of the States. The end of the *Bracero* Accord in 1964 resulted in the arrival of millions of undocumented workers in subsequent years.

In the U.S. *braceros* were able to find better wages, housing and health services during the 45-day period of the contract, and after the end of the agreement they either returned to Mexico for a new

⁶ **Braceros** were mostly “*ejidatarios*” (in Mexico the communal plots of lands created by the revolution were called “*ejidos*” and belonged to the whole community, so the assigned families that exploited the “*ejidos*” were not able to sell them. This was in order to avoid land concentrations), residents of communal properties where they were supposed to making a living. However in real terms this was not possible and they either worked as sharecroppers or labourers for landowners, rented or lost their lands to the elite, or migrated to urban centres in Mexico.

contract or continued to work as illegal residents. But not everybody who decided to come back to Mexico was always lucky, so the one-third who could not obtain new contracts decided to become undocumented workers in the States anyway. The number of *braceros* peaked at over 430,000 in 1955 and if the earliest workers were mostly older, married men whose wives and children worked *ejidal* lands in the absence of the farmer, later on this tendency changed and they started to include younger, single, unskilled male farm-workers and urban service workers. Little by little women began to accompany men and seasonal work, thus, became an important strategy to maintain their small *ejidos* (Massey et al. 1987: 74-76).

But the end of the War brought a reduction of Mexican workers beyond the “*Río Grande*” and, once the *Bracero* Accord was demised, not everybody could remain in the United States. Instead return migrants to Mexican border towns invested in housing and business, engaged in stall or street-cart sales, worked in local shops, drove taxis, formed squatter settlements, and created a marginal petty economy. Soon, they sent from their families from the interior and cities like Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez and Nuevo Laredo, more than tripled their 1940 population. Ultimately, the presence of displaced unemployed workers in Mexican border towns led the government to take measures to resolve high rates of unemployment and social unrest in the area.

For instance, in 1961 the Mexican government designed a plan called the “*Programa Nacional Fronterizo*” (*PRONAF*) – the National Border Program – with two objectives: a) to introduce urban and industrial infrastructure in the northern border; and b) to improve the quality of life of local residents by making the border more attractive through the construction of shopping centres and similar amenities closely linked to the industry of tourism. All these efforts to improve the living conditions of the northern border as a national strategy to boost the economy of the whole country, could not stop nor even control the incessant influx of immigrants into the region, so *La Frontera* continued to have its independent rules and characteristics that did not follow any central regulations nor national policies at all. Migration was out of control and this tendency has prevailed up to now, intensified by the 1982 and 1995 national crisis, by the intense use of female labour in the *maquiladora* program, and recently by the practical consequences of the *North America Free Trade Agreement*.

* Maquilando la Frontera...

In 1964 and following the tendency of the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo*, Mexico established the “*Border Industrialization Program*” (*BIP*) – also known as “*Maquiladora*⁷, Program” – to encourage U.S. firms to relocate labour-intensive industries. Its aim was to create a Mexican-American integration perspective able to use the excess of labour and the economic advantages offered by Mexico, combined with the American technology and *know-how*. The *maquiladoras*⁸ were supported by U.S. dollars and took advantage of cheap, disposable female labour and right-to-work rules, besides exploiting soft environmental laws to achieve greater profit. With the *BIP* Mexico hoped to compete with the Far Eastern countries, where American industrialists had been locating assembly plants. It would permit the United States and other countries to operate partially or wholly owned assembly plants in a twelve-mile-wide free zone (called Export Processing Zone, or *EPZ*) starting at the border. Statutes also allowed duty-free importation of components to be

⁷ The “*maquiladoras*” or twin plants, are foreign-investment companies seeking to relocate their production into countries offering low-cost labour, flexible working rules and poor environmental laws. In the case of Mexican maquiladoras generally they have had the production of components in Mexico and the assembly of final products in the U.S. (even if nowadays they have diversified this traditional role). They were granted further concessions (tariff reductions) under the North American Free Trade Agreement, effective since January 1st, 1994.

⁸ The verb “*maquilar*” means to assemble. Earlier it referred to the portion kept by the mill as a fee for milling flour. As the case of wheat and corn, the modern *maquilas* accept a resource that is processed (assembled) and then returned to the U.S. with the greatest profit.

assembled in Mexico and duty-free exportation after assembly. Temporary location of the products was necessary to qualify for duty-free status, and the products could not be sold in Mexico.

Thomas Weaver, in his article about the economic development of the U.S.-Mexico border region from 1940 to 2000, explained perfectly well the enormous economic gains of the *Maquiladora Program* for the United States, that encouraged the participation of American businessmen in the border industries through the active role of the border Chambers of Commerce. They also created special businesses to advertise and simplify the financing, location, legal integration, staffing, and other necessary activities for the creation of twin plants. The substantial earnings by American border retailers further enhanced the border economy. The supply of machines and industrial products to the twin plant in Mexico established a boon to the U.S. border states, which as a result of participating had increased their industrial and manufacturing economic sectors dramatically in a region not previously known for industrial activity. The United States twin plants also gained from lower wages in border cities compared to those paid elsewhere in the United States. For example, the minimum hourly wage in Arizona in 1980 was \$3.25, and in 1999 was about \$5.65, much less than in many other places in the U.S. (Weaver, Thomas. 2001: 114).

On the other hand in 1972 Mexico made two important changes in statutes regulating the *Border Industrialization Program*. First, plants restricted to a 12-mile free zone could locate anywhere except in highly industrialized areas. They were obliged to locate in industrial existing parks, a provision designed to promote the development of smaller border towns. Second, the decree permitted sale in Mexico of some plant production with the provision that duty was paid on the components imported and that the item would not compete with Mexican products. One year later, in 1973, Mexico allowed 100 percent foreign ownership of *maquiladoras* rather than the prior limitation of 49 percent. In 1989 further changes in regulations permitted inclusion of the processing of crops. For example, an onion grown from an imported seed could be re-exported in flake or powder form to the U.S. In recent times, the automobile industry has emerged as an important component of the program, but agricultural *maquiladoras* are the fastest growing segment of the \$3 billion per year industry (Carrillo and Hualde. 1998: 79-97).

In 1970, six years after the creation of the *Border Industrialization Program*, there were 219 companies operating factories spread in 13 Mexican cities and towns along the border. The estimated number of employees was 2,000 to 3,000, and the minimum daily wage ranged from \$2.58 USD in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, to \$3.68 USD in Tijuana, Baja California Norte (Baerrensen. 1971). By 1973 Mexico had passed Taiwan and Hong Kong in the number of assembly plants. The number of plants increased steadily so that by 1994 there were 2,065 plants employing 579,519 people throughout Mexico's northern border. They represented its main source of foreign investment and since then, as a consequence of the *North America Free Trade Agreement*, the number of plants located away from the northern border has increased, as has the number of male workers hired. However female employees still predominate, ranging from 63 to 77 percent of industry workers. Still, 8 out of 10 plants are located on the border close to U.S. supplies because of cheaper transportation costs and by the great offer of job seekers in the region (either females, return migrants, or undocumented workers trying to cross the border) (Carrillo and Hualde. 1998: 79-97).

But even if the *maquiladoras* were supposed to provide general employment, the transfer of skills and technology, and produce a secondary manufacturing industry in Mexico to supply *know-how* and technological skills, the reality was very different and brought many critics about. Recently only some of the initial goals have been accomplished with the expansion to include automobile and equipment plants, the hiring of more men, and the plants dispersal throughout all Mexico. Until recently, thus, Americans who lived on the U.S. side of the border and commuted to work furnished

supervisory and technical skills. Technological and industrial supplies have been supplied mainly by U.S. border state businesses. The money gained by Mexico has been substantial, but most of the wages earned are spent in U.S. border towns: estimates of the amount of salary thus spent by *maquiladora* workers out of Mexico range from 65 to 95 percent. Female workers are employed in peripheral labour that requires little skill and, finally, there are few backward or forward linkages to markets in Mexico.

The ramifications of the *Border Industrialization Program* continue to be felt all along both sides of the border. Adoption of the *North America Free Trade Agreement* is another mechanism that links the three North American countries in a mutual pact, despite the great asymmetry amongst them. By 2001 the number of *maquiladoras* reached 3,800 plants, 2,700 of which were in the border states. But what is certain is that the *Maquiladora* Program was the precursor and the model for the production and business deployment of *La frontera*.

* **NAFTA and its devils**

Ever since the North America Free Trade Agreement (*NAFTA*) became effective on January 1st, 1994, the border region changed again by making business negotiations easier. During the first years of the agreement exports from Mexico grew by 22 percent and those from the U.S. by 23 percent, with a surplus of 1.8 billion dollars and a growth of 130,000 new jobs for the U.S. (Weaver, Thomas. 2001: 109). Today, thousands of Mexican trucks enter the American territory everyday to distribute goods to local markets, in spite of the recent protests of Americans by the intense arrival of drugs hidden in all kind of vehicles.

The **drug trade**, with its associated violence, threatens to transform Mexico into another Colombia with the difference that in Colombia, ever since the Cali Cartel – which controlled more than the 60 percent of the drug-trafficking from South America into the U.S. during the 1980s and the early 1990s – was disintegrated in 1995 with the apprehension of the brothers Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez Orejuela, the estimates⁹ show around 380 emerging cell drug-cartels which have sophisticated structures that invest in the stock markets and in foreign Treasury Bonds, while in Mexico the number of cartels is 7 according to the authorities, plus approximately 130 cell-drug organizations that constitute the cartels' nets to distribute the drugs throughout the country. These 7 biggest cartels located mostly in the northern side of Mexico, according to the *Procuraduría General de la República*¹⁰ (PGR – Office of the General Attorney of Mexico), are the following: the *Juárez Cartel* (leaded by the brothers Carrillo Fuentes); the *Golfo Cartel* (headed by Osiel Cárdenas, who uses another criminal organization called “*Los Zetas*”, formed by ex-militaries, as their punishing-armed force); the *Tijuana Cartel* (guided by the brothers Arellano Félix); the *Colima Cartel* (commanded by the Amézcua Contreras family); the *Sinaloa Cartel* (guided by Guzmán Loera); the *Milenio Cartel* (headed by the family Valencia); and the *Oaxaca Cartel* (leaded by the brothers Díaz Parada). According to the PGR, the old *Guadalajara* cartel, guided by Rafael Caro Quintero, who became famous for kidnapping and assassinating the American DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) agent Enrique Camarena Salazar in february 1985, who was working under coverage in Mexico during the mids-1980s, does not operate anymore in the country after Caro Quintero was sent to prison.

On the other hand in the U.S. drug trade has created social problems of broad dimensions as long as it is the biggest drug-consumer country in the world. According to a 1999 reportage by the New

⁹ Statement made to the Colombian newspaper “*El Tiempo*” by Oscar Naranjo, Director of the Judiciary Police in the country in 2004. Source: El Universal Newspaper. September 20th, 2004.

¹⁰ Source : *Procuraduría General de la República* (Mexican Office of the General Attorney) (Web site: <http://www.pgr.gob.mx>)

York Times magazine, 11 million Americans consumed marijuana, 1.5 million were powder cocaine users, and 0.6 million were crack-addicts, as reported by the statistics of the U.S. Bureau of Justice (Egan. 1999: 20-21). From the Mexican point of view the drug problem does not come from the grower but from the user, and many claim it is a situation that must be controlled by the United States.

Ever since the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attack in the U.S., the Bush administration has focused its attention in making a safer country for the American citizens. This *effort* was translated into the Patriot Act (signed into law on October 26th, 2001), that dramatically expanded the authority of U.S. law enforcement agencies for the stated purpose of fighting terrorism in the United States and abroad. Among its provisions, the act increased the ability of law enforcement agencies to search telephone and e-mail communications and medical, financial, and other records; eased restrictions on foreign intelligence gathering within the United States; expanded the Secretary of the Treasury's authority to regulate financial transactions, particularly those involving foreign individuals and entities; and enhanced the discretion of law enforcement and immigration authorities in detaining and deporting immigrants suspected of terrorism-related acts. The act also expanded the definition of terrorism to include "domestic terrorism", thus enlarging the number of activities to which the Patriot Act's expanded law enforcement powers can be applied.

Therefore the main actions of the Act within the American territory can be summarised in the following way: a) the combat to terrorist cells; b) the strong control of immigration (legal and illegal); and c) the battle against suspected actions that may bring destabilization to the country, such as drug-trafficking and all its related periphery activities. In fact, much of the profit enjoyed by the *narcotraficantes* (drug traffickers) in Mexico, is spent in the United States: real estate, banks, airplanes, trucking companies, rail lines, warehouses, shopping firms, as well as technology to support their agricultural estates, are purchased in border towns (Weaver. 2001: 113). Businesses, banks, real estate agencies, and retail and clothing outlets are supported by money from the drug industry (Eaton. 1998: 1).

And up to a certain extent this paranoid fear against terrorism has taken the U.S. to strongly fight against drug trade, changing the traditional role that Mexico had had until 2001 as a drug-transit's bridge, to rather be a retail area for the consumption of drugs. This has increased also in Mexico the drug-consumption index, while in the past it was mainly the scenario for growth, production and distribution of drugs. Furthermore, the impact of the drug culture and cultivation has even been worse not just in the north, but also in the rest of the country where the growing of marijuana and poppies requires irrigation, pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and cheap labour. Subjugation, exploitation, and violence are directed at indigenous people who live in remote regions where the product is grown. They are forced to plant and harvest the illegal plants or are co-opted by the better return for their efforts (Weaver. 2001: 113).

But drug-trafficking is just one of the creatures exacerbated by the *NAFTA*, which initially caused the collapse of hundreds of small and medium size companies not only in the north but in the whole country, unable to compete with the prices of duty-free products coming from the States. In fact despite the great governmental campaigns to promote *NAFTA* by trying to convince the Mexicans that the benefits of the agreement would be far too much positive than negative, and that the agreement would rise the employment rate of the country by opening new transnational companies and new service businesses, in real terms only the big competitive Mexican industries were able to face the liberalization process and many medium and small industrialists were forced to close their businesses because it was practically impossible to compete not only with the prices, but with the design, innovation and, to a lesser extent, quality of the products and services included in the *NAFTA*. This generated a high unemployment rate during the first years after the signature of the

agreement, and many of the demised labourers who could not incorporate themselves into the service sector nor into the informal economy, emigrated to the North looking for new opportunities either in Mexico or in the U.S.

As Heredia said: “*In the first two years of the NAFTA over two million jobs (one sixth of all the jobs in the modern sector) were lost in Mexico, as the country’s productive apparatus collapsed following the quick liberalization of trade... Trade liberalization has meant the deepening of the dual economy: while large subsidiaries of transnational companies have flourished, many Mexican firms that sell to local consumers have gone under*” (Heredia. 1996: 34).

Once more *La frontera* worked as a great magnet not just for Mexicans, but also for central and south Americans that everyday risked their lives all throughout Mexico trying to reach the American dream. They all know they represent cheap labour for the agricultural, landscape, restaurant or other service industries interested in gaining a margin of wage profit not available by hiring U.S. citizens. Furthermore, their efforts to cross the border are supported by a whole industry that moves the undocumented workers from Mexico to the U.S. – industry that usually starts in the sending communities which maintain connections with binational nets that traffic with human beings – powered by a series of articulatory agents: *polleros* (those who sell the service to the workers and turn them over to the smuggler); *brincadores* (border jumpers) who guide the *pollos* (chicks, the workers) across the border; and *choferes* (drivers), who provide or drive vehicles to the worker’s destination. The terms *coyote* and *maria* are also used to indicate a contractor who may perform some or all the necessary tasks (just like a *pollero*). And this people-smuggling industry seems endless because finally, return migrants bring information back to the sending community and create social networks that help new *mojados*¹¹ in making decisions about when, where, and how to migrate. So the cycle is completed once again within this never ending **human-trafficking industry**.

Recent reports indicate that increased vigilance of the Border Patrol has resulted in creation of family-like organizations for smuggling undocumented workers that garner millions of dollars. The cost of acquiring access to jobs in the U.S. for workers has increased significantly – from \$600 USD to \$1,500 USD for Mexicans close to the border and up to \$9,500 for Central Americans who need to traverse Mexico (Ibarra. 1999, quoted by Weaver. 2001: 116).

The most frequent crossing point for illegal entry into the U.S. has become the 40-mile stretch between Naco and Douglas, Arizona. Effective American Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) – which was abolished in 2003 because its immigration and naturalization recordkeeping functions were transferred to the new Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services within the new Department of Homeland Security, established January 24th, 2003, by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 – border restrictions in regions of larger population to the west (Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales), have funnelled migrant crossings to this point. More than 250,000 apprehensions were reported by the INS for this narrow zone during the first eight months of the fiscal year¹² 2000: more than one thousand per year.

Growth of these numbers is breathtaking: there were 333,000 illegals encountered and returned in 1996 from the Arizona sector alone. This figure expanded to 470,449 in 1999¹³. And Mexico has also offered its figures: according to the *Consejo Nacional de Población (CONAPO)* – Mexican

¹¹ **Mojado** is a colloquial term referred to the undocumented worker that illegally crosses the border. *Mojado*, in Spanish, is an adjective meaning wet. A “*mojado*” thus, is a person who gets wet by crossing the “*Río Bravo*” to get into the United States, cheating the *Border Patrol* controls.

¹² The Fiscal Year in the U.S. goes from October the 1st, to September the 30th of the following year.

¹³ Source : **Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services**. (Web site: <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>)

National Council of Population – from July 11th 2000 to July 10th 2001 the Border Patrol returned 689,312 people into Mexico; 486,658 from July 11th 2001 to July 10th 2002; and 481,643 from July 11th 2002 to July 10th 2003, which is the latest information available.¹⁴ And ever since the terrorist attack to the U.S. on 9/11, the United States has discovered more than 40 underground tunnels along the Mexican-American border, as stated by the authorities themselves (La Jornada Diario. 25/09/2007). Moreover and just to show the new crossing models currently taking place in La frontera, just in 2006 the Border Patrol captured and deported 37,000 children to Mexico, and 21,000 out of them were trying to cross the border completely alone, without any adults accompanying them (El Sol de Toluca Diario. 02/10/2007).

Just to confirm the above numbers nowadays there is an estimated 12 million Mexicans in the U.S., about half of whom are illegal. In 2006 Mexican migrants (both legal and illegal) sent home more than \$20 billion USD in **remittances**, providing Mexico with its second biggest source of foreign income after oil.

But all this massive flow does not make everybody happy beyond the border. By crossing the border (legally or not) a Mexican person experiences “**reclassification**” downward in a new status system. Legal immigrants are subject to the classifiers employed in ‘racial profiling’, resulting in frequent encounters with law enforcement and discriminatory treatment by the dominant culture. On the other hand undocumented migrants enter a shadow world of underclass status. The threat of exposure and deportation renders them subject to the worst forms of exploitation: sub-minimum wages, subhuman working and living conditions, and demands for kickbacks and sexual services.

Furthermore, while policy makers on both sides have proposed several solutions – that go from favouring free movement of *NAFTA* nationals between all three countries, proposed by former Mexican President Vicente Fox (2000-2006); to the renewal of the *bracero* program (temporary visa) for admission of farm workers, suggested by the Governors of Arizona, California and New Mexico; to the limited amnesty for resident illegals favoured by former President Clinton; to the most recent proposal of building a 700-mile fence along the United States’ southern border aimed at “keeping migrants and criminals from entering the country illegally”, proposed by the American House of Representatives and Senate, who also assigned \$1.2 billion USD to begin building the wall, which has been compared to the Berlin Wall by the current Mexican President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, – the most radical nationalist Americans have also suggested circling searchlights, citizens’ patrols (the best example is the activation of the Minute Men organization, which does not belong to the militia but clusters military-organized units of ‘patriots’ who vowed to be ready for battle foreigners in a minute’s notice, and who easily pull the trigger when hunting illegals crossing their territories), electric fences, 24-hour helicopter patrols, surface movement radars, autonomous underwater vehicles (AUV), autonomous airplane vehicles, and assignment of military units to guard the border. In fact, in 2006 the National Guard was authorized –along with the Border Patrol, which since the establishment of *NAFTA* has seen its budget multiplied by 20 times, thanks to the initiative “*Keep the Position*” – to control the border illegal crossings. They are supposed to reinforce the green and white Border Patrols but with a great difference: they are authorized to shoot the target if it represents a danger for the American security. All this within an exacerbated **xenophobic spirit**.

Therefore illegal Mexicans continue to die from exposure while seeking undocumented entrance into the U.S. The estimates consider the number of death crossers to be around 180 yearly, and in 2005 the media reported 261 undocumented workers dead a step before reaching their goal. But before entering into the U.S. the undocumented workers have to face many other previous

¹⁴ Source: *Consejo Nacional de Población* Office. (Web site : <http://www.conapo.gob.mx>)

problems, such as living in **instant border mega-cities** with horrendous levels of pollution, criminality and poverty.

Mega-cities, metropolis or megalopolis that receive these names not just because of their huge dimensions, but mainly because they represent a risk: the risk of dehumanisation due to both their territorial dimensions and their demographic size (Callari Galli, Matilde. 1979: 102-107). Mega-cities that certainly were not created as a consequence of the *NAFTA*, but which were exacerbated due to the massive migration process that took, once again and for the third time – the first time was during the mandate of General Porfirio Díaz (1876-1910), who started the infrastructure-building process all over Mexico but specially in the North, demanding a huge number of railroad workers in the area; and the second one was during the “golden age” of agriculture within the Mexican Miracle period (1934-1965), – hundreds, thousands of people from the countryside to the city, from the south to the north, from hopeless living conditions to the hope of a better future not just in the city, but in the northern cities of Mexico located right at the entrance of the most powerful country in the world. So it doesn't matter if the migration implies an enormous sacrifice for the immigrants once they arrive in the cities that will temporarily lodge them until their dream of crossing the border may come true, or until convincing them about the convenience of returning to their original communities before getting absolutely blocked, forever trapped in these sub-human mega-city living conditions¹⁵. The risk of dehumanisation, thus, is worthwhile if the American way of life is the reward they get at the end.

In these mega-cities there is a constant lack of official investment either in infrastructure and in support institutions that should incorporate the newly arrived into the local society. Elsewhere, these congested, underserved sites have been called “anti-communities” or de-nucleated marginal clusters of households with impermanent membership (Hackenberg and Hackenberg. 1999: 1-15). But in the northern cities the governmental funds for housing and services will only serve the “built-up” *barrios* of permanent residents, neglecting the squatter *colonias* (neighbourhoods) that contain the bulk of the industrial labour-force households, the undocumented workers, and the new immigrants that everyday get into these sub-human settlements.

Settlements providing shelter for the protagonists of this gigantic industrial development boosted by the twin plants, which have much in common with the gold and silver camps that preceded them in this region in the 19th century. Both mining camps and *maquiladoras* attracted a temporary labour force that resided in makeshift quarters built of scrap materials. The difference is that the mineworkers, unlike those in the *maquiladoras*, were male.

But we must not leave the impression that these circumstances of distress appear only in Mexican border communities. The *colonias* in the lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas contain “*tens of thousands of Texans living in Third World conditions that are virtually unknown in other parts of the country. The persons described are primarily of Mexican origin. In Texas, they numbered 198,000 in 1990*” (Davies and Holz. 1992: 119).

The impression is that these mega-cities which are not exclusive of Mexico and which cluster hundreds, thousands of identities internally, reflect different lifestyles in which every single person belongs to at least two different societies at the same time: the worldwide society which gets highlighted for the proximity to the American culture; and the second one dealing with the traditions, customs, world conception and life approach brought from their original communities. In any other city when these two societies get mixed together the result may be the creation of a local community where people may know each other and where the common civility projects may

¹⁵ Yet, reports from the new populations in the *maquila* areas indicate that, compared with points of origin, some workers feel they are better off.

take place. That is exactly the sense of the city, which should create an identity, a community which is both plural (worldwide), and local. However, within the megalopolis in the north of Mexico, and specifically in Ciudad Juárez, this is hard to accomplish because there is a factor that prevents having common projects and a common identity: the temporary residence, the impermanent membership of these shanty-towns' inhabitants, which provokes the opposite result not because of the endless migrations and flows of people, technology, images and information, but because their pauper living conditions get combined with a permanent fear sensation to all the devils that prowl around the borderlands. Devils such as **drug-trafficking, human-trafficking, women and children pornography, intense migration, pollution, weapon-trafficking, police corruption, discriminations** not just in Mexico but also in the U.S., are just some of the creatures that make the mega-cities' inhabitants even more vulnerable than the rest of the border population. It is easier to exploit their poverty and their fear, and fear prowls around at any moment bringing about distrustful feelings for the others, even if the others are their own neighbours. So it seems almost impossible to share a common identity if everybody fights against the others to survive. And if this survival war goes hand in hand with a constant fear sensation, maybe the only possible scenario – which will last forever – is a dangerous one in which conflicts and social violence will never come to an end. Mega-cities, thus, are the anti-cities par excellence.

Horror stories are told of Mexicali, Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez or Nuevo Laredo, much larger *maquiladora*-based urban centres which also play a key role in the **environmental degradation** of the border area. They are responsible for dispensing thousands of gallons of raw sewage and toxic industrial wastes into convenient watercourses daily, in violation of both U.S. and Mexican environmental protective legislation. These fragile environmental conditions along with the adverse human factors described above, are also unintended consequences of the *North America Free Trade Agreement*.

The 2,000 miles of borderland terrain upon which opposing political and economic forces contest for advantage is not a passive platform. It is an environment of extremes and it imposes its own determinants. Its pervasive aridity is punctuated by annual monsoons that bring torrential rains – often more destructive than beneficial – and by two of the largest river systems on the continent, the Colorado and the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo in Mexico), both severely over-appropriated.

Both major river systems have been converted into a series of dams, reservoirs, irrigation projects, and hydroelectric generators. Conservation groups are making some headway with proposals to demolish Glen Canyon Dam and drain Lake Powell to restore the natural ecology of the Grand Canyon. However, deposits of agricultural, industrial and human wastes are a menace in many locales. The Gulf of California is becoming a collection basin for effluent of all kinds. Commercial fishing and wetlands bordering the Gulf of California have sustained the worst damage (Hackenberg and Alvarez. 2001: 101).

A bi-national pact, the La Paz Agreement, was concluded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and its Mexican counterpart, the *Secretaría de Recursos Naturales y Pesca*, in 1983. It was intended to address the pollution issues common to both countries in an area including large deserts, numerous mountain ranges, rivers, wetlands, large estuaries, and shared aquifers. Later on, in 1994, three multinational quasi-governmental agencies were created to provide mitigation. The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), based in Toronto, conducts investigations. The Border Environmental Cooperation Commission (BECC), with offices in Juárez, provides technical assistance and receives proposals for water and waste disposal systems from communities within 100 kilometres of the border. And funding for BECC-approved projects comes from the North American Development Bank (NADBank), based in San Antonio, Texas.

But action has been slow, bureaucratically impeded, and incommensurate with the magnitude of the problem. By 2000, for example, BECC had certified 12 projects in Mexico and 15 in the U.S. And NADBank had processed just seven BECC-certified loans.

In 1996 another effort was made to simplify the environmental common policies derived from *NAFTA*, and this renewal was called Border XXI. Border XXI was coequal with *NAFTA*'s operative units (CEC, BECC, NADBank), providing proposal preparation and policy development services with reference to water, waste water, and environmental health. However, it shared administrative authority with a thicket of unrelated federal agencies both, in Mexico and the U.S., which made coordination difficult.

Lately, in 2001, commissions from Mexico and the U.S. got together again and launched the Border 2012 Program to protect the home of 12 million border residents who suffer disproportionately from many environmental health problems, including water-borne diseases and respiratory problems. According to Border 2012 ninety percent of the border population resides in 14 paired, inter-dependent sister cities. These "sister-cities"¹⁶ are metropolitan areas in both countries. Rapid population growth in urban areas has lead to unplanned development, greater demand for land and energy, increased traffic congestion and waste generation, overburdened or unavailable waste treatment and disposal facilities, and more frequent chemical emergencies. Residents in rural areas suffer from exposure to airborne dust, pesticide exposure, inadequate water supply and waste treatment facilities. Projected population growth rates in the border region exceed anticipated U.S. average growth rates (in some cases by more than 40 percent) for each country. By 2020 the population is expected to reach 19.4 million.

So the mission of the Border 2012 program is to protect the environment and public health in the U.S.-Mexico border region, consistent with the principles of sustainable development. The ten-year Border 2012 program should take a bottom-up, regional approach, which relies heavily on local input, decision-making, priority-setting, and project implementation to best address environmental issues in the region. It brings together a wide variety of stakeholders to prioritize sustainable actions that consider the environmental needs of the different border communities.

Despite all the common policies and efforts to reduce pollution, protect the environment and the public health of the border inhabitants, the Border 2012 continues to face a complex coordination mechanism because it contains multiple jurisdictions including ten states, local governments, U.S. tribes, and a complex legal framework difficult to bypass¹⁷.

But the ecological adversities boosted by the massive production and migration flows along the border, has not prevented American retired elder-people to move to the sunny and warm southern states to spend their newly acquired working status (retired). While they are not actually counted, there has been a significant increment in the permanent **resettlement of retirement-age households to the “sunbelt”** taking place at the same time, due to the mild weather and below average cost of living. Because of savings and investment income, their economic impact is greater than their numbers. In Arizona, elderly relocatees accounted for 11,600 new housing units per year, adding \$2.5 billion to the local economy. Persons over 55 now account for 22 percent of the state's population (Hackenberg and Alvarez. 2001: 100).

¹⁶ San Diego-Tijuana; Calexico-Mexicali; Yuma-San Luis; Nogales-Nogales; Naco-Naco; Douglas-Agua Prieta; Columbus-Puerto Palomas; El Paso-Ciudad Juárez; Presidio-Ojinaga; Del Rio-Ciudad Acuña; Eagle Pass-Piedras Negras; Laredo-Nuevo Laredo; McAllen-Reynosa; Brownsville-Matamoros.

¹⁷ For further references about the Border 2012 Program see the official web-site <http://www.epa.gov/usmexicoborder/>

Enterprising developers mobilizing huge bundles of venture capital span the spectrum of investment in urban residential expansion. There are substantial new subdivisions of a thousand units or more built as “infills” opening regularly. Beyond the built-up perimeter, entire new custom communities of as many as 5,000 homes contest for space on the desert floor with ever-expanding Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designations of protected wildlife zones.

This is another migration phenomenon which takes advantage of *NAFTA*, as long as the elders may also find a great availability of legal or undocumented household servants mainly coming from Mexico. Moreover there is a part of the Mexico to U.S. border traffic which includes Mexican citizens who are not undocumented but who do not live across the border either. They reside in Mexico and commute everyday to work in the United States. In 1960, these commuters accounted for over 48,000 labourers in San Diego, Calexico, Nogales, Eagle Pass, El Paso and Brownsville (Grebler et al. 1970, quoted in Weaver, Thomas. 2001: 111). More recently, one million commuters have been estimated along the border (Herzog. 1990: 157). Commuters are called “**green carders**” for the colour of the document that allows legal entry. The American Department of Agriculture also has a seasonal agricultural workers (SAW) program that permits entry of up to 500,000 workers after employers demonstrate they can not be found in the U.S. The “H2” regulation in the same department permits entry of 20,000 to 30,000 workers in agriculture¹⁸. These figures do not account for the number of border crossers who are shoppers, tourists, students, academics, researchers and who may work temporarily or become undocumented workers in the United States of America.

According to all the relatively recent *NAFTA* creatures described above, we can affirm that the *North America Free Trade Agreement* was aimed at the elimination of tariffs and the expansion of trade. In fact, it has permitted American manufacturers to locate plants in Mexico which need not comply with U.S. occupational health and safety, or toxic waste disposal standards. Conversely, where Mexican farm products are to be marketed in the U.S., the U.S. Department of Agriculture establishes production standards for growers and conducts rigorous inspections of shipments at border stations prior to entry into the American territory. The failure to permit Mexican truckers to deliver shipments of agricultural products north of the border beyond a 25-mile zone, violates specific *NAFTA* provisions. These examples illustrate the asymmetrical nature of the bi-national implementation of the agreement, but they also provide concrete situations in which it is impossible to take a glance at *La Frontera* without a simultaneous vision of both the local and the global. Without focusing on the human interactions that take place on a common space in contemporary ways. The focus is no longer on the local ecosystem. The “outsiders” become key players in the analysis, as contact with external agents and agencies (for example migrants, refugees, drug-dealers, human-dealers, tourists, students, home-developers, etc.) has become commonplace. Multiple linkages related not just to their bi-national condition, but which mainly respond to the globalization processes we are currently living.

Moreover the tri-national consequences of the *NAFTA* have made Canada a player in what was once a bi-lateral game between the United States and Mexico. Extensions of the agreement have generated large-scale investments from Japan, Korea and Taiwan. With the inclusion of China in the World Trade Organization, the entrance of this country into the game may not be far behind.

This is the reason why we can affirm that the Mexico-U.S. borderlands seem to be the microcosm of the world. But maybe the worst creature produced by *NAFTA* is the miserable murdering of hundreds of women and girls that strangely coincides with the date of signature of the *Free Trade Agreement*. This series of female murders started in 1993, has given a worldwide negative image of

¹⁸ For further references about the temporary entrance programs of the **American Department of Agriculture**, see the official web-site: <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome>

one of the main production centres in the region: Ciudad Juárez, in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. In order to better understand the **femicide**¹⁹ there and the circumstances behind it, it is a must to turn a glance to this city of the future, to narrate the story of the underbelly of our global world and state how the living circumstances and the process of human interaction in Ciudad Juárez created the scenario where such a devil creature has taken place.

CIUDAD JUÁREZ: THE SETTING

Returning undocumented workers and the advent of *maquiladoras* have added population to Mexican border towns since the mid-1960s. Many predict that in the next decade the U.S.- Mexico border region will be the largest urban area in North America, and perhaps the world.

In the Mexican side of the shared 2000-mile boundary divided by the *Rio Grande*, there are six major production cities. From the Sea of Cortés in the Pacific, to the Gulf of Mexico in the Atlantic: Tijuana and Mexicali (both in the State of Baja California Norte), Ciudad Juárez (in Chihuahua), Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa and Matamoros (the three of them in the State of Tamaulipas).

These cities – that in the minds of most Americans represent more a mythic image than a vital reality – still appear in travel guides with terms of reference such as the “Spanish Borderlands”. If this ever was the land of donkey, *sombrero*, cattlemen, Indian wars and colourful renegades, internationally marketed by some American TV programs and cartoons such as “*El Zorro*” or “*Speedy González*”, today it is a type site for the study of political ecology and globalization.

And for sure Ciudad Juárez – along with Tijuana – is one of the most well-known Mexican border cities which has always represented a great magnet not just because of the high number of *maquiladoras* located right in front of El Paso, its American sister city, but mainly due to its tourist industry which has been openly recognised in both sides of the border as one of the most tolerant towards all kind of entertainment.

*** Que Viva México! The Entertainment Industry in Juárez**

Throughout the XX century, Ciudad Juárez was the birthplace of at least two urban legends popular worldwide. The first of them is a bizarre one dealing with the invention of the “Margarita cocktail”, attributed to the local barman Francisco “Pancho” Morales on July the 4th 1942, during the celebrations in Ciudad Juárez of the American Independence Day, with Mexicans and Americans celebrating the U.S. Independence from England by shouting: *Qué Viva México!*. The second one, instead, is the one which has given a negative image of the city by representing it as the most tolerant zone right across the U.S.

In 1921 the American Consul General in Mexico, John W. Dye, said: “*Juárez is the most immoral, degenerated and evil city I have ever seen or been told about during my trips. There are murders and robberies everyday. Gambling is continuously played, drugs are usually distributed and consumed, people drink alcohol in excess and there is sexual degeneration. It is a Mecca for criminals and deviated people from both sides of the borderland*” (González Rodríguez. 2002: 79).

¹⁹The term “femicide” was first used by Diana E.H. Russell in 1976 and it refers to “*the misogynist killing of women by men and a form of continuity of sexual assault where you must take into account: the acts of violence, the motives and the imbalance of power between the sexes in political, social and economic environments*”. E.H. Russell, Diana. “Femicide in global perspective”. London: Teacher’s College Press, 2001. – XII, pp. 22.

In fact his words were confirmed in 1922 by a newspaper reportage (*El Universal Gráfico* on June 5th, 1922) that pointed out to the great difficulties faced by the Mexican Migration Authorities to reject the entrance into Mexico of female streetwalkers who everyday tried to cross the border to solicit their sexual services in the local bars and cabarets. It was easier for them to find clients in Ciudad Juárez than in El Paso and they could better sell their beauty there before, during and after the Second World War. These elegant ladies wearing evening gowns, hats and fancy gloves were easily found walking around the halls of the old hotels and party balls. And they got mixed with the Mexican prostitutes – both male and female – who also competed for the clients even if their dresses, in general, were not as fancy and elegant as the ones worn by their American blond counterparts.

Maybe it all started at the beginning of the XX century, when a flood of tourists to Tijuana followed the legalization of gambling in Baja California in 1908. However, the golden age of tourism was to come later. With the manufacture and consumption of alcohol prohibited in the United States from 1918 to 1933, Mexican towns became meccas for pleasure and entertainment. Tourist districts sprang up in border towns, creating a unique landscape. In Juárez bars were found “*every twenty feet for six long blocks*” (Martínez. 1975, quoted in Weaver, Thomas. 2001: 112-113). Red light districts sprang up almost overnight; special buses transported U.S. citizens to the border for everything from alcohol, prostitution, gambling and nightclub entertainment, to quick marriage ceremonies or divorces, depending on the clients’ moods. Curio shops, restaurants and hotels soon joined the racetracks, while bullfights and cockfights became favourite pastimes. Tourists travelling to California stopped over to take in the sights in Juárez, and El Paso hosted many national conventions and meetings because of the entertainment value of Juárez.

Twenty-eight million people crossed the border between El Paso and Juárez in 1928. The advent of a worldwide depression in 1929, heavily felt in the U.S., led to the expulsion of Mexicans to border towns: 415,000 in 1930 with an additional 85,000 making the move voluntarily (Martínez, 1975). The U.S. military build-up along the U.S. border in the 1940s and 1950s also brought in many tourists as long as the Fort Bliss American forces went to Ciudad Juárez to forget their hard military training and their soldier lives, by getting drunk with *tequila* while shouting in spanglish²⁰: *Qué Viva México-u, cabrones!*

Later on the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* of 1961 was designed to make the border more attractive either for Mexicans by mainly for Americans, who were encouraged to visit the area as it had just built fancy shopping centres and similar amenities. In the early 1970s another regulation created “*Artículos Gancho*”, allowing for the duty-free importation of items popular with Mexican shoppers on the U.S. side such as shampoos, toiletries, and kitchen cleaning supplies. These items were supposed to serve as a *gancho* (hook) to attract Mexican shoppers to buy Mexican goods in their country birthplace (Herzog. 1990: 146-156).

In 1980 Mexico earned over \$1 billion USD from tourism – two-thirds from the border towns. In 1983 Mexicans spent \$50 million in San Diego County alone, and this a year after the terrible devaluation of the peso. Over 20 million U.S. tourists per year crossed into Baja California in 1984: three-fourths went to Tijuana. In 1991 it was estimated that Mexican visitors to Arizona

²⁰ Spanglish is the name given to the mix of Spanish with English languages. Usually it is also called *espanglish*, *espaninglish*, *el Spanish broken*, *ingleñol*, *espan'glés* or *espanolo*, a blend of the English-language words for "Spanish" and "English" — is a name used to refer to a range of language-contact phenomena, primarily in the speech of the Latin American and population of the United States and the population of Mexico that lives near the border with U.S.A., which are exposed to both Spanish and English. These phenomena are a product of close border contacts or large bilingual communities, such as along the United States-Mexico border and throughout California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Florida, Puerto Rico, New York City, and Chicago.

border towns spent \$683.3 million. On the other side, tourism brought \$1 billion annually into the San Diego metropolitan area (Herzog. 1990: 115, 148).

Liquor, meat, prescription drugs, automobile repairs, upholstery and repainting, furniture, glassware, lighting fixtures, velvet paintings and rugs have been popular with U.S. tourists. Herzog estimated that an average of 67,500 Mexican visitors or commuters made daily trips to San Diego County in 1990, and predicted that from 60 to 75 million would cross the border annually in both directions by 1995 (Herzog. 1990: 154-155).

Mexicans went beyond the border to interior locations such as Tucson, Phoenix and San Antonio to purchase groceries, clothing and appliances. All told, Ganster (1997: 259) estimated the total number of border crossers and undocumented workers to be 307 million in 1994, up from the 175 million in 1985.

But specifically referring to Ciudad Juárez in 1996 the Municipal County offered its data about the yearly border-crossings: 42 million people and 17 million vehicles just from Juárez to El Paso, Texas, which evidences it represents the favourite bridge for Mexicans to go to the U.S. all along the border, and is one of the crossing-points with the highest number of human transit in the whole world (González Rodríguez. 2002: 27-41).

*** Some figures just to get a deeper idea about the city...**

In fact ever since Mexico entered the “*Maquiladora Program*” in 1964, Ciudad Juárez along with Tijuana, became the most important production centres of the Mexican northern border. Population growth took place on a platform of economic expansion and from the very first manufacturing plant to its current almost 300 industries²¹, Ciudad Juárez has become the largest border city in Mexico (from 1910 to 1970 it grew 41 times its size) – with a population greater than 1.3 million²² and an annual growth rate of 4.5%, greater than in the rest of the border cities and in the rest of the country, where the annual growth rate in the decade 1990-2000 was of 1.85%²³ – and the fifth largest city of the whole Mexico (after Mexico city, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Puebla)²⁴.

Along with its pairing-city El Paso, in Texas, by December 31st, 2006, they had an estimated common urban population of 2,319,058 inhabitants divided in the following way: 1,563,973 people living in Ciudad Juárez; and 755,085 people residing in the whole County of El Paso (624,365 out of them living in El Paso City, and the remainder in the rest of the County). These numbers rank them as the biggest Mexican-American border urban centre and according to the estimates, the projected population for the year 2020 may be 3,479,147 inhabitants (2,541,900 living in Juárez, 767,750 in El Paso City, and the remainder 169,497 distributed along the El Paso County)²⁵.

The 75% of the population in Juárez is under 35 years of age and the 41.1% out of this approximate 1.3 million inhabitants are not native from the city but emigrants looking for better living conditions than the ones offered by their native communities. Many of these emigrants originally see Ciudad

²¹Delphi, Phillips, Thomson Consumer Electronics, UTA, Yassaki, Valeo, Lear Co., Coclisa and Electrolux are some of the most important twin plants present in Juárez. There the total number of *maquiladoras* is 279, according to the latest information provided by the local government.

²² The latest Mexican 2005 Mid-term Census accounted a population of 1,313,338 inhabitants living in Ciudad Juárez (with a demographic density equal to 5,130 people on Km²).

²³ Source: **Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI)**. Official Mexican Bureau of Statistics (web site: www.inegi.gob.mx)

²⁴ Official Information provided by the **Ciudad Juárez Municipal Government** (web site: www.juarez.gob.mx)

²⁵ Source: **American Development Service and Planning Division Bureau**, and **Mexican Bureau of Statistics**. (web site: www.elpasotexas.gov)

Juárez just as a bridge between Mexico and the United States, but most of them fail in their attempt to cross the border and remain indefinitely *trapped* in the city due to the working possibilities it offers derived from the twin plants. And these opportunities make of Juárez the city with the lowest unemployment rate – inferior than 1% - in the whole country, where the index ranks between 2.5 and 3%²⁶.

In fact these productive activities make of Juárez one of the most attractive cities for national emigrants – who get mixed with foreign migrants coming from the rest of the continent– following mainly the American dream, but who frequently have to swift such a dream with the possibility of getting enrolled as factory-workers in the *maquiladoras*, which usually take advantage of disposable female labour for being both skilful at assembling and easier to control than the male one (which means lower salaries for women and permits workers to be easily mistreated, dismissed and replaced). Moreover, according to official statistics²⁷ by the year 2000 (which is the latest information available) 50.8% of the economically active population in Ciudad Juárez worked in the twin plants, and the 70% out of these *maquiladora*-workers were young women ranking from 16 to 24 years old because in Mexico the legal age to start working is precisely 16. They earn \$5.00 - \$6.00 USD per day as machine operators producing mainly computer chips, auto parts and medical supplies.

This phenomenon has changed the traditional dynamics of relations between the sexes, which has always been characterized by gender inequality but recently gives raise to a situation of conflict towards the women – especially the youngest – employed in the *maquilas*. This social change in women's roles has not been accompanied by a change in traditionally patriarchal attitudes and mentalities and, consequently, the stereotyped view of men and women's roles in society has been shocked, with men refusing to accept the *independence* of women and violence as their tool to punish them for their *daring*.

Inequities in distributing the economic advances of *NAFTA* are clear when we compare the wages of *maquila* workers with both their counterparts in the U.S., who earn in one hour what they earn in a day, and the profit margins of their U.S. employers. In spite of such low wages and the bad working conditions that allow easy mistreatment to labour force, Alvarez and Hackenberg affirm that “they are “programmed” to accept sub-normal (some would say sub-human) working conditions with a minimum of complaints as their intentions were to accumulate stake and return to points of origin or move to more habitable surroundings”.

And if these sub-normal working conditions get mixed with sub-human living circumstances, instant border mega-cities with horrendous poverty levels start flourishing in the periphery of the city, forming new *colonias* (neighbourhoods) in the middle of the desert. *Colonias* which only luxury is to have a free mega-vision of the United States of America, that is just beyond the metallic dividing fence, a little bit further the Rio Bravo. All this occurs without either essential infrastructure (energy, water, sewer) or support institutions (health, housing, transport, education), and the advantages of *NAFTA* seem to collapse in front of this poor scenario. Furthermore, the overall situation has led to a range of criminal behaviours including organized-crime, drug-trafficking, trafficking in women, undocumented migration, money-laundering, pornography, procuring and the exploitation of prostitution.

And because of all these phenomena taking place at the same time and in the same space, Ciudad Juárez is reaffirmed once again to be the microcosm of the world: the interaction between two

²⁶ Source: **Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI)**. Official Mexican Bureau of Statistics (web site: www.inegi.gob.mx)

²⁷ Official Information provided by the **Ciudad Juárez Municipal Government** (web site: www.juarez.gob.mx)

independent states with an asymmetrical nature linked by the bi-national implementation of their economic agreement. Asymmetrical economies that are clearly in contrast with each other because of their different demographic growth rates; the lack of infrastructure, services and appropriate housing in the Mexican side while the Americans seem to live in a well-organized city; the different labour levels that get reflected not just in the great salary gaps, but mainly in the work regulations and the protection towards workers; the diverse approach promoted by the governments towards natural resources; the lack of water all along the border; and the pollution levels either in the U.S. but specially in Mexico due to its poor environmental regulations and the air-pollution derived from the approximate 300 brick-producing companies located in Ciudad Juárez, among many other contrasting situations. It is a scenario that holds a hybrid society which, at the same time that displays an incredible hybrid vigor and inter-cultural variation, is also able to create devil creatures that clearly evidence deep pathologies, being the *femicide* the most serious of all.

* **A great business: Female labour + maquiladoras**

Even before the *Maquila program* began in 1964, workers had been drawn to the northern border of Mexico by the need for cheap labour in agriculture in north-western Mexico and the south-western United States. Later, this concentration provided convenient access to employment for undocumented workers in the U.S. Termination of the *Bracero accord* in 1964 left many people unemployed in northern Mexican towns. In Nogales, Sonora, for example, it was estimated that the 50 percent of the work force was unemployed (Baerrensen. 1971).

The *Border Industrialization Program* helped by hiring young, single females. At first, these workers came from neighbouring states. Today they are more likely to be the daughters or wives of undocumented or unemployed workers who, through their work, provide support for the extended family. But there is also a new phenomenon taking place in Ciudad Juárez, according to the direct information provided by the female *maquila*-workers interviewed by the researcher during her in-site research period²⁸: in the last five years some *maquiladoras* have promoted the “fishing” of young women in central and southern Mexican states such as Veracruz and Chiapas, with non-conventional methods completely unknown in the past. These methods seem to be the product of marketing campaigns directly in the target states, where *maquiladoras*’ representatives go to promote secure jobs in the twin plants, plus additional interesting benefits such as free transportation in company buses from Veracruz to Ciudad Juárez, or from Chiapas to Ciudad Juárez, and a fixed initial amount (that goes from \$1,000 to \$2,000 Mexican pesos – approximately \$100 to \$200 USD) for housing relocation expenses during the first days after their arrival in the city. Moreover, to make their offers even more attractive these reps also complete the *maquila* “all-included job packages” with special Christmas promotions in which the companies commit themselves to take the young female workers from Ciudad Juárez to their original states, wait for them until the celebrations are finished, and bring them back altogether to their jobs in the northern border, as if they all were a close and happy family.

From all the facts stated above we may say that there are three clear symbols that can represent the spirit of Ciudad Juárez: a) the intense immigration flows that bring new people into the city everyday, specially young women who get *cannon fodder* for employers, crime organizations and men in general, because they are usually defenseless, vulnerable and live in a precarious situation (as stated above the local authorities estimate that 41.1% of the approximate 1.3 million Juárez’s inhabitants were not born in the city); b) the maquiladoras that continue demanding for fresh flesh of women for being easy to control and skilful at quick-assembly at the same time, for not mentioning the lower salaries they receive; and c) the young age of the population in Juárez (the 75% of them is under 35 years of age, as estimated by the local authorities), which is evident when

²⁸ Interviews that took place amongst the female *maquila*-workers all over Ciudad Juárez, in July 2006.

walking up and down the city where visitors can mainly see children and young male and females everywhere, as in any developing country in the world.

So **young, immigrant women** who come to temporarily work in the *maquiladoras*, seem to be the prototype of the city's inhabitants. An army formed by women who can easily find work in the twin plants due to their manual skills, but who become an easy target for men not just within their working sites, but also within their own families in the case they have one, or even in the public space of the city which is usually dominated by the organized crime, the Juárez drug-cartel, or the uncountable gangs that are spread all over Juárez.

Alfredo Limas Hernández, a young Juárez researcher specialized in gender issues, has written in his essay "*La construcción de ciudadanías*" that in Ciudad Juárez the twin plants have built up the city (*las maquiladoras maquilan la ciudad*). They are the ones that have restructured the urban shape and have also provoked dynamics of socio-cultural segregation that cluster all the economic actors. As the trans-national companies become richer, the whole city becomes poorer. This is evident because the public space, the capital's social responsibilities, and the local public policies towards development become weaker at the expense of the people's bodies, especially the female ones for being the most vulnerable of all.

Moreover according to Limas Hernández, if in the past female factory workers were more likely to mysteriously disappear in the city, recently this tendency has changed and includes an increasing number of students (teenagers but also girls) who vanish or who are sexually attacked just because they are walking down the street, in the middle of the public space. For him, there is not just one social group which is the most vulnerable of all (women), but there are also some circumstances that are terribly risky for females. Being alone or passing through some extremely dangerous territories, as those located downtown or in the western part of the city – where the *Colonia Anapra*, an instant-border megacity, stands right in front of the United States – are some of the most hazardous circumstances for girls and young women in Juárez.

"Being a woman in Ciudad Juárez means living in an unbalanced gender system where the public space in the city hurts and damages women. It means living in an harmful environment that does not have public policies towards development, and which completely tolerates structural and gender asymmetries within the society. It means living in a real warehouse where human beings get stock and are 'maquilados' according to the capital's needs and demands" (Limas Hernández, 2001, quoted in González Rodríguez. 2002: 30-31).

And the *maquiladoras'* needs require young people able to work without complaining for the low wages nor for the working conditions, and without demanding social care nor extra benefits. A real army of female robots who assembly dvd-players, television screens or laptop computers for less than fifty cents of dollar an hour, in ten-hour shifts. And it does not matter if they are illiterate, as long as they can become the human hands of the assembly-cyber arms used in every production line of every *maquiladora*. Because the technological trend in Ciudad Juárez has changed in the last years as long as the *maquiladoras* have committed themselves to provide the highest quality control, the use of robotics, and automation, in order to compete with other cheap-labour countries. And this hard competition also requires multifunctional labour, which means that the factory workers must work hard, almost sweating blood, to become the human mechanism in these automation processes. And little by little, almost in an imperceptible way, this domination forms have been transferred from the industry to the domestic sphere, from the economic to the social lives of the people residing there.

The manual skills of women allow them to easily find jobs in the twin plants, but once they arrive there they are also easily mistreated, sexually harassed or dismissed just for being women. Moreover, some of the girls interviewed confirmed that they are subject to menstruation controls every month and, if the screen-tests turn out to be positive, they are fired without any dismissal compensation. After all there is a whole army of unemployed females looking for a job in the city, and everyday approximately 300 new people get there attracted by the twin plants, or by making a living beyond the border. Just to give an example the Department of Sexual Crimes of the Juárez Police²⁹ receives an average of six formal complaints for sexual violence daily, and most of them take place within the maquiladoras.

Maquiladoras clustered in 10 industrial areas spread up and down the city, employing approximately 300,000 people. The 70% of these *maquiladora*-workers are young females who mostly live in the instant megalopolis that border the city and, consequently, have to commute for long everyday to get to their jobs on time. Megalopolis in which street lighting does not exist and public transportation is almost nonexistent. Therefore their efforts to get to their jobs on time – otherwise the strict managerial rules of the twin plants refuse to accept delayed workers, who are forced to go back home – are extraordinary, and they expose themselves even more by crossing on foot isolated territories in the middle of the desert just to respect their shift schedules: the first shift goes from 7:00am to 3:00 pm; the second shift starts at 3:30pm and finishes at 12:00 or 1:00am; and the third one, which is the best paid of all but also the most hazardous due to the time, goes through 3:00am to 7:00am.

So every woman who is going to or coming back from work can become an easy target for the evils that reside in this urban sprawl. Every woman who is poor enough to offer nothing than her manual skills in the *maquiladoras*, or in the hundreds of shops and tourist attractions located mainly in the city centre. Young women that everyday hear that they are one of the main sources of wealth in Juárez and that they represent the city's capital for the future, but who violently and cruelly realize that these statements are nothing but propaganda made by politicians or by entrepreneurs in their speeches.

Under these economic and social circumstances in which not just salaries but also work are undervalued, the role of women gets more than undervalued indeed. Not just in Juárez but also in other border states and in the whole country, where approximately 40 million people live in extreme poverty conditions in a territory of more than 100 million people³⁰. A country that reflects the incredible and painful difference between imagining a promising scenario for everybody as a product of the collective imagination shown in the *telenovelas*, and the real and limited actions and objectives that Mexicans can effectively reach in order to improve their lives socially, economically and politically.

Undervalued gender role dominated by a patriarchal ideology present in Mexico since its very origins, but reinforced by the Catholic religion brought to Latin America by the Spaniard conquerors. Before the Spanish discovered the American continent and before their arrival in Mexico in 1519, leaded by a young Captain named Hernán Cortés, the role of women in Mexico was symbolized by two emblematic representations: they were the image of fecundity but at the same time they also represented death. As in many other cultures in the world the Goddess of

²⁹ Source: *Secretaría de Seguridad Pública del Estado de Chihuahua*. Public Security Department of the State of Chihuahua (web site: <http://www.sspe.gob.mx/sspe/inicio.asp>)

³⁰ Source: **Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI)**. Official Mexican Bureau of Statistics (web site: www.inegi.gob.mx). The INEGI estimated in the 2005 mid-term census that the total Mexican population was 103,263,388 people.

creation was also a goddess of destruction. It was a human being that represented the world's radical heterogeneity and the universe weirdness³¹.

Indigenous males desperately tried to establish this ambivalent nature of women by a series of legends about some Mexican goddesses such as *Teteoinnan*, who was the Mother of all the Gods in the Pre-Hispanic universe; or *Chalchitlicue*: represented with a Green Jade Skirt, who was the wife of *Tlaloc* and therefore the Water Goddess; or *Chicomecoatl* (also known as *Chalchiuhcihuatl*, *Chiccomeccatl*, or *Xilonen*): the Corn Goddess represented with Seven Snakes and married to *Centeotl*, the Corn God; or *Coatlicue*: who was the mother of the War God *Huitzilopochtli*, and who was figured by wearing a Skirt Made of Snakes; or *Metztli* (also called *Tecuciztecatl* or *Tecciztecatl*), the Moon Goddess, who sacrificed herself to become the sun but, by being a woman, could only take the moon's role.

But there were also cruel, evil, lascivious goddesses bringing destruction to their universe and symbolizing the negative aspects of this ambivalent character, difficult to understand for the indigenous males: *Mayahuel* (also known as *Mayahual* or *Mayouel*): the Maguey cactus Goddess who consequently became the alcohol divinity; or *Xochiquetzal*, represented with a flower and quetzal fancy feathers, who was the Sex Goddess and the protector of prostitutes, sexual pleasure and young mothers; or *Tlazolteotl* (also called *Tlaelquani* or *Tlazolteotli*), who was the Dust-Eater and purified people from dirt, sickness or any kind of excess; or the most terrible and feared goddess called *Mictecacihuatl* (or *Mictlancihuatl*): the Death Goddess who was the queen of *Mictlan*, the indigenous hell.

Fecundity and death, creation and destruction, redemption and sin, all mixed together in a single female body full of mystery for men, who tried to answer to some questions to better understand such ambiguity: does the woman represent life or death?, what does she think about?, does she ever really think?, does she ever really feel?, is she like us? And sadism against women in that society – in which women were commonly sacrificed to gain the gods' favours; punished to lose their virginity before marriage; or cruelly and publicly killed when caught at having an extra-marital relationship, by sitting them on a long, pointed stick that penetrated their vaginas until provoking a terribly-suffering death – started as a revenge for the female hermeticism, or as a desperate attempt to get a response from a body that was considered to be insensible.

Women who existed in a male universe because men wanted them to exist, because men let them exist. Goddesses that became divinities mainly because they were the Gods' mothers or the Gods' wives. And when the Spanish soldiers arrived at the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico this scenario changed the form but not the content, because women continued to be discriminated and relegated to secondary roles thanks to the Catholicism imposed with blood amongst the indigenous people.

In fact the new religion and the Spanish language were the key elements imposed all over Latin America to culturally control and dominate the conquered territories. Spanish soldiers and catholic missionaries worked hand to hand to make the “*indios*” understand that their Gods had forgotten them once and for all, and that a new era had come in which the only white, bleeding God, cruelly nailed on an enormous, wooden cross, could also mercifully accept them as his sons in spite of their skin colour, with the only condition of swearing total obedience to the King and to the principles of the Bible. So the ‘new’ Mexicans started to venerate the bleeding Christ, beaten and humiliated by the roman soldiers and condemned by the judges, because they saw in him the reflection, the transfigured image of their own destiny. A cruel destiny that let them in an anguishing and miserable orphan-hood after their temples, their gods and their cities were destroyed by the

³¹ For a brilliant description of the traditional role of women in Mexico see the beautiful essay “*Los Hijos de la Malinche*” by Octavio Paz, included in his book “*El Laberinto de la Soledad*” (Paz. 1993: 72-97).

conquerors. Under these sorrowful conditions the only way for them to find a suitable place where to live in the new world, was through religion. Belonging to the catholic faith, thus, meant to find a place in the cosmos again. A place that was miserably negated by the Europeans, who considered them inferior than their own animals and put them at the very bottom of the social pyramid, right after their horses and dogs. So Catholicism was the only way for them to overcome their deep solitude, to restart their contact with the world, to give sense to their presence on the Earth, to start hoping once again, and to justify their lives but also their death.

It is not necessary to say that the new religion was a mixed of old and new beliefs. This could not be otherwise as long as the Catholicism was an imposed religion and not the free will embraced by the indigenous populations. And to restart the discontinued relationships with the cosmos, the other human beings – especially the newly arrived Spanish people – and the sacred world, interrupted with the Conquest War that left a whole nation orphan, the Catholicism used two main characters to include and control the newly converted: God (a suffering Christ able to show that sorrow was more than welcome in Heaven and that through it people could redeem themselves), and the maternal figure of the Virgin Guadalupe, a brunette, ‘indian’ Virgin also called Guadalupe-Tonatzin - *Tonatzin* was their Fertility Pre-Hispanic goddess – by the ‘wild Mexicans’. Furthermore, the place where the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to the *indio* Juan Diego, was the same hill where Mexicans used to venerate the goddess that they considered to be their mother: *Tonatzin*.

Once the conquerors destroyed the two main, male, Aztec gods: *Quetzalcóatl* – the Feathered Snake, the God ruling the Day and Night, the resurrection and death – and *Huitzilopochtli* – the young War God – the indigenous believers desperately returned to the shelter of the old female divinities. This is the reason of the high popularity of the Virgin of Guadalupe up to the present days. A Catholic Virgin that was the new mother, the new shelter for the poor, the unprotected, the helpless *indios*. The orphans’ mother. The intermediary between the disinherited *indios* and the new, still unknown, Spanish powers.

On the other hand, there was another female representation popular during the Colonialist centuries but still recognised up to now. A figure that was the antithesis of the Mexicans’ mother, the Virgin of Guadalupe: *la Chingada*, or that passive woman who was unable to defend herself from the sexual, psychological and physical violence of the Spanish men and represented the raped mother. Her impurity resided right in her sex. Her passivity during the sexual assault made her lose her own identity, so her new given name became *la Chingada*³². She lost her name, she was nobody anymore, she had no value anymore, she was nothing. However, she sadly became the representation of the woman’s condition since that very moment (Paz. 1993: 92-95).

La Chingada was right like the Conquest war: a real rape, total violence against a whole nation. And this historical fact remained deeply marked in the *indias*’ skins: Doña Marina represented the naïve indigenous women, seduced and raped by the Spanish men. But right because of her passivity the Mexican population has never forgiven the betray of *la Malinche*. She continues to be a negative symbol in the Mexican collective imagination up to our present days: a symbol to avoid, to hate, to condemn, and to punish to death. It is something more than just a historical fact: it is the clear representation of a secret conflict used as an excuse by Mexicans to negate their past, to

³² In Mexico the verb ‘**chingar**’ has a sexual denotation meaning to penetrate, to rape, to sexually abuse of a woman. In fact, it is usually used as a rude word that indicates the sexual, violent domination of a woman by a man, a weak person by a strong one. It derives from the time of the Spanish arrival in Mexico (1519), when the indigenous princess *Malitzin* was given to Hernán Cortés as her personal translator. As her name was difficult to pronounce for the Spaniards, they simply called her ‘doña Marina’ or ‘*Malinche*’, which was the Spanish version of her original *náhuatl* name. Afterwards *Malitzin* and Cortés became lovers, so she was considered to be a betrayer because she preferred the foreigners than her own people (as long as she always supported Cortés’ intentions to conquest Mexico).

repudiate their origins, and to reject the original respect – or fear – they felt for their female divinities.

It is evident that the antique Pre-Hispanic roots of the current patriarchal ideology in Mexico were reinforced by the influence of Catholicism, which considered the woman to be a sinner since the minute Eve took the apple and invited Adam to eat it. Since that very moment women needed to be punished for their daring and audacity, but at the same time they also needed male protection because they were unable to do anything by themselves. But maybe the worst thing of all was the women self-conviction that their presence in the world was supposed to be subjugated to men since the very Creation act, and that from that instant they were supposed to behave submissively and obediently respecting their fathers, husbands or sons' wills and desires. And this conception of the female role in a devote and mainly Catholic country such as Mexico, left no room for women emancipation nor for their independence, and provided men with the necessary symbolic elements that justified any limitation or even violent act against them as soon as their partners, wives or daughters tried to interrupt the activities proper to their assigned roles.

And Ciudad Juárez is a scenario where the traditional women's role has been interrupted in different ways: first of all it is well known all over Mexico that the women from the North are more open-minded and sexually emancipated than those from the centre or the south. This was probably caused by the proximity to the U.S. and the intermittent influence from the American culture, which has modified the social patterns all along the borderline. By itself this phenomenon did not use to be a problem as long as border males were used to this kind of sexual behaviour from their female counterparts, but since almost half of the Juárez's population comes from the south, the newly men arrived get immediately exposed to a completely different sexual approach and are afraid that their own partners could imitate the regional sexual styles. Moreover and as long as many women arrive by themselves into the city, a lot of them get enrolled as sexual workers if the *maquiladoras* are not able to absorb them fast. The sex industry is one of the city's main attractions and there is a crowd of men waiting for new flesh to consume but, at the same time, ready to punish – by beating, raping and even murdering – the sexual independence of the female sinners, the betrayers, the new *Chingadas*.

A second element that interrupts women's traditional role in Ciudad Juárez deals more with the economic female independence, as long as they are usually able to easily get a job in the *maquiladoras* or in the tourist industry of the city. Until very recently it was easier for a woman to find a job within the twin plants than for a man, so the traditional domestic roles have been inverted with several Juárez's women having full time jobs and earning to – hardly – maintain their families, and men staying at home and looking after their children. In other cultures this new domestic patterns would have not provoked resentment nor psychological frustration in men, but in Mexico the '*macho*' role had been totally compromised by the women's daring and insolence against their own men, who badly accept to be maintained and easily punish their partners due to their new economic status. This relative economic independence – we say 'relative' because salaries in the twin plants are too low to allow women to maintain themselves, for not mentioning the extremely high cost of life in the border as a consequence of the dollar-free circulation in the area – is the first element that allows women to get a further social, psychological and even sexual independence as long as they do not need any male protection any longer. In fact the percentage of women who are single mothers in the city is 62%³³, which clearly shows this new tendency and highlights the current female belief that men are not necessary anymore as long as they can continue being hired by the *maquiladora*-industry, which has meant independence and redemption for women in the city, but paradoxically also death.

³³ Source: **Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI)**. Official Mexican Bureau of Statistics (web site: www.inegi.gob.mx)

* The Cartel of Juárez: a parallel state

At the same time that the *maquiladora*-industry expanded up and down the city, some other activities such as the drug-trafficking industry, the organized crime and the gangs' consolidation were in the process of growing too, making of Ciudad Juárez one of the most violent and dangerous cities not just along the border, but in the whole Mexico. This reputation, combined with the entertainment attractions provided by the city, have created an explosive mix either for the residents and for the thousands of visitors coming to the city everyday. Ciudad Juárez has a sordid, squalid night-life equally sampled by Mexicans and Americans eager to get off the limits in the hundreds of bars, pubs, saloons, brothels, hotels, 'no-tell motels' and *picaderos*³⁴ located in the city, taking advantage of some local circumstances such as police corruption, poverty, segregation, excessive violence and even witchcraft facts present mainly in the northern Mexico.

According to the results of the First National Survey about Insecurity (ENSI1)³⁵, Ciudad Juárez is a *municipio* (county) with a high criminal rate as long as the city exceeds the crime average not just of the State of Chihuahua, but that of the whole nation. Just to give some examples in 2001 for every 100,000 inhabitants there were 730 assault and battery crimes in Ciudad Juárez, while in the rest of the State the number decreased to 303, and in the rest of the country it went down even further to 113 crimes dealing with injuries and/or lesions. Talking about homicides in the same year for every 100,000 inhabitants there were 66 murders in Juárez, 25 in the rest of the State, and just 12 in the rest of the country. But regarding kidnapping the data were even more impressive: in all Mexico the statistics showed that for every 100,000 inhabitants the number of people kidnapped in 2001 was 18, 51 in the rest of Chihuahua, and 133 in Ciudad Juárez: the 700% percent more than in the whole country!

But things were not better when focusing on complaints dealing with the abuse of authority: in 2001 for every 100,000 inhabitants there were 332 reports in Juárez, 253 in the rest of the State, and just 67 formal complaints in the rest of the country. Unfortunately these figures presented by the Institute of Studies about Insecurity were far beyond those accepted by the authorities, who denied to have received as many reports as the Civil Association (ENSI1) stated, and added that from 1997 to 2001 the number of crimes reported in the State of Chihuahua for every 100,000 inhabitants had considerably decreased along the years.

This statistics war seems to be one constant characteristic in the crime average of the State of Chihuahua, but we can deduct from it that the high violence index in Juárez gets worsened by the poor response of the authorities towards crime and the police corruption, which have created, altogether, an environment full of insecurity and legal uncertainty which facilitates illegal conducts of hundreds of people staying on the wrong side of the law. The popular statement "*La frontera es tierra sin ley*" (The border is a land of outlaws) seems to perfectly describe the real nature of Ciudad Juárez.

Drug-trafficking in the city is not a new industry. Since the Vietnam War and the socio-cultural movements of the 1960's drug-consumption increased in the United States, so the drugs from Colombia passing through Mexico were not enough to satisfy the American demand anymore.

³⁴ **Picaderos** are the places where people can buy drugs and also inject them immediately. The hygienic conditions are usually very poor and the risk to get infected by dirty-needles is high, but the estimates count approximately 1,000 of them distributed all over Ciudad Juárez (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 41).

³⁵ The Survey was sponsored by the Institute of Studies about Insecurity - Civil Association in March 2002, as stated in the article "*Feminicidio en Ciudad Juárez: Ruptura de la Equidad de Género*", written by René Alejandro Jiménez Ornelas in the book "*La memoria de las olvidadas: las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez*" (Alvarez de Lara, Rosa Isela. 2003: 16-40).

During the same period the State of Sonora, once considered the breadbasket of Mexico, received a great governmental support to increase the agricultural productivity levels, but unfortunately not all the money was channelled properly and the poppy harvests started to proliferate all over the state. Moreover poppies and marihuana harvests also expanded into Sinaloa, the southern border state. In those years Ciudad Juárez, along with Tijuana, were already the main crossing channels to transport the drugs from Colombia into the U.S., but the American higher demand of narcotics triggered a war between the two main Mexican border drug cartels: the Tijuana cartel and the Ciudad Juárez one. Some years later a new cartel, headed in Sinaloa, began to compete for the supremacy of the border causing even more violence, kidnappings and executions in the area.

Moreover during the early 1980s the American demand of drugs went even further due to the consolidation of the crack consumption in Los Angeles, as a secret national strategy to get funds to finance the Contras revolution in Nicaragua. In those years Reagan's foreign policy towards Latin America was based on a declared war to communism, and the drug-industry was just the means to reach the goal. In his book "Dark Alliance", the journalist Gary Webb³⁶ documented the CIA responsibility in the crack and cocaine expansion in Los Angeles. But the CIA was not the only institution involved as long as Webb also mentioned the DEA, the Medellin Cartel and the contra-revolutionaries in Nicaragua. In fact he pointed at a guy called Alejandro Cerna, from the Medellin cartel and Mike Palmer, related to the CIA – who introduced himself as being an indirect CIA provider of air transport services through the Vortex Aviation airline, a humanitarian association belonging to the U.S. State Department – as the main actors in charge of transporting drugs from Colombia into the States. But in order to do it they also needed some Mexican counterparts able to connect both countries just as the strategic bridge located right at the entrance of the States, and the war amongst the Mexican cartels worsened even more to compete for such a position (Webb, Gary. 1998).

Even if Mexico has always been a drug producer in those years the main business' headquarters were still located in Colombia, so the cartels mainly fought for the drugs distribution and transport into the U.S., the highest drug-consumer in the world. Later on and since the United States declared war to the drug-trafficking industry, in the last decade of the XX century, the *narco* trans-national companies were also forced to change their strategies and Mexico, from mainly being a bridge between Colombia and the U.S., became also an important consumer of the drugs that got blocked in the country due to the DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) anti-narcotics war. Cities like Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, Guadalajara and Mexico City became important drug markets with a high consumption of cocaine and synthetic drugs. For the traffickers the most important thing was business, so selling drugs in Mexico was the alternative to get less, but secure money. Cheap drugs easy to obtain from street pushers seemed to be their new business, and there is currently a war between the main cartels and drug-cells to dominate the Mexican market too.

In this war the Juárez cartel seems to be one of the strongest and there are even some reports stating that during the mandate period of Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, a former Mexican President who

³⁶ Gary Webb, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1990, started a research for the San Jose Mercury News in August 1996 in which he clearly explained, among other things, how the CIA and the NSC worked with dozens of drug-dealers and their companies to secretly fund the right-wing Latin American guerrillas; the decade-long U.S. government cover-up of the CIA-Contra drug-trafficking and illegal gun-running network; and how the DEA undermined a criminal investigation by the FBI in order to shield a massive L.A. drug ring and protect the drug-ring's boss from arrest and exposure. When the original articles were published he stunned the world, to the point that he got his own newspaper's repudiation and his career blocked. In 2004 he was found death from two gunshot wounds to the head, and the original suicide theory seemed to be just his murderer's cover-up. For further references on line about his book "Dark Alliance", visit the link: (<http://books.google.it/books?id=CwijfdYbkC0C&dq=dark+alliance&pg=PP1&ots=0XEgs-Q8V&sig=7LNbgf1g6JXIfuWvosqP4rzaqHY&prev=http://www.google.it/search%3Fhl%3Dit%26q%3Ddark%2Balliance%26meta%3D&sa=X&oi=print&ct=title&cad=one-book-with-thumbnail#PPP1.M1>)

ruled the country from 1994 to 2000, the Juárez cartel capos showed up in Los Pinos – the official Presidential House located in Mexico city – to establish an alliance with the government for the drug control in the nation. This non-aggression pact was simple: the cartel would have provided hundreds of millions to the authorities if they had received, in return, the governmental protection and commitment to fight against the other cartels present in the rest of the country. In this way they would ensure to continue acting undisturbedly and, at the same time, their competitors would be wiped out by the governmental agencies in charge of the anti-narcotics war. There are confidential documents that seem to confirm this rumour, which are mainly reported in some books regarding the drug-trafficking history in Mexico. Unfortunately most of those authors have been threatened to death and some of them have mysteriously got vanished or murdered after their research results were published³⁷. This as a confirmation that the drug cartels in Mexico, but specially the Juárez one, are lethal machines able to bribe, to submit people's wills, to execute following the *mafia* methods, or to simply exterminate whoever dares to disturb their millionaire businesses or enter into their unapproachable secret world.

In his book “*El Negocio. La Economía de México atrapada por el Narcotráfico*”, Carlos Loret de Mola reproduces a report by the *Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional – CISEN* (Research and National Security Centre, the governmental agency that practically clusters all the Mexican secret agents) stating that in the case the drug-trafficking industry came to an end, the U.S. economy would fall sharply from the 19 to the 22%, while the Mexican economy would collapse up to the 63%. Loret de Mola's efforts to mathematically calculate such estimates were based on the 1994 figures made by the *Procuraduría General de la República* (Mexican Office of the General Attorney), which estimated the drug-trafficking profits in Mexico equal to 30,000 million USD dollars annually (Loret de Mola, Carlos. 2001).

But the Juárez cartel has not always been the most powerful in the country even if the strategic geographical position of Ciudad Juárez has always been exploited by alcohol, human, gun-runners and drug-traffickers. During the American Prohibition period – also known as Dry Law – Juárez was used as the headquarters to produce, storage and illegally channelled the forbidden alcoholic beverages into the United States. During the same period the opium traffic intensified too, as a result of the Chinese influence in the area. In 1925 Pablo González and his wife María Ignacia Jasso, also known as *La Nacha*, controlled the marihuana and heroin traffic in the city. Their business went on until the late 1960s when Oscar Venegas, a prior Major of the Guadalupe County, took the control of the market. After Venegas' assassination the drug-industry was taken over by Pablo Acosta Villareal, the *Ojinaga Baron*, who was supported in that cruel and bloody *narco-war* by a ferocious young man from Sinaloa: Amado Carrillo, nephew of the well known drug-trafficker Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, alias *Don Neto*.

After internal adjustments that counted several murders – including the assassination of Rafael Aguilar Guajardo, a previous agent of the *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (Federal Security Agency) that became a *narco-capo* afterwards, – Pablo Acosta, popularly known for keeping himself awake by a massive cocaine and crack consumption in order to fulfil the hundreds of drug-orders got from his American clients, mysteriously died in the county of Ojinaga, located in the north-eastern region of the State of Chihuahua, directly opposite of the Presidio City in Texas (Poppa, Terrence. 1998). His sudden death was the culmination of several executions and

³⁷ For a further reference about the drug-trafficking war in Mexico see the serious research made by José Alfredo Andrade Bojorges in 1999. After publishing his book “*La historia secreta del Narco: desde Navolato vengo*”, Bojorges was “levantado” (kidnapped) by a special command after having lunch with some colleagues in Mexico city, and nobody has seen him again after that. His family thinks it was a *narco execution* as a revenge for his research about the Juárez Cartel (Andrade Bojorges, José Alfredo. 1999). See also the FBI reports got by the journalist Diana Washington Valdés for her research about the femicide in Ciudad Juárez (Washington Valdés, Diana. 2005: 93-116).

imprisonments in the area that took Amado Carrillo Fuentes, alias “*El señor de los cielos*”, to the top of the Juárez cartel. From his new position “*El señor de los cielos*” started to transport, in Boeing 727 airplanes, tons of cocaine in the mid 1980s – the estimates state they were more than 200 cocaine tons yearly – from Colombia to the borderline in Chihuahua. In fact he was called “*El Señor de los Cielos*” (The Lord of the Skies) for his pioneering use of over 22 private 727 jet airliners to transport Colombian cocaine to municipal airports, and dirt airstrips around Mexico, including Juárez.

It did not take Amado Carrillo a long time before becoming one of the most feared and bloodthirsty drug-traffickers in Mexico – who transported four times more cocaine to the U.S. than any other trafficker in the world, which made him built a fortune of over US\$25 billion – but on July the 4th, 1997 the mass-media informed the whole country about his accidental death in the private, costly Santa Monica Hospital in Mexico City. According to the media “*El señor de los cielos*” was admitted to hospital under the alias of Antonio Flores Montes, but after an operation that lasted eight hours – which was supposed to give him a new identity because the plastic surgery would not just have modified his face features, but also his body – he died after receiving a pain reliever (Dormicum) unsuitable for his condition. The medical report stated a respiratory failure as the cause of his death. As long as the mass media nationally reported the news it was the American Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) the first to confirm that the corpse lying in the Santa Monica Hospital’s morgue effectively belonged to Amado Carrillo Fuentes. This affirmation was made even before the Mexican authorities could say anything about it, provoking a diplomatic complaint in which the Mexican Ambassador in the U.S., Jesús Silva Herzog, accused the DEA Director, Mr. Thomas Constantine, of being a “stupid man”.

In spite of the American affirmation and the proper confirmation made by the Mexican authorities afterwards, the media started to wonder about Carrillo’s possibility to fake his own death to mislead the investigations about the cartel after the DEA had asked Mexico for a closer and more careful collaboration against the bi-national drug-industry. It was after rumoured it that “*El señor de los cielos*”, along with his closest cartel members, tried to settle down in Chile under false coverage and with false passports. It was also said that they started doing huge local investments and spending a lot of money in private Mexican parties in the country, but the local authorities said that it was just a rumour and the investigation about the second life of the Juárez cartel in Chile was never closed.

The only certainty then was that the war in Juárez was far away from coming to an end: the day after his “accidental death” a series of murders started to take place in Ciudad Juárez and several minor and main drug-traffickers got assassinated in revenge. It was also said that those uncountable murders were the logical result of the Cartel’s internal adjustments, or simply the extermination of eventual witnesses who could have provided further information about the cartel to the authorities. But such a brutality did not stop in Juárez: just a day after Amado Carrillo Fuentes’s tragic surgery the cartel killed Tomás Colsa McGregor, who was the jeweller who provided not just jewels to “*El señor de los cielos*”, but also the proper coverage for the drug’s money-laundering. He was tortured for at least two days before dying as a punishment after he testified against Carrillo, from March to May 1997, in the PGR (*Procuraduría General de la República*) offices located in Mexico city. It was his declaration which allowed the authorities to understand how the cartel received official protection after bribing some of the most important Army officers in charge of leading the anti-narcotics war in Mexico, to continue undisturbed with their businesses. In fact after McGregor’s testimony the Army Forces imprisoned General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, Mexico’s top drug enforcement official (Head of the *Instituto Nacional para el Combate a las Drogas – INCID*), who was identified as being the main protector of the cartel, but unfortunately not the only one.

But Tomás Colsa McGregor's execution was just the first assassination made by the cartel to take revenge for Carrillo's death occurred during surgery, as long as four of the doctors who operated him were found dead in Mexico city just a few days after their fatal medical malpractice. And the executions continued throughout the year not just in Juárez and Mexico city, but also in other places such as Guadalajara or some counties of Chihuahua, so that by December 1997 there were 918 murders related to violent crimes such as executions, robberies and drug-overdoses just in Ciudad Juárez, while in Mexico city, during the same period, the number of similar crimes was 1,688. But in that period the population in Juárez was less than one tenth of Mexico city's population! (González Rodríguez, Sergio: 2002: 103-118).

To make things worse during the days after Carrillo's death a former Commandant of the Judiciary Police in Mexico city (*Procuraduría Judicial del Distrito Federal – PJDF*), Jorge Francisco Palacios Hernández, was reported as a missing person not just by his family but also by some journalists covering the news about the Juárez Cartel. His story was bizarre: after working for the Judiciary Police Palacios Hernández became a warden in one of Carrillo's houses located in Mexico city. It was rumoured that he was bribed by Amado Carrillo himself, due to his amazingly physical similarity to "*El señor de los cielos*". In fact, after passing on Carrillo's side he was not just a warden for him, but also his "double" or "human shield" in certain events in which his *capo* needed to be protected. And because of this physical appearance his family declared, after the luxurious burial of Amado Carrillo in Guamuchilito, Sinaloa – which cost around 50,000 USD – that the real corpse buried had effectively belonged to Palacios Hernández and that "*El señor de los cielos*" was still alive somewhere in Mexico or abroad, secretly protected by the police. It is not necessary to say that the PGR (*Procuraduría General de la República*) never accepted that version.

Whether Carrillo slipped away to another country or died in Mexico City, the fact remained that he was no longer operating as head of Mexico's largest (and Juárez-based) drug trafficking cartel. It was assumed immediate control of the cartel would fall to Amado's brother Vicente Carrillo, 34, who was already overseeing operations in Juárez. Two other brothers worked for the cartel, but DEA authorities said it would be unusual for them to be in-fighting among the organization. U.S. DEA chief, Thomas Constantine, and Mexican drug enforcement agents said they predicted a bloody battle among rival trafficking groups seeking to expand their own turf. They expected the Juárez cartel's fiercest challenger to be the rival Tijuana Cartel, allegedly led by the Arellano Felix brothers, who control almost all the drug trafficking between Tijuana and Mexicali. Other major drug traffickers expected to vie for power included Jesús "Chuy" Amezcua Contreras, leader of the Colima Cartel, who mainly imports ephedrine from India and Thailand, which is then used to manufacture methamphetamines in the U.S. and Mexico; and Miguel Caro Quintero – brother of Rafael Caro Quintero, who was sent to prison for his role in killing DEA special agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena in 1985, – leader of the Sonora Cartel which has smuggled marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and weapons, mainly across the Sonora-Arizona border since 1985.

What is certain is that in the months before his death, Carrillo's business was growing exponentially: his cartel was shipping multi-ton shipments directly into Manhattan, and million dollar payments to Carrillo were seized at the El Paso-Juárez border. According to reports, during that same time, Carrillo was frequently travelling in his private jets to Cuba, Russia, Colombia, Chile, Argentina and other nations in search of a safe haven, and maybe right now he is living in one of those countries leading the operations of the Juárez Cartel off-site. We may never know the truth, but we can say for sure that Carrillo was the most powerful drug trafficker of his era, and that the Juárez-based Cartel – currently ruled by his brother Vicente – is still the most dangerous and lethal one all over Mexico.

Such a lethal presence in the city has also involved lots of innocent people who have got killed as one of the logical consequences of sharing the same place that hosts the Juárez cartel. Violence sprawls on the city and the drug-trafficking industry imposes its own law in a land where a gram of cocaine may cost 50 pesos (\$5 USD) and a dose of heroine, directly injected in a *picadero*, may get up to \$10 dollars. In a land where every month the records count, on average, 10 deaths for overdose. A land where approximately 500 gangs contend to expand their own turf immersed in illegality, and two-third parts of the crimes committed are related to drugs consumption and distribution. A land where the cartel imposes several everyday practices including *narco-lexicon*, *narco-fashion*, *narco-music* (the popular *narco-corridos*), and *narco-codes* based on the adoration of the outlaw *Malverde*, who after became the god of Death for drug-traffickers. An authentic *narco-world* full of rites that are used to separate them from the rest of the world. Rites that make them different from the others and gather them together at the same time, in a world where the only existing law is the *narco* law.

FEMICIDE AND THE CITY

Ciudad Juárez is not only the border town with the highest presence of *maquiladoras* in the northern region, the lowest unemployment rate in the whole Mexico, and one with the most intense number of international human and vehicular crossings yearly, but at the same time it also has two other unfortunate records that have made it internationally popular in the last decade: the first of them is the presence of the Juárez drug-cartel, which has transported by itself more cocaine to the U.S. than any other cartel in the world; and the second unpleasant record is the high number of murders and abductions of young women in the city. In fact Ciudad Juárez is the perfect representation of an open wound caused by the crash of a developing country against the most developed country in all the world. An open wound that does not stop bleeding the blood of poor, young, mainly Mexican ladies, in a city that has become one of the riskiest and most dangerous places for women on The Earth: in the year 2000 it had a female homicide index 5.8 times superior than in any other city in the world (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: IV).

The femicide in Ciudad Juárez is a story made of extreme violence against women for different reasons, by different actors, under different circumstances, and following different behavioural patterns. All within a gender discrimination frame based on the idea that women are inferior, interchangeable and disposable according to the patriarchal hierarchy still present in Mexico, but strongly reinforced by a sort of conspiracy of silence provoked either by the high impunity rate, the governmental incompetence to solve the crimes, or the general indifference of the population. It is the story of hundreds of kidnapped, raped, in many cases tortured, and murdered young women. The murders first came into light in 1993 and up to now young women continue to “disappear” without any hope of bringing the perpetrators to justice.

Effectively since 1993 the corpses of young women and some girls started to be found by passers-by –but never by the police – in open spaces all along Ciudad Juárez: they were found lying down just like trash in garbage dumps, in old-abandoned buildings, in parking lots, on the streets of *La Mariscal*, which is the red light district right in the city centre , in dangerous slums such as *Puerto Anapra*, near police stations or *maquiladora*-premises, but mainly in the immensity of the desert far away from any sign of civilization, just in the middle of nothing. Some of these young women and girls (the youngest girl found under these circumstances was the seven-year old Airis Estrella Enríquez Pando³⁸, who unfortunately is just one out of the 89 girls murdered in the last 14 years in

³⁸ Airis Estrella Rodríguez Pando was kidnapped while walking down home from a grocery store where she went to buy a soda. Three adults (the sixty-year old Luis García Villalbazo, a man whose last name is Zendejas, and another adult, all arrested in July 2005), pushed her into a truck and abused her for at least one week before her assassination. When

the city) had been dead for so long before being found, that their corpses were practically unrecognisable. Some other girls were identified just after the DNA tests were done to their bones found somewhere in the desert. Some corpses had evident torture traces that proved they had been tormented for days before dying. Some other corpses had ice-burning wounds that proved they had been frozen, in cold-storage chambers, for a long time before their murderers decided it was time to throw them away. In some macabre cases and just as if the killers were playing a sort of evil game with their victims, some of the corpses were wearing the clothes originally worn by other girls killed before them. Many corpses had been found lying down by themselves, but also in groups of 3, 4 or even 8. Almost all of them belonged to Mexican women, but there had also been 13 American girls – of Mexican descent – from El Paso and New Mexico (Washington, Valdés, Diana. 2005: 299-318), and one European young lady from the Netherlands. They were mainly poor, *maquiladora*-workers, but there were also students, shop assistants, bartenders, housewives and prostitutes.

The main questions seem to be: why were they brutally assassinated?, and why most of the crimes have not been solved yet? But there are also many other questions dealing more with the context, the *Juarences'* lifestyles, the eventual hidden powers behind the crimes, the possible murderers' reasons, the response of the local civil society, or the international community actions to fight against femicide in Juárez, among many other things, that are still waiting for an answer. But above all there is the need to remember that every single woman or girl assassinated there had a name, an identity, a family, a story to be told time after time and as many times as necessary, in order to avoid accepting these crimes just as statistics, as cold numbers that might make us forget the human tragedy that has been flagellating the city since 1993. We must remember as well that their deaths express a gendered oppression, the inequality of the relations between what is male and what is female, a manifestation of domination, terror, social extermination, patriarchal hegemony, social class and impunity.

* **Gender violence and femicide: some theoretical reflections**

Femicides are lethal hate crimes. Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of the sexist terrorization of women and girls. Rape, torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, incestuous and extra-familiar child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, and serious cases of sexual harassment are also on this continuum. Whenever these forms of sexist terrorism result in death, they become femicides (Russell, Diana E.H. 2001: 3-11).

In spite of the undeniable importance of the term “femicide” – which is not a new concept, but just recently has been used in a political way to denounce the most extreme form of misogynist violence against women – it has not played yet a critical role in mobilizing not just feminists (who are usually more involved in denouncing the problems by implying their gender assumptions), but the whole population to try to combat and prevent the problem. This serious lapse in people's consciousness is particularly ironic since femicide remains the most neglected form of violence against women. In addition, the media provide extensive coverage of femicides – even if such coverage is often made in an exploitative, titillating manner. Furthermore, for the media and for most of the spectators murder is the fate of some rape victims and battered women – issues about which there has been massive feminist mobilization for many years. Although only relatively small percentages of female rape and battery victims are actually killed, the fear of being killed is a major

her parents reported her as a missing person the police did not take into consideration the men and vehicle's description provided by some children who witnessed the scene, for considering their testimony not legally valid due to their young age. It was later known that Airis Estrella was taken to different places within the city in the same vehicle, during the whole week before her assassination.

aspect of the trauma of these crimes. Indeed, the fear of being murdered by a man is probably felt by most women at some time in their lives, including those women who have never been abused.

Nevertheless the history of the term “femicide” started almost two centuries ago: it was first used by a British man named Corry, in his 1801 book “*A Satirical View of London at the Commencement of the Nineteenth Century*”, to simply and generally signify “the killing of a woman”. In 1827 a short manuscript – “*The Confessions of an Unexecuted Femicide*” – was written by femicide perpetrator William MacNish, about his murder of a young woman he had previously seduced, impregnated, abandoned, and then murdered. And, according to the 1989 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term appeared in *Wharton’s Law Lexicon* in 1848, suggesting that it had become a prosecutable offense in spite of its general meaning relative to the killing of a woman.

Jane Caputi, Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer were the first to systematically analyse sexual killings through the category of gender. In fact Jane Caputi (1987) was the first feminist to publish a book in the United States with a feminist analysis of one of the most frightening types of misogynist murders: serial femicides. That same year (1987) British feminist scholars Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer’s book on sexual murder was published. However, eleven years before these publications Diana E.H. Russell had already coined the theoretical term *femicide* in 1976, while she testified about this crime at the *International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women* in Brussels. At the very beginning she did not provide an explicit definition of the concept but in 1990, along with Jane Caputi, she defined femicide as “*the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women*” (Caputi and Russell. 1990: 34). Two years later Russell gave a further definition, along with Jill Radford, stating that femicide was simply “*the misogynist killing of women by men*” (Radford and Russell. 1992: 3). It was until 2001 that Diana Russell’s definition of femicide was completed and improved as “*the killing of females by males because they are females*”, which extended the term beyond misogynistic killings to apply to all forms of sexist killing. *This because misogynistic murders are limited to those motivated by the hatred of females, whereas sexist murders include killings by males motivated by a sense of entitlement to and/or superiority over females, by pleasure or sadistic desires toward them, and/or by an assumption of ownership of women* (Russell, Diana E.H. 2001: 12-13).

According to such a definition Russell also specifies that “*just as murders targeting African Americans can be differentiated into those that are racist and those that are not, and murders targeting lesbians can be differentiated into those that are lesbiphobic and those that are not, so can murders targeting women be differentiated into those that are femicides and those that are not. When the female gender of a victim is immaterial to the perpetrator, we are dealing with a nonfemicidal murder. For example, an armed male robber who shoots and kills the male and female owners of a grocery store in the course of his crime has not committed a femicide. The same applies to a man who accidentally kills a female bystander when attempting to target a man*

” (Russell, Diana E.H. 2001: 15).

The term goes further to just the misogynist killing of women by men and a form of continuity of sexual assault, where you must take into account: the acts of violence, the motives and the imbalance of power between the sexes in political, social and economic environments. There is a direct proportional correlation between the structural changes that take place within a society and the level of tolerance manifested by the collective to it, and its level of violence (Vachss. 1994: 227). All the factors and all the policies that end the lives of women are tolerated by the state and other institutions (Radford and Russell. 1992).

In *The Age of Sex Crime*, Jane Caputi takes on the sexualized serial murder of women by men. She affirms that the crimes of lust, murder through rape, serial and recreational killings are new

expressions of a new kind of crime. This kind of murder by no means lacks motives, since rape, torture, mutilation and finally extermination speak to us of “*‘sexual murder’ as a sexually political killing, as functional phallic terrorism*” (1987: 2).

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

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

Consequently, serial sexual murder is a ritualistic mythic act in the contemporary patriarchy where sex and violence combine, where an intimate relationship between manliness and pleasure are established because “*the murder of women and children—including torture and killings by husbands, lovers, and fathers, as well as those committed by strangers—are not an unexplainable crime or in the domain of “monsters” only. On the contrary, sexual murder is an ultimate expression of sexuality as a form of power*” (Caputi. 1989: 39).

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

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

The analysis of crimes against women and girls inevitably takes us to the theoretical construct of femicide. This social phenomenon is tied into the patriarchal system that predisposes, to a greater or lesser degree, that women get murdered. Be it for the simple act of being women, or for not being one “adequately”. The inadequacy presupposes that the woman has “stepped out of line” and has “exceeded the established limits”, accordingly, the authorities in Chihuahua -referring to the victims- stated in a report: ...*it is important to note that the behaviour of some of the victims does*

*not correspond with those established characteristics of the moral order; living there has been frequenting excessive entertainment establishments very late at night which in many cases are not appropriate for their age, as well as an inadequate care and abandonment of the family unit in which they have lived*³⁹.

Femicide is understood as a progression of violent acts that range from emotional and psychological abuse, battery, verbal abuse, torture, rape, prostitution, sexual assault, child abuse, female infanticide, genital mutilation, domestic violence and all policies tolerated by the state that cause the death of women. The motives can be hate, pleasure, ire, malice, jealousy, separation, arguments, robbery, the sensation to possess women and exterminate the one that is dominated. The victimizers can be among others: a father, a lover, a husband, a friend, an acquaintance, a stranger or a boyfriend. They are violent men who believe they have every right to kill some women just because they consider them inferior and disposable.

It is now necessary to point out to the different types of femicides as long as most of the research to date has been done on *intimate partner femicide* – which most researchers simply refer to as “intimate femicide” – which is the killing of women by intimate male partners, that is, current or former legal spouses, common-law partners, and boyfriends (Dawson Myrna and Rosemary Gartner. 1998, quoted in Russell, Diana E.H.. 2001: 18). Even if the research done so far presents some slight differences, we may say that intimate partner femicide is different from family violence as long as this latter implies commonalities among killings across very different types of intimate relationships. In fact Russell divides femicide crimes in 1) intimate partner femicides (which can be committed by male (ex) lovers, (ex) sex partners, (ex) husbands, (ex) common-law husbands, (ex) boyfriends or other male intimate partners); 2) familial femicides (perpetrated by fathers, step-fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, sons, step-sons, fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law and any other male relatives); 3) femicides by other known perpetrators (who can be male friends or colleagues, co-workers, male authority figures such as teachers, employers, priests, etc., male acquaintances or dates who are not sexual, and any other known male perpetrator who is not sexually involved with the woman); and 4) stranger femicides.

As we can realise from this typology since the concept “femicide” is still in its infancy, the focus to date has been on the most overt form of it: murder. However, femicide also includes covert forms of woman killing (*social femicide*), such as women being permitted to die because of misogynistic attitudes and/or sexist laws and social institutions. Just very little has been said about this *social femicide* as long as it implies governments, institutions and laws permeated by patriarchal practices and habits that continue dominating our social and political existence worldwide. Unfortunately the panorama for the future is not very encouraging due to the fact that it will be extremely difficult to convince men – who are the ones who create the laws – to stop tolerating sexist laws and attitudes. Attitudes of covert femicides such as avoiding legal abortion practices; permitting deaths from unnecessary surgeries such as hysterectomies; genital mutilation (particularly excision and infibulation); experimentation on women’s bodies, including the use of insufficiently tested methods of birth control, some of which have turned out to be carcinogenic; dangerous marriage practices such as those in which extremely young females are married to much older men, some of whom die as a result of forced sexual intercourse; and the deliberate preference given to boy children in many cultures, resulting in countless female deaths from neglect, illness, and starvation in numerous impoverished nations, such as China and India; among many other examples.

³⁹ Assistant Prosecutor’s Office - Northern Zone, “Informe de Homicidios en perjuicio de mujeres en Ciudad Juárez”, Chihuahua. 1993-1998.

In 1976 Diana E.H. Russell referred to this problem at the *International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women* in Brussels, by giving an example about illegal abortions in Portugal – in that year there were about 2,000 female deaths yearly as a result of unsafe abortions in that country – as follows: “*The number of women who actually die every year as a consequence {of the refusal of patriarchal societies to recognize our right to choose or reject motherhood} is not known, but it is probably as high as the number of casualties in the most lethal, patriarchal, geopolitical wars. However, the casualties of the war of men against women are hidden, and unrecognised for what they are*” (Russell, Diana E.H. 2001: 186).

The massive number of women and girls described as “missing” constitutes further evidence of the terrible dimensions of femicide in certain regions of the world today. And these forced disappearances , which are also covert forms of *social femicide* – along with other forms such as the millions of cases in which sexist male behaviour causes women and girls to die after contracting AIDS, or after illegal abortions, or after being born girls instead of boys, or after being lapidated as a consequence of having an extra-marital relation, – tell us a terrible story of inequality and neglect leading to the excessive mortality of women everywhere in the world today. Unfortunately, patriarchal governments neglect many of the momentous problems that victimize women, even when they are blatant (such as *intimate partner femicide*). They typically do not even recognize the more covert forms of *social femicide*, just like in the case of the government of Ciudad Juárez.

In order to overcome this handicap it is necessary to find ways to reform laws, social policies, and institutions relating to these crimes. It is also necessary to be able to help the survivors and to place the blame where it belongs: on the male perpetrators of such crimes instead of on the female survivors. In addition, it is necessary to recognize the role of patriarchy in causing these women-hating crimes, as much as the role of the state to structurally preserve them in time due to the impunity arose by their neglect in punishing the murderers.

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

Nevertheless, it is important to insist that any investigation of the killing of women and girls in Ciudad Juárez which does not take into account the perspective of gender, “*as a constituting component based on the differences that distinguish the sexes...and a principal framework for significant relations of power*” (Scott. 2000: 289), together with social class, will not achieve in explaining what has happened on this border. Because the murder of women and girls, born immersed under structures of inequality, is directly related to these same structures.

In addition, however, we should not just centre on analysing the behaviour of women, but mainly on the desire of men to kill them. The behaviour of prostitutes, labourers, minors, students, and women in general must not even be analysed because we would leave aside the analysis of the violence on the part of some men, demanding that women themselves prevent rape and murder (Cameron and Frazer. 1987: 110). If it is true that women should and must be responsible for themselves, what happens when the conditions of poverty force some females to work night shifts? What happens when you live in areas with a deficient urban infrastructure and without electricity? When there is neither private nor public transportation to leave women at the doorsteps of their homes? In addition, what happens when a woman is under age? Men who rape do so because it hurts women. Nevertheless, a society that wishes to reduce that kind of violence must direct its

attention to find the reasons for which men inflict such harm. To that end a society must favour and promote that women acquire the emotional means to really know what their desires are, and the economic means to be able to say no to sexual violence and all forms of intimidation (Pally. 1997: 25-28).

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

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

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

Furthermore, men almost everywhere in the world hardly resist losing their monopoly on power. Just as the whites of South Africa were against the black people who dug at the base of the racial structure of power, thus men react confronting the liberation of women: while more women gain access to jobs, financial growth and professional success, the violence of men against women increases, *although not necessarily against those who are successful* (Russell, Diana. 1993: 258).

In addition to this, one has to take into account that the free display of female sexuality has been represented only through a productive attitude dictated by male desire. "*Without it, any free demonstration of female sexuality appears as chaotic horror. It is never the other way around, because then disorder is established and chaos appears, which seems to be what is seen at the turn of this century*"(Foucault. 1998: 177).

And it is precisely this unbalance in the male-female powers which makes us focus on the lives and actions of the victims when we speak about the killing of women, rather than in those of the killers.

The violence cannot be understood without taking into account the dominant class behind the organization protecting its interests and privileges through a political system permeated in violence (Tecla. 1995: 83). Therefore human violence is a destructive and annihilating force that dissipates or maintains a contradiction and prevents the development of one of its opponents, or simply destroys it (Tecla. 1995: 93). For the dominant classes, violence is a necessary value that contributes to maintain the existing order; it is the right of those who have the power (Devalle. 2000: 22).

This is why to analyse the femicides in Ciudad Juárez it is not enough to focus on the living circumstances of thousands of young women and girls who share common spaces in a city popularly known for offering cheap, female labour to the trans-national companies interested in cutting down production costs. It would not be enough yet to base our analysis on the crime perpetrators, whoever they may be, as long as the complexity and the motives behind femicide do not follow a unique crime pattern, but rather a series of different behaviours all based in the common sensation that women are inferior and disposable. Moreover, a complete analysis should also include the fundamental role of the government and the political institutions to allow these crimes to go still unsolved, after fourteen years since the first assassination of a young woman came to the light in that border town, as long as it has been established that those who enforce the law are not fully interested in apprehending those who break it by killing girls and women. This is necessary because femicide is reserved for the ultimate act of male sexism: the literal destruction of the lives of women and girls on an individual, non-institutionalised level, as well as on a large-scale institutionalised level, just like what is happening in Ciudad Juárez up to date.

* **Femicide in Juárez: a brief history and criminal behavioural patterns behind it.**

12 May 1993 - *The body of an unidentified woman found ... on the slopes of Cerro Bola (...) in the supine position and wearing denim trousers with the zipper open and the said garment pulled down around the knees (...) penetrating puncture wound to the left breast, abrasions on the left breast, blunt force injury with bruising at the level of the jaw and right cheek, abrasion on the chin, bleeding in the mouth and nose, a linear abrasion near the chin, light brown skin, 1.75 cm., brown hair, large coffee-coloured eyes, 24 years old, white brassière pulled up above the breasts. Cause of death asphyxia resulting from strangulation. (Preliminary Investigation 9883/93-0604, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, February 1998 – Description about the first femicide victim in the city, Alma Chavira Farel, assassinated in January, 1993)"*

In his last book Roberto Bolaño⁴⁰ mentioned that Ciudad Juárez is a sort of laboratory of our future as long as the most complex, extreme and even bizarre situations coexist in a land where the productivity of its people usually comes annihilated by the violence of the city, which also hosts the most lethal and bloodthirsty drug-trafficking cartel all over Mexico, right at the entrance of the United States. A laboratory of our future because explosive elements are being combined, for more than a decade now, in a city that feeds itself from the blood of hundreds of kidnapped, raped and murdered young women. The murders first came into light in 1993 and up to this day females continue to "disappear" without any hope of bringing the perpetrators to justice, in spite of the recent efforts of the local authorities to "speed up" the local police investigations after a missing report is received.

Even if we now know that it all seems to have started in 1993 – the first young woman to be assassinated was Alma Chavira Farel on January 23rd, 1993 and just two days later, on January the

⁴⁰ In "2666" Roberto Bolaño narrates, in one of the four stories included in his book, the femicides in Ciudad Juárez seen through the eyes of a journalist visiting the city. In fact he got inspired in the figure of Sergio González Rodríguez (author of the book "Huesos en el Desierto") to create the main character of his book.

25th, the impregnated sixteen-year old Angelina Luna Villalobos was strangled with an electric cable, being one of her husband's friends suspected of committing the murder,⁴¹ – year in which there were sixteen women assassinated in the city despite the phenomenon was not perceived yet as a threat by the inhabitants, and that from 1993 to November 1997 several women's corpses had been found in desert or semi-desert locations either in the suburbs – there the neighbourhoods were always the same: Cerro Bola, Lomas de Poleo, Lote Bravo – or in the city centre, there has been a constant note throughout the years which makes these femicides even worse: the lack of reliable information about the precise number and identities of all the victims savagely strangled, battered, raped, stabbed, mutilated, and/or tortured to death.

In fact in 1993 some journalists and media communicators started to realize that the ‘normal’ number of female homicides, previously considered as acceptable because they just involved prostitutes and women related to the drug-cartel, were noticeably increasing and included more female categories such as students and *maquiladora*-workers. This kind of patriarchal attitudes that fully justified the killings of prostitutes and female drug-traffickers or drug-baron's partners, has been explained by Jane Caputi and Diana E.H. Russell in their book “*The Politics of Woman Killing*”. In it they have stated that the misogyny does not only provoke violence against women, but it also distorts the media coverage about such crimes. Femicides, rapes and female mistreatments are usually ignored or are broadcasted in a sensationalist and titillating way by the tabloid press, depending on the victim's race, social status and physical attractiveness. The more a woman is white, rich and beautiful, the more the tabloids will talk about her assassination to the public. All because the media coverage also follows masculine or male-dominated models (Caputi Jane and Diana E.H. Russell. 1991).

In 1998 the *Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos* (National Commission on Human Rights) affirmed that, in a period of 10 years, there were 263 homicide cases in Juárez and 4587 reports of “missing” women⁴². In 2003 several reports coming from different national as well as international organizations presented different estimates, so for the *Human Rights Commission of the United Nations* there were at least 189 cases of homicide in Juárez and for the UNIFEM (*United Nations Development Fund for Women*) – that supported the NGO campaign known as “*Stop Impunity: No more Murder of Women!*” – about 280 women had been brutally killed between 1993 and the middle of 2002.⁴³ The number raised to 285 female homicides and 257 reports of missing women for the *Inter American Commission on Human Rights*⁴⁴, while *Amnesty International* reported 370 cases of killings and 70 disappearances⁴⁵.

These data did not tally with the information provided by the Mexican authorities, who in 2003 commissioned a “newspaper survey”⁴⁶ that brought forth 321 murdered women in Juárez between January 1993 and July 2003. The *Chihuahua Women's Institute* raised the figure to 326 in October

⁴¹ The information about the victims has been collected in different ways: newspapers notes, direct interviews to the relatives of the murdered women, and a few official documents provided by the authorities to some journalists. Two very important and complete summaries are included in the books: “*Cosecha de Mujeres. Safari en el Desierto Mexicano*” (by Diana Washington Valdés) and “*Huesos en el Desierto*” (by Sergio González Rodríguez).

⁴² Special Report No. 44/98 of the National Commission on Human Rights about “*Women homicides and disappearances in the city of Juárez, Chihuahua*”. 1998

⁴³ Recommendation made by Noeleen Heyzer, the Executive Director of UNIFEM, to the Mexican government in 2003.

⁴⁴ Special Report of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights “*The situation of the rights of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico: The right to be free from violence and discrimination*”. Organization of American States. Doc. 44, March 7th, 2003

⁴⁵ Special Report of Amnesty International “*Intolerable killings: 10 years of abductions and murders of women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua*” August 2003.

⁴⁶ Due to the lack of official reliable information in 2003 the governmental Chihuahua Women's Institute sponsored a survey – named “*Homicidios de mujeres: auditoria periodística 1993-2003*” – based on the information given by the local newspapers about the women murdered in the city.

of the same year during the visit of the representatives of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁴⁷, while both the *Chihuahua Interior Department* and the representative of the *Public Prosecutor's Office of the General-Attorney of Mexico* raised it to 328 in the same period. Other official sources such as the *State Public's Prosecutor Department* had referred to 258 murderers for the same geographical area up to February 2003 and, according to the information submitted by the *Government of the State of Chihuahua*, between 1993 and May 2004 there were 334 murders of women in Ciudad Juárez. These figures were based on the number of victims whether or not they were fully identified. Similarly, it should be noted that these data included just the murders committed in Ciudad Juárez and not those reported in other cities of the State of Chihuahua, nor the number of women reported as "vanished".

Currently Mexican civil and non-profit organizations and residents say the true number is likely much higher than the last figures provided by the Government of the State of Chihuahua in September 2007. For them from January 1993 to September 2007 – which is the latest official information available – there were 392 female murderers not just in Ciudad Juárez but in the whole state of Chihuahua, which may be very suspicious due to the previous numbers reported by different associations and institutions in 2003. However, on the 392 femicides they gave the following status: 183 out of them have been judiciary solved; 18 were cases of femicide-suicide; 61 are currently under criminal proceedings; 127 are still under investigation; and the remaining 3 of them have been declared unsolvable due to the authorities' incompetence. For the Chihuahua Prosecutor Patricia González, throughout the 2007 and up to date "*there have just been 14 femicide-cases in Ciudad Juárez, which is a real proof of the efforts made by the government to stop the female crimes in the city*"⁴⁸.

Whatever the real number is –although figures are very important, they are not the central issue – there have been two different murder behavioural patterns identified as the cause of these femicides: "situational violence" and "serial sex killings".

Most have been victims of what police call "situational violence": routine instances of drug, gang, robbery and domestic violence that anyone expects in any big city. But due to the living conditions previously explained and the human relations derived in Juárez the level of brutality against women is extreme: wives killed by husbands; jealous boyfriends or lovers; for not mentioning that the impunity for murderers has also provoked copycat crimes:

*"María Luisa Carsoli Berumen, a 32-year-old mother of four and the secretary at a battered women's shelter in Juárez – 'Casa Amiga', still run by Esther Chávez Cano, an internationally recognised human right activist who has fought against the male violence over women, – was standing by the shelter entrance when her husband approached. He had a history of domestic violence, and although Carsoli Berumen had reported him to authorities, they had released him. Now, as bystanders watched, he stabbed his wife twice, killing her. Carsoli Berumen became another statistic in a decade-long surge of murders committed against women in this gritty border city"*⁴⁹.

And as if this wave of situational violence were not bad enough, a second, chilling surge of "serial

⁴⁷ Report on Mexico produced by the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW - UN). January 27th. 2005.

⁴⁸ Statement made by the Chihuahua's State Prosecutor, Patricia González, in September 2007. Reported on the newspaper "El Paso Times .com" on September 28th, 2007.

⁴⁹ Amnesty International On-line Magazine. USA., 1995. "The Juarez murders" article.

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/amnestynow/juarez.html>

sex killings" also hit Juárez a decade ago. Corpses, mostly of young women and girls, started turning up in fields and dumps around the city. Most had been raped or sexually abused, tortured to death, and some had mutilated breasts. Many had been dead so long that they were un-recognizable. Some were found individually as well as in groups of three, four or eight. A few of these women had triangle-marks ripped out from the skin in their backs. Some of the victims were buried wearing clothes that belonged to other victims. The corpses were abandoned on waste grounds and eventually discovered by passers-by, not by the police. Then investigators have rarely implicated the family members or close acquaintances of those victims who could be identified as the murderers. Instead, the culprits seemed to have been unknown to the victims. An estimated 90 murders in the last decade fit this pattern (one-third of the total murderers in Ciudad Juárez), even if the numbers also differ from source to source:

"Claudia Ivette González might still be alive if her employers had not turned her away. The 20-year-old resident of Ciudad Juárez—the Mexican city abutting El Paso, Texas—arrived at her assembly plant job four minutes late one day in October 2001. After management refused to let her into the factory, she started home on foot. A month later her corpse was discovered buried in a field near a busy Juárez intersection. Next to her lay the bodies of seven other young women".⁵⁰

As mentioned in different reports produced by national and international bodies, the women who have been murdered following the "serial sex" pattern or have disappeared (both through deception or by force) are young women (ranking 14 to 25, even if the youngest victim was just 6 years-old) of humble origins living in conditions of poverty and vulnerability – most of them maquila workers, but there are also students and employees of commercial activities – who are abducted in their course to work in the twin plants, in deserted zones but also while they are waiting for or leaving the buses that take them to and from work, or after visiting the bars that are popular among the maquila-workers on Friday nights in the heart of the city, or even in broad daylight spaces downtown escaping police notice and with no one reporting having seen anything unusual. Far from hiding their victims, the murderers leave them in plain sight perhaps as a challenge to the authorities since they have enjoyed total impunity so far. By a curious coincidence, the discoveries of corpses have also coincided with the announcement of Government measures or actions taken by non-governmental organizations (NGO's), as if they were a response by or a threat from the criminals.

The motivations have included theories involving drug-trafficking – there seems to be consensus among the three levels of Government that, being a border town, both Mexicans and American citizens could be implicated in the crimes, that the murderers might even live there and be involved in drug dealing, commit the murders in the U.S. and then bring the corpses to Ciudad Juárez – trafficking in organs, trafficking in women for sexual exploitation purposes or the production of "snuff" videos, among other uncertain things and theories. Unfortunately so far the only certain thing is that there has been growing dissatisfaction, both within Mexico as well as internationally, with the progress of the official investigations, leading to charges even of police complicity. Critics say investigations have ground to a halt because of corruption, incompetence and witness intimidation. The serial slayings have continued despite numerous arrests and claims that they have been solved.

The mothers of the victims are extremely dissatisfied with whom officers have arrested. In many cases, as in a documentary produced by the Mexico-born but *chicana*-identified Lourdes Portillo⁵¹,

⁵⁰ Amnesty International On-line Magazine. USA., 1995. "The Juarez murders" article.

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/amnestynow/juarez.html>

⁵¹ Documentary "Señorita extraviada (Missing young woman)" by Lourdes Portillo, 2001, 74 minutes, USA-Mexico. <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2002/señoritaextraviada/index.html>

women testified that it was police who kidnapped, it was police who raped, it was police who victimized and harassed women of Juárez. Many arrests have been made, but due to the lack of evidence or poor police investigations caused by either incompetence or lack of resources and political will, the fact remains that mistakes have been made. Investigations have gone uninvestigated.

Various individuals have been arrested in connection with the murders. However, the Mexican police has been criticized for making arrests with little or no evidence and failing to detain alleged perpetrators, and they have been accused of coercing people to confess the murders, destroying evidence, even kidnapping women in a sort of conspiracy of silence and cover-up by Mexican politicians bribed by the killer or killers.

Whatever the reasons behind femicide are, the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez took place in the setting and under the human interaction factors described above. Although they were surely committed for different motives, by different perpetrators, in different circumstances and according to different patterns, they are all influenced by a culture of discrimination against women based on the erroneous idea that women are inferior, dispensable and interchangeable. Due to this fact the murderers and abductions have not been fully perceived as a significant problem requiring immediate and forceful action on the part of the relevant authorities, who started to react just under international pressure. However, the saddest part of the story may be the general lack of interest in the whole country in spite of the great efforts of some groups of mothers⁵² that continue, lonely and desperately, fighting for justice and demanding, in the international scenario, the support that they have not found in their own homeland...

⁵² A special mention will be given to “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a casa a.c.*” (May our daughters be back home), a non-profit civil association of mothers by mothers in Ciudad Juárez, who claim that their cases have gone unsolved for over 13 years and wish to get the murderers of their daughters convicted. (Web site: <http://www.mujeresdejuarez.org>)

2. JULIA... The mother

“On Tuesday October 24th, 2000, the authorities of the State of Chihuahua recognised to have found the corpse of another assassinated woman in Ciudad Juárez. The corpse, who was thought to belong to a young woman, was in a state of total decomposition. It was found in a desert area in the suburbs of Juárez. The victim presented bruises in different parts of her body and very probably internal lesions as well. It was estimated that the mortal remains had been exposed outdoor for a period around 15 to 18 weeks long, and the experts’ opinion would have revealed whether the woman had been sexually attacked. The State Attorney’s Office for the crimes against women in Ciudad Juárez said that the mortal remains could belong to María Elena Chávez Caldera, who had vanished five months before” (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 217)



Julia and Daniel, María Elena Chávez Caldera's parents
at her funeral - Ciudad Juárez - 2004

The first impression when meeting Julia Caldera was an extremely positive and long-lasting one. This may be thought to be the normal impression when meeting any of the mothers of the women assassinated in Ciudad Juárez, due to a sort of female complicity when facing such a painful situation as the murder of a mother, a sister, or a daughter, like in Julia's case. But with Julia the feeling got during our first interview was very different maybe because I expected to find the standard figure of a docile and self-sacrificing mother, which tends to prevail in all Mexico north to south and east to west. Instead I found a still very young mother who has learnt how to live devoting her life to get justice for her daughter's assassination, along with other mothers that unfortunately share with her the same unfair fate.

Before meeting Julia I had talked to her on the phone to introduce myself and to ask her to meet me. Who could be interested in sharing such a deep pain with a strange woman, coming to do an academic research for an unheard University located in the other half of the world? Who could be willing to go through her pain, once again, just to inform that curious researcher about the ordeal she and her family have gone through since María Elena had disappeared, seven years ago? Who could be willing to open her house doors to a perfect stranger after all the risky situations her family has gone through in the last seven years? I honestly expected a negative answer, just as all the previous 'no' I had already heard when contacting some of the mothers who had also got their daughters assassinated in Juárez.

Just like the first 'no' I heard from Evangelina Arce, one of the most well-known mothers and currently the Vice President of the *Comité Independiente de Chihuahua Pro Defensa de los Derechos Humanos* (CICH – Chihuahua Independent Committee for the Human Rights Defence), who bravely faced the Juárez authorities when they had already closed her daughter's case because, according to their limited proofs, there were no further lines of enquiry in the case of Silvia Arce. Evangelina then collected the proofs – which also included the complete names of the three suspects – and took them to the Police, proving that her daughter and a friend of her had been first kidnapped and then killed by ex-agents of the former *Policía Judicial Federal* (Federal Judiciary Police) in 1998. When I first called her Eva honestly told me that she did not want to grant any other interview because she was afraid of what could have happened to her grandsons, Silvia's sons. That was in march 2006 and the cruel destiny was about to prove she was right to be afraid, because almost three months later, on June the 5th 2006, her eighteen year-old grandson, Angel Octavio Atayde Arce, was shot twelve bullets at a party. He died there and nobody knows who the killer was, alleging that Angel Octavio's death was not a retaliation act against Evangelina's work as a human right activist in Ciudad Juárez, but mainly the proper consequence of Angel's rude and problematic character seriously affected since 1998, after his mother's assassination... The only certain thing then was that Angel Octavio was about to leave Mexico to go to study to Spain, thanks to a scholarship granted by the Spanish government to some of the orphans of the femicide in Juárez, after the association "*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*" (May our Daughters Return Home) had received a prize for their commitment on the human-rights promotion from the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón.

Or like the second 'no' I got from Ramona Morales, Silvia Elena Rivera Morales' mother, who got her daughter killed in June 1995, after Silvia didn't come home. It has been more than 10 years since Ramona had to identify her strangled daughter's decomposing body, which had been dumped in the mountains near their home. Silvia was one of the early victims of rape and murder in Juarez, and Ramona Morales is one of five victims' mothers touring the United States in 2004 with International Caravans for Justice, spreading the word about the situation in Juarez and Chihuahua City and urging Americans to put pressure on their representatives to embarrass the Mexican government into responding to the murders. When I called Ramona and explained who I was and

why I would be very pleased to talk to her about Silvia, she kindly refused arguing that she was so busy that it would have been impossible for her to find the time to meet me on the proposed date. However, when I confirmed my availability to meet her at any time and place, she replied by saying that she had to go to El Paso for some days to visit some of her relatives there. Although her voice seemed a little bit embarrassed, my insistence did not help to make her change her mind.

But with Julia it was very different since the very beginning. Once she knew I had got her telephone number from Marisela Ortiz, one of the founders of “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*”, she immediately accepted to meet me the day after, despite the fact it was a sunday:

- *I live in Puerto Anapra – she said – and I have time to meet you in the morning, at about 10 o'clock. My address is Ballena 10715. See you tomorrow.*

And the next day, after getting some information from the hotel receptionist about the best way to get to Puerto Anapra, which is considered to be one of the most dangerous neighbourhoods located in the suburbs of Juárez, and after convincing the taxi driver to take me here, wait for me outside Julia's house, and take me back to the city centre, I was on my way to meet one of the symbol-mothers of the battle against the hidden powers behind the femicide crimes in the city.

I must admit it was very difficult to find Julia's house mainly because Puerto Anapra is an enormous slum city with similar streets almost impossible to recognize one from another: a labyrinth of unpaved roads embedded in the desert hills where it is very difficult to find street name signs, and it is very common to see hundreds of peeled power cables used to steal electricity from the lamp posts located on the main road which, by the way, is the only one to be paved. As long as the taxi passed by an improvised street market where every kind of second-hand articles were being sold – from old tires to cheap toys for the numerous children walking around the stalls hand in hand with their parents, to worn clothes and old radios, tape recorders and even small televisions that seemed to work in spite of their age – the visitor could realise about the precarious living conditions of the residents, as long as most of the houses were built with waste materials recycled mainly from the *maquiladoras'* garbage dumps. Shelters more than houses that seemed so fragile that it was difficult to conceive people living there especially in the winter, when the temperatures in the desert drop sharply provoking a high number of deaths every year. And to make things worse there was the *Santana* wind blowing intensively and bringing by all that sand which made the outsiders feel quite gritty after getting out of the cab to walk to Julia's house, located on the *Ballena* street almost at the end of the neighbourhood:

- *Don't worry, 'señora'. I'll wait for you here while reading the newspaper. Then I'll take you back to Juárez as agreed* – the taxi driver told me without asking the reason why I was going to the 10715 house.

*

Ballena 10715. Familia Chávez Caldera. By looking at the façade there was no doubt that Julia's house was one of the best ones on the street, and maybe in the whole neighbourhood. First of all it was a real brick and mortar house with no signs of waste materials in the front, which was beautifully yellow-painted and decorated with a big crucifix representing a bleeding Christ, just as the tradition imposes in many rural Mexican houses as a way to show the community their commitment to faith (the Catholic one, of course) and their confidence in a supreme power (Jesus Christ) who must claim in the afterlife the right to the heritage of such poor and vulnerable people. However, the most astonishing thing was the discovery of the small grocery store Julia and her family have recently opened, evidenced by the sign “*Abarrotes María Elena*”. It was a very nice and unexpected surprise as most of the families who have got a woman assassinated in Ciudad Juárez do not have the economic possibilities to open a business on their own, no matter how small

it might seem. *Coca-Cola*, *Marinela*, *Tía Rosa*, *Bimbo*⁵³, plus a few other limited brands were some of the available grocery products in the Chávez Caldera's store.

The first family member I could meet was María Elena's youngest and shy brother Martín, who stole a glance at me when I was looking around while waiting for his mother. Then a short, slim and graceful middle-aged woman showed up wearing some young-style clothes which gave her a teenage look despite the deep wrinkles around her eyes. Eyes framed by the most well-cared eye-brows I have ever seen, just like the ones of her three daughters including María Elena, when she was still alive. After the official introductions – she was very kind at introducing his son too – she thought we were going to be more comfortable inside the house, and it was right after crossing the main curtain – used as a door – that the inside living conditions brought me abruptly back to reality once again.

At the very beginning we sat down in an outdoor corridor because Julia's house has been built at different stages by adding every single room little by little, as they were getting the money to do so. After one small room had been roughly completed they continued building one after another, so their house was a complex of single, unfinished, shell-rooms along an outdoor, narrow corridor, that connected all of them with the front room used as the grocery store. Fortunately the sunny and warm day allowed us to sit in the middle of the desert – the corridor was not an interior one and it was not paved either, just as the rest of the house – at the very beginning, but it gave me the impression it was a tactful decision in order to let her family see me in advance, before being officially invited to get in one of the bedrooms with the excuse we were blocking the way. In fact while we were talking right at the entrance of the corridor sitting on some old chairs, the rest of her family started to come out from the different rooms and, just as the Mexican hospitality rules impose, Julia introduced them all to me, as a sign of the obliged courtesy ruling in Mexico. The first one I met was María Elena's older sister, Judith, who was taking a crying baby-boy in her arms. I will never forget Julia's words to introduce her, nor my surprise at knowing that such a young girl – she was then 24 years old – could already be the mother of three children:

- *She is the one that made me become a grandmother, Usted cree?*

- *But a very young grandmother, Ms. Julia* – I replied, trying to play with the baby-boy by holding his little hand. It was then that I realised about the serious dermatitis he had on his face, which was full of red spots maybe derived from the hard atmospheric conditions they had to cope with everyday.

While Judith was standing next to us two other children came closer to meet me. They were Judith's older son and daughter, who were adopted by Julia when Judith gave birth to his last child because they were the children of a different man. It was then that Julia decided to raise them as if they were her own children, in order to prevent Judith from having a serious problem with her brand new husband who, by the way, was very young too. But things for them were not very good so they moved to live with Julia, Daniel, their own three single sons and daughter, plus their two 'adopted' grandchildren. Eleven people living together in the same three unfinished, thick partition rooms, which had thick curtains instead of doors incapable to avoid the sand from the desert to come inside.

After Judith it was my turn to meet Julia's oldest son, Mario, who just happened to pass by the corridor as he needed to bring the electricity power – through an extension cable – from the grocery store into one of the rooms, due to the fact that they wanted to watch a DVD. When Julia introduced us he seemed a little bit upset with my presence as if he had known, in advance, that it

⁵³ These brands are some of the most popular and well-known brands all over Mexico, and their distribution channels are usually very efficient as long as you can find them even in the most remote towns in many rural communities. '*Marinela*' is a candy-brand; while '*Tía Rosa*' and '*Bimbo*' are the two most famous pastry-brands in Mexico.

would have been pointless to tell their story to a perfect stranger once more. A stranger who would never come back again or would never even call to know how things were going for the Chávez Caldera family. Just as it had happened in the past with so many people including journalists, TV reporters, university researchers, police men, writers, and video-makers such as Lourdes Portillo, who interviewed Brenda, his youngest sister, while she and her crew were recording a documentary about the “Missing Young Woman” in Ciudad Juárez, just a few months before María Elena’s disappearance. Since that day in which Portillo was recording some scenes in Lomas de Poleo – an isolated and remote zone located at the end of Rancho Anapra where many female corpses had been accidentally found, just two kilometres away from their house – their destiny started to change dramatically, as if the interview had been a bad premonition about a series of negative coincidences that started to happen ever since to the Chávez Caldera family. And paradoxically they never received a copy of such a documentary, so Brenda could never see herself when expressing that she did not know any woman that had gone vanished or had got killed in their neighbourhood. Of course then she did not imagine that a few days after her beloved sister would become another victim of such evil crimes.

And maybe they did not receive a copy of the documentary, as Lourdes Portillo had promised, not because she never had the intention to do so, but just for a banal mistake in the film-maker’s logistics. However, that unfortunate mistake served to confirm the superiority feeling the researcher usually has over her/his research object. We, the researchers – whoever we may be – feel to have the right to spy on our objects’ everyday lives, to ask them hundreds of questions pretending to receive just kind and polite answers, to follow them as a shadow to observe them from a close distance that would allow us to figure out the reasons behind the ‘extreme cases’ we have chosen to study. But, at the same time, we consider that those ordinary men and women under observation do not even have the right to be informed about the results of such espionage. Therefore such results are only communicated to our ‘equals’ in order to elaborate sophisticated thesis able to explain new or unusual behavioural models within a specific group. And, by doing so, we always get further and further from our object (who has become a subject in the meantime), falling into the trap of our ‘intellectual’ work that separates us, the makers from the takers, being the takers just ‘passive’ consumers of goods, messages, news, and models. Just because we consider ourselves – and we like the others to know about it – superior or at least better prepared than the others to judge the best way and terms to live in our world (Callari Galli, Matilde. 1979: 79).

So I could not blame Mario for giving me a fast, uninterested, and weak handshake, not for telling his mother we were blocking his way. Then Julia kindly invited me to go inside her bedroom as they did not have any living or dining room where to go, but just multi-purpose rooms full of beds for all the numerous family members. Once inside her tidy although humble bedroom – which had a thick curtain as a door, and was furnished with one double bed plus a set of bunk beds for her grandchildren, and old sofa, some shelves with plastic flowers, a big mirror, and a small closet – we sat down in the double bed and I immediately noticed María Elena’s photo right in the middle of the shelves, surrounded by the faked flowers. It was the same photo used during her search and distributed up and down the city ever since she had vanished. A photo taken for the job-form requested by the *maquiladora*, and touched up with shocking pink around her figure just to get people’s attention more easily. It was María Elena’s only recent photo left as a memory to all the people who have come to known her just after her death.

- *She was so beautiful, Ms. Julia, and she looked just like you.*

- *Yes, she is so beautiful ... and I miss her very much.*

*

My intention since getting the appointment with Julia was to record our interview to be able to create a video afterwards not just for academic purposes, but as a remaining document collected directly from the protagonists for all the people who might be interested in getting informed about the femicides in Juárez. A testimonial video able to show the ‘unofficial’ side of the story, since the relatives of the killed women have really had reduced opportunities to speak out against their own experiences after their daughters, mothers or sisters were killed. A sort of pedagogical video which may allow the audience to ‘see’ such an extreme case from the eyes of the affected people, from the vision of individuals having different cultural experiences. Probably in this way the spectators will feel more involved, shocked and/or eager to contribute to transform the reality after interpreting it based on a different point of view. The weak people’s view.

Unfortunately when I asked Julia if she would agree to me recording our talk, she kindly replied that it would have been better if our conversation had remained unrecorded:

- *No, mejor que quede hay así* (it’s better if it remains just in the air)
- *You mean I can not video-record it? Could I then at least record our conversation on my MP3?*
- *Hay así, mejor* (It’s better if we don’t) – she replied with an embarrassed attitude that made me realise about how vulnerable they can become if they do not take all the proper precautions at any time.

*

It was the same hidden vulnerability I felt in the voice of Evangelina Arce when she refused to grant me an interview to talk about her daughter, Silvia Arce.

Evangelina, who was one of the mothers interviewed by Lourdes Portillo in her documentary – just as Brenda, María Elena’s youngest sister – described in it not just the vulnerability of her own daughter, but that of all the women who arrive to Juárez looking for a better life, and become an easy target for all kind of men instead. A vulnerability that is not new in Juárez and which reflects the patriarchal models that allow men to possess women not just in Mexico, but in the whole world. Evangelina herself was abducted for a night when she was pregnant of Silvia, more than thirty years ago. She had just come to the city when a friend of her, one of her colleagues at the *maquiladora* where she used to work, ‘sold’ her to a man for 15 pesos (approximately 1.5 US dollars at that time). After deceiving Evangelina into getting into that man’s car to get a lift to her house, her colleague left her alone with him and he drove Evangelina up and down the city that night, stopping now and then in cemeteries and isolated desert zones to make her believe he was letting her go away, just to catch her immediately after, to beat her and to oblige her to get into his car again and again until the early morning of the following day⁵⁴. Then he really took her home – for an unknown reason that she is not able to explain yet – and warned her about all the ‘evil’ men strolling in the city:

- *You are lucky because it was me and I am not an assassin, but what about if I had really wanted to rape you and kill you? I would have dumped your corpse in the middle of the desert and nobody would have ever known it was me. But be careful because next time you may not be as lucky as you were today.*

After such a terrible experience Evangelina spent her life working hard to provide Silvia with a better life that could prevent her from danger, but Silvia, as the average young women in Juárez, got pregnant when she was still very young and everything changed afterwards. She got a job as a

⁵⁴ See the documentary “*Señorita Extraviada*” (Missing Young Woman) by Lourdes Portillo, 2001, 74 minutes, USA-Mexico. Xóchitl Productions. <http://www.lourdesportillo.com/señoritaextraviada/index.html> In it the film-maker interviewed some of the mothers, sisters and other relatives of some of the missing young women in Juárez, in her attempt to explain the complex reality in the city and the femicides occurred since 1993.

dancer – even if her mother has always declared she just sold jewellery and cosmetics amongst the workers and the frequent clients of the nightclub, and cleaned the toilets as well - at “*El Pachangas*”, a popular bar located in the intersection of the *Manuel Gómez Morín Avenue and the Trigal street*, in the downtown red-light district. Evangelina never imagined that the terrible episode she went through when she had just arrived to the city, would be repeated on Silvia but this time with a tragic end. She never imagined that Silvia was about to be killed, in March 1998 – when she left home to go to “*El Pachangas*” for the last time, – and that they would never find her mortal remains nor her assassins.

Since Evangelina knew – from his son in law, Octavio Atayde – that Silvia had not arrived home on March the 11th, 1998, she went to the Attorney General’s Office of the state of Chihuahua (*Procuraduría General de Justicia del Estado*—PGJE) and filed the corresponding complaint. However, the civil servants in charge of receiving the complaint laughed at her insinuating that her daughter had gone off with her lover or with a client, but that for sure she would be back home soon. To make things worse Silvia worked in a nightclub known to be one of the most popular ones in the city centre, so the authorities assumed it was normal for a ‘prostitute’ working there to go away for some days without advising the family. Specially if she had a jealous husband and three young children. Furthermore, according to the Mexican laws valid in that period⁵⁵ the police refused to start searching for Silvia and her friend, Griselda Mares, alleging that they needed to wait for 72 hours before getting the search started, just as regulated in the law.

Since that day Evangelina began to look for evidence by herself and went to “*El Pachangas*” as many times as necessary to trace her daughter’s last actions on that tragic March the 11th. She took notes of all the answers and evidence found and she delivered them to the *Fiscalía Especial para la Investigación de Homicidios de Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez* (FEIHM - Special Commission for the Investigation of the Murders of Women), which had been recently headed by the Special Procurer Ms. Suly Ponce on November 9th, 1998. But Suly was unable to find the suspects although Evangelina provided their complete names and surnames, stating that unfortunately there was not enough evidence to accuse them.

As Evangelina has repeatedly declared: “*They (the authorities) have many lines of investigation, they have addresses, phone numbers, names and they haven't been handed over. I took them a lot of information and it isn't even in the case file. We don't deserve this treatment or the pain we are suffering every day. All I'm asking is that they find my daughter and for justice to be done*”⁵⁶.

After Evangelina became a member of the *Comité Independiente de Derechos Humanos de Chihuahua* (Chihuahua Independent Committee for the Human Rights Defence), she was reportedly assaulted by three unidentified men in the city centre of Ciudad Juárez, on April the 30th, 2003. As well as stealing her purse, the men kicked her repeatedly. This has raised concerns that theft may not have been the primary motive for the attack. During the previous week she reported that she had noticed an unidentified car parked outside her house, as well as she had also received several

⁵⁵ In the past and until February 2007 the families of the missing women all over Mexico needed to wait for 72 hours before getting their daughters, sisters or mothers searched by the police after a disappearance report, as long as there was the assumption that vanished people (also males) could have voluntarily gone away with their sentimental partners. Just until February 2007 a new law was promoted in the country to guarantee women a life without violence (“*Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*”), but it has not been officially published yet and it still needs to be fully regulated. However nowadays the waiting period has changed, specially in risky places such as Ciudad Juárez, so that the investigations can start right away after receiving the report.

⁵⁶ Statement made by Evangelina to Amnesty International in 2003, included in Amnesty’s Special Report “Intolerable killings: 10 years of abductions and murders of women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua” (August 2003). <http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/juarez/pdf/mares.pdf>

anonymous telephone calls. Evangelina identified one of the occupants of the unmarked car watching her home as a state judicial police officer. Despite the incident was reported to the authorities, no steps were taken to identify the officers watching the Arce's home. The authorities refused a request made by Evangelina to be a line up parade of state judicial police agents, which would have enabled her to identify the occupant of such a car. It is also important to state that all these events have occurred at a time of increased national and international pressure on the authorities to renew the stalled investigation into Silvia Arce's abduction.

Just before the intimidating incidents began, Evangelina had given a statement to the *Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos* (Human Rights National Commission) highlighting the failure of the authorities to carry out an effective investigation into the abduction of her daughter Silvia, who was 29 years old when she went missing in the city. In fact after the intimidating events Amnesty International was concerned that they could be linked to Evangelina's efforts to press the authorities on their investigation (see the Police files No. UA 123/03, AMR 41/19/2003, 6 May 2003).

On December 30th, 2003 Evangelina presented a petition to the Inter American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR, which belongs to the Organization of American States)⁵⁷ to accept her daughter's case as long as the Mexican State was directly responsible for all the irregularities committed during the investigation to find Silvia's murderers. After all the necessary confirmations and analysis in March 2006 the IACHR accepted the petition, and in July 2007 Evangelina's lawyers (through the *Centro para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer A.C.* – Women's Development Centre) travelled to Washington to get informed about the follow-up of such a supra-national procedure⁵⁸. There they got informed about the response provided by the Mexican State to the accusations, and at the same time a new petition was taken to the IACHR: the complaint against the Mexican government for their negligence in the official investigation to solve the murder of María Elena Chávez Caldera, Julia Caldera's daughter.

*

Silvia Arce, 29 years of age, was last seen alive by her family on Wednesday, March 11th, 1998. The day of her disappearance, Silvia left her home at 7:00 pm for her job as a dancer in a bar called "El Pachangas" and never returned. Octavio Atayde, a violent partner and father of Silvia Arce's children, went to the bar to ask about her and one of the waiters expressed surprise that she had not arrived home yet. At the same time that Silvia Arce disappeared, the 24-year old Griselda Mares Matas, one of her closest friends, disappeared as well.

On March 13th, 1998 Octavio Atayde went to Evangelina Arce's house to inform her that her daughter had not returned home. After knowing the terrible news Evangelina and some other relatives managed to obtain as much information as possible to help them clarify the facts and determine her whereabouts. The night of March the 14th Mr. Atayde returned to the bar, but those present were unable to provide him with any further information. On March the 15th, one of the security guards of the bar told them that, on the night of the event, Mr. Avilio Melgarejo – another security bar who was dating out with Silvia at that time in spite she still lived with Octavio Atayde,

⁵⁷ See the on-line petition No. 1176-03 (Admissibility of Silvia Arce and others – Mexico), approved by the Inter American Commission on Human Rights on March 14th, 2006 (Inform No. 31/06) <http://www.cidh.org/annualrep/2006sp/Mexico1176.03sp.htm>

⁵⁸ The recent visit of the *Centro para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer*' lawyers to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has been directly communicated to the researcher by the lawyers themselves, who were collecting funds for their airplane tickets last July. Julia Caldera herself called me to let me know about this initiative and to ask me for support, as long as her case was going to be taken to Washington and it could be also accepted by the Commission. Her only hope to solve María Elena's murder resides abroad as long as she does not trust the Mexican justice system anymore.

who was a very violent partner and used to batter not just her, but also their kids – had offered to take Silvia back to her house. Silvia’s relatives reported this information to the PGJE (State Judiciary Police) and, after observing that the motor vehicle of Mr. Melgarejo was in his home, they reported this fact to the Criminal Investigation Department so that the police would proceed to look for him. Nevertheless, no steps were taken until March 23rd, 1998, 10 days after the disappearance. During the proceedings, the owner of the house repeated to the officers the same thing she had said to the relatives of the alleged victim: that on the date of the event “*a woman fitting the description of Silvia Arce had come looking for Avilio Melgarejo and that she was with another individual in a white car*” that was identified by the authorities in the course of the investigation⁵⁹.

A week after Silvia and Griselda went missing, a complaint was lodged with the *Procuraduría General de Justicia de Chihuahua* (PGJE – Attorney General’s Office of the state of Chihuahua) by Verónica Rivera, who had been the victim of abduction and torture a few days before the two women went missing. Verónica, who worked at the same bar as Silvia and Griselda, said that she had been kidnapped, tortured and released by her captors after being held for two days on March the 8th and 9th. According to her testimony, one of her captors claimed to be a federal police officer from the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (*Procuraduría General de la República*, PGR) and reportedly said that he would let her go on condition that she told no one about what had happened.

According to Verónica’s testimony – who left the city after informing the police as long as she knew herself in danger – two federal police officers from the Office of the Attorney General of the Republic (*Procuraduría General de la República*, PGR) – Carlos Cárdenas Cruz and Jorge García Paz – had used the nightclub to store some weapons that got mysteriously vanished in those days. When they knew about their missing weapons they suspected on the bar’s workers, so they – together with Avilio Melgarejo – started a cruel questioning to make them confess who the thief was. The first two women to be questioned were Silvia and Griselda, who were taken to a ranch where they were tortured to death after they had declared having no knowledge about such weapons. Only then the two police officers would have questioned another dancer, who clarified the misunderstanding by saying that the weapons had not been stolen but just taken to a safer place by one of the bar’s employees.

The Public Ministry and the four State Judicial Police Officers officially assigned to the case carried out intense investigations and gathered several testimonies and other pieces of evidence that allowed them to corroborate the circumstances surrounding the method, time and place of Verónica’s abduction. The vehicles and houses used were also identified as well as the two men pointed out as suspects in connection with the abduction of Silvia and Griselda. Moreover, the Public Ministry also located the wife of the federal police officer from the PGR who had been identified by Verónica. The officials assigned to the investigation informed their superiors about the results, which were confirmed in the case record.

On April the 6th, 1998 summonses were issued against the two police officers from the PGR and another former police officer (Avilio Melgarejo) on suspicion of being responsible for the kidnapping of Verónica. After that, the investigations suddenly came to a halt and the authorities informed that it was impossible to go on mainly because everything was based on the testimony of a prostitute – Verónica –, but also because “*El Pachangas*” had been externally restructured and the previous owners had sold it, firing all the former employees. The club was after renamed the “Caribbean Queen” which remained open until 2003, when it was finally demolished to build a new

⁵⁹ See Amnesty’s Special Report “Intolerable killings: 10 years of abductions and murders of women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua” (August 2003). <http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/juarez/pdf/mares.pdf>

mall. In the meantime the PGR decided to send the two federal police officers involved to the State of Querétaro (located in central Mexico), alleging that once they had left the district of Ciudad Juárez they were unable to trace them anymore for being out of their jurisdiction, and that it was impossible to find the officer's ex-bosses as well (Washington Valdés, Diana. 2005: 120-121).

In five years there was no indication of further official steps having been taken to try to find out what happened to Silvia and Griselda, or where they were. In March 2003 the authorities reported that the case had been reopened at the end of 2002 but that they had been unable to locate those believed to be responsible. In the investigation there is no documentary evidence of any legal steps having been taken to discover the whereabouts of the suspects. The only record found was an order for a civilian in the case to be sought in Veracruz, but there was no request for the federal police officer to be located. In the same month Evangelina Arce and lawyers formally requested the Special Commission for the Investigation of the Murders of Women to issue summonses against all the individuals suspected of involvement in the case, as long as the police officers in charge of the case omitted lines of investigation that, from the very beginning, would have led to useful results for the clarification of Silvia's disappearance. On the contrary, they said that the investigations had focused on the victim's private life. Evangelina added that some of the evidence she presented did not appear in the inquest: for example, she mentions a tape recording in which an unidentified person states that "*Silvia Arce was murdered by Avilio Melgarejo, and that afterwards they dumped her body in the Municipality of Parral, in the State of Chihuahua*". This tape recording appeared later on, until 2002, and the fact was just an example of the investigation irregularities (such as the officers failure to gather relevant information on the main suspect, or the lack of proper investigations carried out on the persons who might in some way have been related to the disappearance).

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Unfortunately such omissions and neglect shown by the authorities and the police during the official investigations, have been a constant and common note in many other femicide cases in Ciudad Juárez. Specially in those cases that seemed to have followed a "serial sex killing" pattern due to some similarities found in the corpses of the assassinated women, which clearly evidenced that sex and power were the main elements pursued by the killers. Serial sex killings that seemed to be more frequent during the first ten years of such a tragic phenomenon, also characterised by collective corpse-findings especially in the city suburbs from 1993 to 2003: eight corpses found at *Lote Bravo* in 1995; nine corpses found in *Lomas de Poleo* in 1996; eight corpses dumped in a cotton field on the *Ejército Nacional* Avenue – located right in front of the *Asociación de Maquiladoras A.C.* (A.M.A.C. – Twin Plants Association) – in 2001; and six corpses thrown away as garbage at *Cristo Negro* in 2003.

Collective corpse-findings that allow us to read between the lines – because there is no other way to read and analyse the situation beyond comparing different stories narrated by the relatives of the missing girls and women, as long as the official results of the investigations are not available and the official figures vary depending on the source – to realise that behind such killings there is a mighty, impenetrable, inscrutable and secret power able to bribe some police officers and authorities to protect the murderers, whoever the murderers may be. Independent investigations and social justice organizations believe that drug traffickers and corrupt police are involved in the murders, either by committing them or covering up for those who commit them. At the same time as more and more young, poor women flood border towns to work for factories, most of them U.S.-owned, there is a growing pool of victims.

What becomes obvious in most of the single stories heard from the families and/or social justice organizations, is that those who are part of the hidden power(s) behind femicide in Ciudad Juárez have formed a sort of intrinsic coalition to protect themselves against those who claim for justice. The powerful ones inside the power structures, against those miserable, ordinary people who have at least two things in common: a) they have all got a female relative sadistically killed within their families; and b) they are all poor people and such a poverty condition makes them become even more vulnerable from a social and political point of view, but also an easy target for the female killers that use women to claim the right to control the territory. A golden territory able to produce extraordinary profits from all kind of businesses (legal or illegal). And to accomplish their goal they use violence on the most vulnerable beings to make everybody know – women and men, native residents and migrants, national and foreigners, friends and enemies – that they are the ones who command and that those standing outside their coalition must be scared of crossing the thin line that separates their worlds.

And talking about power I needed an anthropological approach to better narrate the stories of those standing outside the power structures as long as historically the anthropology, in terms of power, has been the science focusing on the weakest, the most vulnerable, the conquered populations since the tribes attracted the conquerors' attention and obliged them to justify their domination wars. People that have faced different kinds of power at different times: the miserable shanty towns' inhabitants, drug-addicts, alcoholics, gangs' members, tramps, prostitutes, illiterate, morons, handicapped persons, elders, children or women, amongst many other categories.

But it is still necessary to focus on power as the origin of these femicides as long as Ciudad Juárez represents much more than just the patriarchal cultural domination of males over females. It goes beyond the traditional “macho” culture characterised by men owning, controlling and deciding the conduct and destiny of their women, as long as in real terms Mexican women are not the passive, subordinated women that tend to be represented in the collective imagination worldwide. There is no doubt that there are still many communities and social groups in Mexico – more in the countryside than in the city, or more within the low-income classes than within the medium-to-high-income ones – where these behavioural patterns seem to prevail up to now, but such a stereotype has been subverted in the last decades. As a matter of fact gender subordination in Mexico has been subverted little by little also with non-elite women, as long as ordinary females had started to bargain with patriarchy specially in the North since the 1940's, when the migration flows were attracted to the area after the *Bracero Program*. Later on in the early 1960's and as a consequence of the *Programa Nacional Fronterizo* (PRONAF), migrant women were forced not just to face the traditional patriarchal attitudes, but to bargain with them in order to survive in a land located far away from their own native communities. They could have never moved by themselves to the northern cities if they had not started to gain a new bargaining power that allowed them to have a sort of new independence relatively unknown at that time. Specially because little by little more and more women started to arrive alone to the border towns, and this tendency seems to continue up to now.

Paradoxically at the same time that the migration flows to the north have slightly empowered migrant women to the eyes of the people around them in their native communities, these migrant females become more vulnerable than ever once they get by themselves to the border cities. And this sort of contradiction is more than evident in Ciudad Juárez, where unfortunately there are hundreds of stories that narrate extreme situations of female vulnerability and physical, sexual and psychological subordination. Just like the stories of Julia Caldera and her daughter, María Elena Chávez Caldera. Or Evangelina Arce and her daughter, Silvia Arce. Or like the story performed by Ramona Morales – who, by the way, refused to grant me an interview when I first called her alleging that she was very busy in those days and that it would have been impossible for her to

receive me during my research period on site – and Silvia Elena Rivera Morales, her beloved daughter. Or like hundreds of other stories that present the same elements in which the weakest and most vulnerable people face all the arrogance and prepotence of the power(s) behind such crimes.

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On July 11th, 1995, Silvia Elena Rivera Morales left for high school with her brother. She planned on heading to her part-time job at a nearby shoe store called “*Zapaterías 3 Hermanos*” after school. In the early afternoon her mother, Ramona Morales, received a call from a friend who said that Silvia was not at work when she stopped by, but Ramona did not think much of the call, she figured Silvia was in back, avoiding the chatty friend.

But when Silvia’s usual time to return home came and went, Ramona began to worry. Several hours passed as Ramona waited on the corner where she normally met Silvia, who like clockwork arrived home every work night on the 8 o’clock bus. Finally, at 1 a.m., she came home and woke up her husband and her sons to tell them Silvia was missing.

- I thought something had happened to her because she did not have the habit of not coming home, she said.

At first the family called friends, the hospital, even the jail. Don’t worry, some friends told them, it is Friday night so maybe she is out dancing. But Silvia always called to let her mother know if she was going to be late.

In the morning, the family went to the shoe store and the owner told them that Silvia had left at 2 p.m. the previous afternoon to take a final exam. It was then that Ramona knew she would have to go to the authorities.

But the police refused to file a report alleging that it had not been 72 hours and that maybe she was with her boyfriend or maybe she was staying with friends. Ramona and her family would have to wait. So they waited.

- Hours passed, days passed and it was as if she had disappeared off the face of the earth, she said. *And the authorities did nothing.*

Months were passing and she was getting no help from the police. She began to connect with other mothers whose daughters had also disappeared within several months of Silvia. Eight women in a few months – the number seemed very strange⁶⁰. Finally, the women joined together and went to see the prosecutor, hoping that he would realise there was something serious going on and took up the case.

- He said our daughters led double lives, that we did not pay attention to who they were running around with, that they were prostitutes, Ramona said. *Instead of doing anything, the authorities have defamed our daughters.*

Most of the girls, just like Silvia, were 17 year-old students strongly tied to their families. This insult just added to injury for the mothers, who began to fear their daughters were dead.

⁶⁰ In 1995 there was the first collective corpse-finding in Juárez, in a semi-desert area called Lote Bravo. From January to September eight female corpses were found dumped down there with similar characteristics: they were all raped and strangled. At least four of them had right breasts mutilated, while their left nipples were ripped out with bites.

Finally, a woman's body was found dumped in a field during the summer 1995. It was identified as Elizabeth Castro García (who was 17 years old), one of the missing daughters. When Ramona heard the news, she lost all hope that Silvia would be found alive.

On September the 2nd, police officers arrived at the Rivera Morales household and asked to see one of Silvia's shoes. Then they asked Ramona to come to the morgue and identify one of the two bodies that had been found in the mountains around the city, in a semi-desert place called *Lote Bravo*, located in the southern part of Juárez, near the local airport. They believed one of them was Silvia.

At first, when Ramona viewed the body they showed her, she did not want to believe it was Silvia. So she told the authorities that it was not her daughter as long as her teeth looked strange. She asked to be taken back home but the police refused, so she had to beg money for a ride on the street as she did not have any with her to take the bus.

Ramona now realises that the corpse was her daughter's and that she had been raped, strangled and mutilated, her face disfigured. In fact the three first women out of the eight found at Lote Bravo that year had all the same characteristics: they were lying down in a supine position, semi-naked, and strangled. To make things worse Silvia's right breast had been mutilated with a sort of knife, while her left nipple had been bitten off. Moreover all of the victims were wearing similar clothes and had a similar appearance: they had got blue jeans and T-shirts, and they were thin, brunette and with long hair. The authorities were just able to identify three of them, but their mothers are not sure yet about the results although more than twelve years had passed. They were all from Juárez and their names were Elizabeth Castro García (17 years old), Silvia Elena Rivera Morales (17), and Olga Alicia Carrillo (20).

Ramona now also believes that the man the police arrested shortly after Silvia's body was found, was not the man who killed her. However, when the police arrested the egyptian Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif on October the 3rd 1995, and blamed him to have assassinated Elizabeth Castro García and some other women whose corpses were found in that period – and Silvia was amongst them – Ramona was one of the mothers who shouted at Latif, in front of the media cameras, that he deserved to be killed in the same way their daughters had been killed.

- *The authorities have a practice of arresting innocent men and beating them until they confess*, she said.

Eventually, a judge ruled there was not enough evidence to convict the man of Silvia's murder, although he was convicted of Elizabeth Castro García's one⁶¹. As far as Ramona is concerned, the real killers of her daughter and the others are still free, hidden under a mass of corruption, disregard and evil.

- *In the past nine years, I have been going back and forth demanding justice for my daughter but I have never received it*, she said. *Not one of the 400 young victims has received justice.*

⁶¹ The story about Elizabeth Castro García and her alleged assassin, Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif, was full of contradictions since the very beginning. The most noticeable one was related to the physical characteristics of the corpse the authorities said to have belonged to Elizabeth: the decomposed body presented to the Castro García family was 1.63 mt. and brunette, while Elizabeth was 1.75 mt. and had fair skin. Despite these evident irregularities Sharif was condemned to 30 years for Elizabeth's murder. (See the Police Report No. 16142-95-1101, and the family's claim No. 0301-15852-95).

Since Silvia's death – it is important to point out she was one of the first victims that made people think something very strange and out of the standard patterns of violence was going on within the city, and it was precisely 1995 the year when a collective psychosis started regarding the assassination of young women in Juárez – the rape and murder of women has spread throughout Juárez and into Chihuahua city. Critics say there is a continued indifference to the problem at the highest levels, including former President Vicente Fox Quezada, whom Ramona has met in person to discuss the issue and claim for justice. She says Fox made many promises, but she has yet to see the results. And when a new Governor of the State of Chihuahua was elected he replied that the investigation was the previous Governor's problem, not his⁶².

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Once inside Julia Caldera's bedroom our interview started, with a very embarrassed researcher asking painful questions to a brave mother whose pain had been shared many times in the past with different kind of people: from film-makers to students, from the authorities to media reporters. Therefore it was evident she was already used to talk about María Elena's abduction and murder, and about all the actions her family and some other mothers had started to get justice for all the missing daughters assassinated in the city since 1993. This sort of confidence showed during the whole interview did not mean Julia was insensitive to her great pain, but just that she had already learned how to live and cope with it in a wise way to explain to all the people interested in knowing her story the facts she has gone through since María Elena disappeared, on June 20th, 2000.

Her relaxed attitude – in spite of her first distrustful gesture of receiving me in the outside corridor before inviting me to enter into her bedroom, once she seemed to be sure about my person and my intentions, or her denial to let me record our conversation – and her easy-going explanations, were an undeniable proof of her familiarity with the interviews and with different kinds of researchers, which meant she might have also learned how to give the best answers to get the highest attention from her audience.

And talking in methodological terms this kind of attitudes from the objects under observation is one of the most difficult things to deal with when doing an on-site research, as long as the objectivity of the whole research may be seriously compromised once the interviewees have discovered how to better answer to get the more benefits from the interviewers. Specially if the problem under study is as serious and sensitive as the one of the assassinated women in Ciudad Juárez, as long as most of the relatives of such girls still live with the fear of being hurt or damaged at any moment, and they know perfectly well that their physical and psychological integrity depend, at a large scale, on the international pressure their stories may get from the foreigners willing to interview them for different reasons. That is why I could get the phone numbers of some of the relatives of the murdered women, because they know the more their stories will be told and heard abroad, the safer they and their families will be in Ciudad Juárez. The more they will be known out of Mexico, the more possibilities they may have to continue fighting for justice without being threatened or mysteriously beaten when walking down the street, just like Evangelina Arce or like Julia Caldera's oldest son, Mario, who gets beaten by the police every time he goes to the city centre.

- I am very sorry to disturb you and to bring back all your pain again, but could you tell me a little bit about María Elena's life before she went missing in June, 2000? – I asked.

⁶² For a complete description about Silvia Elena Rivera Morales' death the researcher could interview Ramona Morales just on the phone. Ramona denied to grant me an interview alleging she was very busy those days. However, see also the Corvallis Gazette-Times Newspaper. Corvallis, Oregon USA October 21st, 2004. <http://www.gazettetimes.com/articles/2004/10/22/news/community/friloc04.txt>, and the descriptions made by Sergio González Rodríguez (2002: 42-54) and Diana Washington Valdés (2005: 290-292) in their books.

- María Elena had just got a new job as a maid in the house of a very important lawyer who used to work in the local prison called “El Cereso” (Centro de Rehabilitación Social – Social Rehabilitation Centre) in Ciudad Juárez. Before getting that job she used to work in a maquiladora, but she never liked it as long as she got home very late at night and she was a little bit afraid of commuting alone in the darkness. That is why she was very happy with her new job, which allowed her to return home when there was still sunlight. But on June 20th, 2000, I was waiting for her on the bus stop as usual and she never showed up. Since the very beginning I knew, in the bottom of my heart, that something very strange was going on as long as María Elena had never done that before, but I still wanted to believe it was just a delay and that she would be home at any moment... So I waited until very late on the main road – at about 800 mt. from their house – and when I came back alone my husband and I decided it was necessary to go to the police to set a report – she said.

Since they went to the police station to set the missing report the authorities acted irresponsibly by telling them they would have to wait as long as there were 449 reports of missing girls before theirs. Moreover the police said, once again – as they had already done it with other girls – that 72 hours needed to pass before starting the investigation, as long as many females used to go away with their boyfriends or friends without advising their families. Finally they told Julia to go home and to wait until the authorities could get any trace, adding that it was not necessary for her to come back to the station to see the progress of the searching.

- I told them my daughter left for work in the morning of June 20th and that apparently she disappeared after leaving the house where she used to work. That nobody had seen her afterwards. That the last people who saw her alive was exactly that family. But they told me that María Elena’s kidnapper had to be someone very close to her such as a relative or a neighbour. So they came to Rancho Anapra to interview our neighbours, alleging that maybe she had had a problem with some of them and her kidnapping was just a revenge act for an unknown reason related to our family. They were pretty sure that the responsible was someone who belonged to our circle of friends, acquaintances or even relatives. However, as far as I am concerned they have never gone to look for evidence to the house where María Elena used to work. They have never interviewed that family because they are important people... they are all lawyers. But I know for sure that they were the last people who saw her alive because nobody seemed to have seen her afterwards – Julia stated, adding that she had collected some evidence by herself without any help by the authorities.

- Do you remember that family’s surname, Ms. Julia, or have you ever tried to talk to them to establish María Elena’s possible whereabouts after leaving their house? – I insisted.

- Their surname was... er... I do not remember very well now, but I must have it written down somewhere. They are important people here in Juárez and the father is a lawyer who used to work at “El Cereso” when my daughter was working with them, maybe that’s why the police has never disturbed them. I tried to talk to them at the very beginning but I do not know their exact address, so I could not go to their home to ask them about María Elena’s last working day with them. All I knew is that they lived in a neighbourhood located near the streets “Paseo Triunfo de la Repùblica” and “López Mateos”, near the “Río Grande” mall, but that little information was almost useless because it prevented me from doing more to know about her whereabouts.

- And what did you do after, Ms. Julia?

- After that we used to go very often to the police station to get news about María Elena, but every time we got there they used to tell us with rude manners: “Go home, señora. We will let you know if we find something related to your daughter”. It almost seemed they were very displeased and

even angry by our insistence. Then the days started to pass by and we got no answers from the authorities, so we contacted the association named “Voces Sin Eco” (Voices without Echo), which was formed by the relatives and friends of some of the murdered and missing girls in Juárez. I got there because I knew a mother of one of the first murdered women in town. She is one of my husband’s relatives from Hidalgo and she migrated to Juárez many years ago. Her name is Irma Pérez and her daughter, Olga Alicia Carrillo Pérez, was assassinated in 1995... The first action we did with them was distributing flyers all over the city with María Elena’s photo framed by an intense pink colour which, by the way, was the only and most recent picture I had of her. But unfortunately it was all pointless – she remembered with a sad expression that denoted all her helplessness.

By that time (2000) *Voces Sin Eco* counted 38 missing people – just females – since 1993, but according to the authorities just three out of those 38 missing reports were still pending cases, as long as the remaining 35 had already been solved (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 217). Such association had been formed by the sister of the seventeen-year old Sagrario González Flores, who disappeared on April 16th, 1998 in her way back home from work. Sagrario worked in the General Electric twin plant when she vanished and, just as a curious information, a few days before her disappearance some photographers had taken photos to all the GE female *maquila* workers in different poses, which although suspicious, is still considered a normal procedure in many different *maquiladoras*. The excuse for taking such photos is that they are needed for the personal records of each worker, but the reality is that there are certain rumours stating that many of the missing girls have been chosen on photo by their murderers before being kidnapped⁶³.

Voces Sin Eco – founded by Guillermina González, Sagrario’s sister – anonymously painted hundreds of telephone poles in Ciudad Juarez hot pink and marked black crosses upon them, in order to draw public attention to what they see as the often-suppressed outrage of the murders. In 2004 they decided to re-paint the same telephone poles hot pink and to re-mark black crosses upon them on the sixth anniversary of Sagrario’s death. Unfortunately so far the authorities have failed to find Sagrario’s murderer and, to express their dissatisfaction for the investigation results, they did it again last year, on November the 2nd, 2007. Such black crosses on hot pink frames represent one of the symbols of the city, just as the eight hot pink wooden crosses located in the cotton field on the *Ejército Nacional* Avenue, right in front of the *Asociación de Maquiladoras A.C.* (A.M.A.C. – Twin Plants Association) as a permanent reminder of the eight corpses found there in 2001. Altogether seem to remind all the people – residents or visitors, local or foreigners, men and women, young or adults – that such evil assassinations of young women can not go unnoticed anymore.

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Formed on July 18th, 1998, *Voces Sin Eco* sought to support the families of missing women and to seek justice in the cases of their missing family members. Comprised of six families, none of the families’ cases have been resolved so far, according to Guillermina González and Paula Flores, Sagrario’s sister and mother respectively.

González said that people in the media and in NGOs were profiting from *Voces Sin Eco* and that the group never wanted money to be a central concern:

⁶³ See the documentary “Señorita Extraviada” (Missing Young Woman) by Lourdes Portillo, 2001, 74 minutes, USA-Mexico. Xóchitl Productions. <http://www.lourdesportillo.com/señoritaextraviada/index.html> In it the film-maker also interviewed an activist from Ciudad Juárez, named Judith Galarza, who clearly shows the photos taken to Sagrario before her abduction, explaining that apparently different girls working in the *maquiladoras* have been chosen in advance on photo.

- "From the beginning our objective was not to make money or profit, we fought with what we had, with the little that we had, this was the idea," – she said.

Voces Sin Eco also complains that people in Mexico and other countries were trying to raise money for the group but they never received anything. González stated that her organization helped in the production of documentaries, books and movies and that one group said that part of the earnings from a documentary were to have gone to the group. Nevertheless *Voces Sin Eco* never received a cent, according to González.

To cover some expenses and the rent of the small apartment that they used as an office, González said that the group sold used clothes and raffle tickets⁶⁴.

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- *And did you continue searching for María Elena supported by the association Voces Sin Eco, Ms. Julia?* – I asked with a very interesting attitude, as long as it would have been very interesting to me to find out as much as I could about the civil associations founded in Juárez to fight femicide there.

- *Just at the very beginning because unfortunately the group was soon dissolved as long as the members did not have the economic possibility to continue assiting to the meetings or the events. Some of us (the mothers) did not have enough money not even to take the bus to our meetings (at that time the bus ticket cost twenty-five cents USD), so we could not last any longer in spite of some actions done to collect funds. In the meantime I continued going to the Police Station to ask if they had found any trace related to María Elena's whereabouts, but their reply was always the same: "Go home, señora... We will let you know if there is something new". So July came and passed and nothing new happened, then August, September, October, November, December and it was always the same dissapointing answer... It was until February 2001 that the authorities informed me they had found a corpse in a state of total decomposition, since October 2000, which was wearing some clothes that seemed to match those of my daughter...*

- *Was it María Elena's corpse?* – I questioned her, admiring her strength showed while talking about such a delicate and painful episode.

- *When I first entered into the morgue to identify the body I could not believe the skeleton I had in front of my eyes could have belonged to my daughter... It was unrecognizable and I could not believe it was her... They told me they estimated her mortal remains had been exposed outdoors for 15 to 18 weeks long, but I could not believe a body could be totally decomposed in just four months... They also told me my daughter had been probably battered as long as she had bruises and internal lesions as well, which made them think she could have been raped. Unfortunately I could not recognise María Elena in spite of some of the clothes the corpse was wearing, which were hers for sure: they were the same blue jeans, the same green sweatshirt Bugs Bunny design, the same pink T-shirt with a U.F.O. design, the same pair of white tennis shoes, and even the same heart charm with the inscription "Love" on it.*

- *Do you mean you could identify some of María Elena's clothes, but you were not sure it was her body the one in front of you?*

⁶⁴ See the documentary "Señorita Extraviada" (Missing Young Woman) by Lourdes Portillo, 2001, 74 minutes, USA-Mexico. Xóchitl Productions. <http://www.lourdesportillo.com/señoritaextraviada/index.html> In it the film-maker also interviewed Guillermina González and Paula Flores, who described their experience after Sagrario's death and the way they gathered together with some other families in their association called "*Voces Sin Eco*".

- That's right. By that time we have already heard that some of the murdered women found were actually wearing clothes that belonged to other females killed before. That the assassins seemed to have fun at interchanging their victims' clothes. So some of the corpses were wearing the blouses, shirts, pants or even the underwear of other women, in a sort of macabre game aimed to confuse the relatives of the missing women. That was why we refused to accept the mortal remains and we demanded to have a DNA analysis, just to be sure that the corpse we were going to bury was effectively María Elena's one. Moreover the authorities had declared the corpse found belonged to a brunette woman with inked hair (two different colours), but María Elena had white skin and she did not ink her hair, so the description provided by the Police did not seem to be my daughter's one⁶⁵.

- How did the Police react to your demand? Were you being advised by some lawyers or associations by then? - was my question this time, as long as it was not a normal practice that the relatives of the assassinated women requested DNA tests on their own initiative. Specially because most of such families were extremely poor and their extreme poverty made them even more vulnerable and defenseless in front of the law.

- After splitting from the association *Voces Sin Eco* we contacted another one that had just been formed in 2001, after the miserable murder of the seventeen year-old girl Lilia Alejandra García Andrade. Its name is "Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa A.C." (May Our Daughters Return Home - Civil Association) and it was a brand new group formed by Alejandra's Secondary teacher Marisela Ortíz, and by Lilia's mother Norma Andrade. When we decided to join them they were trying to consolidate an important organization formed by the mothers, sisters and relatives of the murdered women to demand the government to stop the femicides in the city, fight against the impunity, find the guilty people and bring justice to the victims' families. They were the ones who advised us to require a DNA test to fully identify the mortal remainings that were supposed to belong to my daughter.

- And did the organization "Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa" really help you? Did you notice any difference when they started to support you, or was it the same than before?

- It was completely different. This does not mean that "Voces Sin Eco" was helpless... on the contrary, they did a lot for my family and they were the first ones who really tried to explain us how things worked and how we should have acted to demand justice from the State. We would not have been able to face the Police procedure if we hadn't gotten all the support, advise and good will of the "Voces Sin Eco" members, who were extremely helpful for us. However, their bargaining power in front of the authorities was very limited and the association was politically very weak, so we could not get immediate nor important results.

- So it was then that you decided to join "Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa", wasn't it? – I interrupted her abruptly.

- Yes, that was the main reason. "Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa", on the contrary, were doing a lot of actions to get the public's attention not just in the city, but also in the whole country and even abroad. They were trying to contact the authorities at a national level to draw their attention into the femicides in Ciudad Juárez, and they even got an interview with the President of Mexico,

⁶⁵ For a complete report about María Elena Chàvez Caldera corpse see the "Averiguaciòn Previa No. 25860-00 – Mujer desconocida No. 171-00" (Report No. 25860-00 – Unknown woman No. 171-00), included in the report created by the "Comisiòn Nacional de Derechos Humanos" (National Human Rights Commission), in 2003. <http://www.cndh.org.mx/laCNDH/informes/espec/dmujch/cedulas/61-F.htm>

Mr. Vicente Fox Quezada⁶⁶. Moreover when we presented ourselves into the Police Station and some members of the association (Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa) were with us, the attitude of the Public Servants towards us was very different: they were nice, polite and even smiling, which was completely new for us because in the past they used to be unpolite and rude.

- Besides their politeness, did they cooperate to help you determine if the mortal remainings they handed in were María Elena's? – I asked her trying to be as soft and delicate as possible, almost imagining it could be my own mother the one having to answer such a question.

- After I demanded to get the DNA test they told me that if I did not accept the corpse, they would not give me the economic help they were providing to the relatives of the murdered women.

- Sorry to interrupt you, but do you mean the government has a program for the victim's families? How much money do they provide to each family and how can you access to such an assistance? Was it just an economic contribute or did you get any other kind of support, Ms. Julia? – I bombarded her with questions that would have helped me to get a better idea of the programs the Federal and local governments had implemented, from the direct point of view of one of the possible beneficiaries.

- The assistance program for the families of the killed women provides an economic contribute twice a month. They are approximately 900 pesos (about 90 USD) every two weeks for each proven femicide victim in Ciudad Juárez (which makes a total of 1800 pesos monthly, approximately 180 USD). Such a help is not for every woman found death in the city, but just for those who the authorities determine were real victims of femicide. This does not include the girls involved in street riots, gang brawls, nor those who died under the effect of drugs, so it is not automatic to receive such a contribute. It is a sort of conditioned help in which you have to accept what the authorities say in order to receive the money. In my case they clearly told me I would not have access to the funds if I didn't accept the corpse they were handing in, so I lost my right to the contribution just because I wanted to be sure about María Elena's identity.

- And was there any other kind of assistance you received during the whole investigation, apart from the economic contribution that was denied to you?

- Yes, the government also implemented some counselling programs to recover our emotional and psychological health as long as it was very difficult for the parents, brothers, sisters, children and other relatives of the girls to overcome our pain and distrust in the authorities and in the whole society... I attended myself the sessions and in the last one, which was also presenced by different mothers, my sorrow flourished again and we burst into tears when a man, the father of one of the girls, started remembering her missing daughter out loud... – and for the first time I saw her eyes

⁶⁶ The Mexican President at that time was Vicente Fox Quezada (he ruled the country from 2000 to 2006), who became Mexico's first President from a right-wing political party (PAN – Partido de Acción Nacional) after more than 70 years the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) had governed. After Fox took power and during his first visit to Ciudad Juárez Norma Andrade, the co-founder of “Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa” (NHRC), deceived the Presidential guard by climbing a fence, and personally requested him an interview. He accepted and granted it either to Norma Andrade, Marisela Ortíz and other five mothers on November 25th 2003, but in spite of the actions he committed himself to do to stop femicide in the city – which were supposed to be a) to constitute an independent experts' pool; b) to provide more economic resources to effectively look for the still missing women; and c) to punish the irresponsible Public Servants who had allowed impunity since 1993 – the member mothers of NHRC have always declared that President Fox' response was always very weak and inefficient. Furthermore, some journalists have declared that Fox always knew who were behind such femicides in Juárez, but he had always kept it a secret as long as the guilty people, at least at the very beginning, were some important local residents who gave funds to promote his presidential campaign in 2000. Those journalists have been threatened to death, but they have also provided evidence about their declarations (See the books by Diana Washington Valdés, and Sergio González Rodríguez).

tearful in spite of her great effort for not making out crying in front of me, a perfect stranger who might not understand her controlled suffering. However the memory of such a session had brought some tears to her eyes, which made me understand, at that very moment, that it was not enough to stand out there just listening to her story without doing anything to effectively try to really help Julia, her family, and the other mothers who have claimed for justice since they got their daughters brutally murdered. It was not enough to ask for interviews with the only purpose of writing a PhD dissertation to get such a degree. It was not enough to pretend sharing my research conclusions just with colleagues or with ‘equals’ in order to develop ‘sophisticated’ theories and models mainly about the category of poor, migrant, female workers in Ciudad Juárez. Those hidden tears deserved much more than just the pretention of doing some ‘intellectual’ work for academic purposes, as long as most of the times the libraries of the Universities worldwide are full of useless books and dissertations covered with the dust of oblivion.

Advocacy seemed to be the possible answer to do a little bit more than just a scholar research to get a degree. After all the main weakness of anthropology so far has been to remain as distant as it has from the political and decisional powers. Furthermore those mothers, sisters or daughters were women just like me and, even more important, they were also Mexican just like me, so I could not close my eyes in front of such crimes. It would not have been fair to them, but it would not have been fair to me either.

*

- *I'm sorry for my previous interruption, Ms. Julia... you were telling me the authorities denied to grant you the economic assistance after you refused to accept the corpse they handed in before doing the DNA test. What happened after?* – I asked her trying to order the events to find out the rest of the story and the response of the authorities to her demand.

- *Well, they agreed to do the DNA analysis even if they were not pleased about it. They immediately warned us it could have taken long to get the results as long as they needed to send the samples to Mexico City because in Ciudad Juárez they did not have the proper equipment to do it. Then they took blood samples from me and my husband to compare them with the sample taken from the corpse, and they told us to wait for their call... So we waited for ten long months and the only answer I got after all that time was that the samples had not been enough and that it had not been possible for them to complete the test... So they took samples from us for the second time and again we needed to wait for long before we got the new results... It was already the end of 2002 and after our first negative experience I decided it would have been better to continue presenting myself to the Police Station to find out if they had effectively got the analysis from Mexico. Every time I showed up there they kept saying they were still waiting to get the DNA results and I got the same identical answer for months before I found out they had already got them, but they had lost them afterwards by mistake... They never recognised their neglect openly, but I knew it from an employee who was working there at that time, who asked me to keep her identity confidential.*

- *And what happened after? How long did you have to wait again before knowing the corpse's real identity?*

- *After the third “Fiscal Especial” (Special Attorney to Solve the Homicides in Ciudad Juárez) arrived, whose name was María López Urbina, she ordered to send again new samples to Mexico City for the third time and finally we got the results in June 2004, just after the third attempt! On that occasion the results were positive, which meant the corpse they had found since October 2000 effectively belonged to our daughter. But this time, after all those years and after all those mistakes, we did not trust the DNA analysis anymore so we refused to bury the body before doing*

another independent test... Unfortunately due to our demand we were strongly criticised either by the authorities and the media, who claimed we were refusing our daughter's corpse because we didn't have the money for the funeral... It was very painful to hear those comments but in spite of the gossiping we demanded a new test for the fourth time, and an independent team of female forensic anthropologists from Argentina offered to do the analysis once more.⁶⁷

- *What was the reaction you got from the authorities when you demanded a new, independent DNA test? Did they agree to do it without any condition?* – was my following question that interrupted her story again.

- Just like before they made it clear that if we refused the third DNA results we would not get any economic contribution from the femicide victims' fund, but the only thing we were interested in was in confirming our daughter's identity... Then we finally got the Argentinian Forensic Anthropologists conclusive results in December 2005 and they turned to be positive again, so until that very moment we knew for sure that the corpse that had been lying in the morgue for more than four years was María Elena's one... Finally after five years of permanent suffering the new Local Prosecutor in charge of the “Fiscalía Especial para la Investigación de Homicidios de Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez” (FEIHM - Special Commission for the Investigation of the Murders of Women), Ms. Angela Talavera, handed in the definitive results and just then we could organize the so longed for funeral for María Elena...

- I can hardly imagine, even if I try, all those terrible and uncertain years in which you were trying to find out what had really happened to María Elena on that June 20th, 2000. And it is incredibly difficult to understand how the authorities could be so careless and neglect towards you and your family, Ms. Julia. You were very brave to face them and to continue asking to clear up the facts in spite of all the mistreatments you got from the Public Servants in charge of the investigations – I sincerely expressed before asking my next question – May I ask you if you took any legal measures to counterbalance such an irresponsible behaviour from the civil servants?

- Of course we did. We gave notice of appeal against 12 civil servants. They were “Ex-Fiscales” (ex-Prosecutors) and “Ex-titulares de la Procuraduría General de Justicia Estatal – PGJ” (ex-bosses of the State Attorney General Office)⁶⁸. The charges we accused them at the “Departamento de Averiguaciones Previas de la Procuraduría General de Justicia” (Criminal Investigation Department of the Attorney General Office) were hiding away the evidence for the identification of my daughter's corpse, which represented a criminal offense from the authorities, and the lack of human rights' respect. We decided to do so following the legal advise from “Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa” – I am a member of it since then – because we considered that María Elena's

⁶⁷ The Forensic Anthropology Team from Argentina was initially contacted by some Mexican Human Right Organizations, and then by the “Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women in Ciudad Juárez” – headed at that time by Guadalupe Morfín – in 2004 to assist the authorities at identifying some of the femicide victims in Ciudad Juárez. Once they got the official request the anthropologists Patricia Bernardi and Mercedes Doretti travelled three times to Mexico (in June and October 2004, and January 2005) to analyse the files and the unidentified mortal remainings of at least 53 victims. During their independent research they had access and could read 24 original files, but they could not photocopy nor photograph them. They could also interview the families of the missing women before taking the proper samples to do the DNA analysis, but in some cases – just like in Julia Caldera's case – some relatives requested further DNA tests although they had already got the corpse and the proper DNA evidence from the Mexican authorities. For a complete description see the web site: <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/sociedad/3-47530-2005-02-20.html>

⁶⁸ Accused in this latest case of negligence are ex-officials Suly Ponce Prieto, Mayte Espinoza Martínez, Arturo González Rascon, Angela Talavera Lozoya, Manuel Esparza Navarrete, and Zulema Bolívar García. Also linked are ex-officials Ricardo Vázquez Santiesteban, Luis Antonio Morales González, José Luis Armendáriz Fuentes, Julio César Yáñez Camacho, Elizabeth Hernández, y Felipe Alejandro Astudillo Sánchez. (NOTE: These are all former special prosecutors, Attorney General or other state officials).

identification procedure was full of irregularities and neglect from the very beginning. First the authorities refused to fully investigate the family with whom she used to work when she vanished; then I was the one who discovered, by chance and until February 2001, that the Police had found a corpse wearing my daughter's clothes in October 2000, as long as they never contacted me to let me know about their discovery but it was always me the one who assisted to the "Procuraduría" to hear about the latest news about the women's murderers. And then, after we requested the DNA analysis it happened exactly the same to know the results. If I hadn't gone to ask them maybe they would not have informed me they had already gotten the first results, which were incomplete, by the way... For not talking about the second ones they lost... It took four years to know if the girl lying in that cold room in the morgue was María Elena... It was too much and we could not leave it just like that... We needed to denounce the irresponsible behaviour of the main public servants implied... It wouldn't have been fair for anybody not to do it... We owned it to María Elena...

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Last July 2007 the *Centro para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer A.C.* (Women's Development Centre from Ciudad Juárez) travelled to Washington to get informed about the follow-up of the petition made to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights about Silvia Arce (Evangelina Arce's daughter) and Griselda Mares. During their trip they were also supposed to present María Elena Chàvez Caldera's case to the Commission, demanding the Mexican State to reply to the neglect and inconsistency accusations.

So far – January 2008 – the case is still under analysis by the IACtHR, which usually takes from two to three years to accept a petition. This means that Julia is still waiting for justice but this time at an international level, as long as she does not trust the Mexican legal system anymore. Her only hope by now is to get accepted María Elena's case by the Commission, and in the meantime she continues actively fighting, as a human right activist, to find her daughter's assassins and to get justice for her death.

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- When you were talking about your first experience with the organization "Voices Sin Eco" you mentioned that you met them thanks to a woman whose daughter had also been killed in 1995. Correct me if I am wrong but if I understood well that woman – Irma Pérez – is also a relative of yours... Is that right? Does it mean that María Elena was not the first member of your family who got assassinated in Ciudad Juárez? – I asked her after having listened to the whole story about her daughter's disappearance, identification and legal steps against the Mexican authorities set afterwards.

- You understood well. Unfortunately María Elena was not the only member of our family who was killed in Ciudad Juárez... She was not the first one but she was not the last one either, even if it seems hard to believe. In 1995 the daughter of one of my husband's relatives, who had migrated from Hidalgo to Ciudad Juárez many years before us, mysteriously disappeared while she was coming back home from work. She used to study and work at the same time, as long as she needed the money to help her mother to afford her University career. So she had two part-time jobs: one as a shop attendant in the "Zapaterías El Vaquero" (a shoe store) located near the Juárez Avenue, right in the city center very close to the Cathedral (at the branch store on Tecnológico Avenue, 1610), and the other one as a secretary of a Lawyer, because she wanted to get some previous practice as long as she was about to start studying Law. Olga Alicia had taken the decision to quit her job at the 'zapatería' (shoe store) because she was planning to spend more time working for the Lawyer, so she vanished during her last working week there, on a day that was supposed to be her

day-off, but which had been rescheduled according to her bosses' needs. I don't know if it was destiny, but that day she was not even supposed to go to work, and maybe she would not have disappeared if she hadn't presented herself to the store. It was 1995 and her mother got her corpse one month after her disappearance... But it was very strange because in fact it was not her corpse the one she got, but just a sack full of bones. Just imagine Irma's incredulity when the Police gave it to her: she could not believe that skeleton was Olga Alicia's one... It had just passed a month and it is not possible for a corpse to get into the bones in such a short period.

- And what happened to her, Ms. Julia? Did the Police find the murderer? Are you still in contact with Irma Pérez? Does she still live here in Juárez? – I asked her even if I knew, in advance, that the Police first blamed the Egyptian Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif to be the responsible, even if he was later found innocent for the murders of Olga Alicia Carrillo Pérez and Silvia Elena Rivera Morales, which approximately occurred during the same period.

In fact Silvia Elena Rivera vanished on July 11th, 1995, while Olga Alicia Carrillo went missing on August 10th, 1995. Moreover, both girls used to work at two shoe shops called “Zapaterías 3 Hermanos” and “El Vaquero” respectively and, just as a macabre coincidence, Elizabeth Castro García, who also vanished that year, was last seen on the corner of Juárez Avenue and Vicente Guerrero Avenue, right in front of the “3 Hermanos” shoe store, on August 14th, 1995. Elizabeth disappeared when she was coming back home after her first shift at the *maquiladora Procon* – which finished at 3:30 pm – and after she had also finished her afternoon computer lesson at the ITEC IT School, located on the corner of *Lerdo* and *Mejía* streets, right around the corner from the “3 Hermanos” shoe shop where Silvia Elena used to work. To make things worse all of them were found at the *Lote Bravo* field, where eight corpses were dumped as garbage just in 1995⁶⁹.

- Irma currently lives here downtown where she still uses to sell hamburgers and sodas on a street stall located right in front of her home, two kilometers away from the border crossing. She lives alone because Olga Alicia was everything she had as she came to Juárez to look for a better future thirty-three years ago. Unfortunately we have lost touch since I left “Voces Sin Eco”, but she really helped me when she knew about María Elena’s disappearance. A year after Olga Alicia’s death Irma suffered from a cerebral embolism due to the stress, but so far the Police has not found the killer yet and she continues fighting to get justice... Just like me... Just like all of us...

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Irma Pérez raised her daughter, Olga Alicia Carrillo Pérez, in a small, blue stucco house a few blocks from the Cathedral plaza, cooking and selling hamburgers at night on the sidewalk of the graffiti-scarred neighborhood. She also sold second hand clothes and eventually worked as a domestic maid either in the city or at El Paso, as long as she was saving money to send Olga Alicia to the University. From her house the El Paso skyscrapers can be easily seen, which means she really lives near the borderline, in the old downtown neighborhoods of Ciudad Juárez.

Olga Alicia was a 20-year old shoe store clerk, killed in 1995. But she was also a very good student and was about to start her Law career at the University when she disappeared in her way back from work, at the “Zapatería El Vaquero” located very close to the Cathedral, just a few

⁶⁹ These girls were not the only ones whose disappearance was weirdly connected with the “Zapaterías 3 Hermanos”. Also Liliana Holguín, whose body was found at the *Cerro Bola* vacant lot in 2000, was last seen there. For further references see “Huesos en el Desierto” (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 42-54); “Cosecha de Mujeres” (Washington Valdés, Diana. 2005: 25-36) and “Las Muertas de Ciudad Juárez: el caso de Elizabeth Castro García and Abdel Latif Sharif” (Ortega, Gregorio. 1999). The only murder for which Latif Sharif was condemned was Elizabeth Castro’s one, but the file was full of inconsistencies and it all seemed to prove that Sharif was just the perfect scapegoat.

blocks away from her house. She had recently presented her resignation letter there because she wanted to spend further time as a secretary for a Lawyer Consultant office downtown, for whom she was already working part-time. In spite of her resignation she was asked to go to work to the shoe store on her day-off, during her last working week there, only 11 days before she was to start college classes at a prestigious local university.

In the evening of that precise day, August 10th, 1995, she went to the office of the *PAN (Partido Acción Nacional)* political party as long as she had recently joined the youth forces of such a right-wing organization. The *PAN* offices were located downtown, right at the intersection of *16 de Septiembre* Avenue and *Cinco de Mayo* street, near the Cathedral square. In that time the *PAN* had gained important positions over the *PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional)* and they were ruling the Chihuahua State – Francisco Barrio was the Governor, – the Ciudad Juárez County – Ramón Galindo had just won the elections as a Mayor, – and important police positions, such as the Special Attorney's one (Francisco Molina Ruíz was the Attorney General then).

On that day the young *PAN* members were supposed to have a meeting at 7:30 pm, but after her job Supervisor and friend Anita left her there, and after the *PAN* caretaker saw her walking down the street right outside the political party office, nobody saw her ever again.

When Irma realized something strange was going on she gathered with some relatives and friends and they printed some flyers with Olga's photo on the front, talked to anybody who could have seen her for the last time, and set a report at the Police Station.

- “*The authorities were just indifferent*” – she said. The police treated her with disdain from the very moment she reported her daughter's disappearance. - “*This didn't matter to them at all.*”

Perez finally persuaded detectives to question her daughter's coworkers to determine who had seen her last. - “*But all they wanted to do was look at the cowboy boots and flirt with the clerks,*” she said. “*They had no investigative plan.*”

After some days full of indifference from the Police she joined other families who were also looking for their missing daughters. The growing cluster of grieving relatives came to call themselves *Voces Sin Eco* later on, in 1998. Each of them, it seemed, had a story of horror, heartbreak and frustration - of police incompetence, or insensitivity, or indifference. Investigators seemed inclined to blame the victims for their own deaths, or the victims' families, the relatives said. So every Monday they gathered at police headquarters at the southern edge of the city, sitting in the lobby in quiet demonstration beneath large photographs of the dead.

Irma, who is a strong woman⁷⁰, has repeatedly declared that when the *PAN* youth group knew about Olga Alicia's disappearance the newly elected Mayor, Ramón Galindo, gave the precise order to cancel a religious retreat trip they had been organizing to the Chihuahua mountains. Furthermore he ordered all the young *PAN* members to avoid helping Olga Alicia's relatives in their efforts to find her, despite the fact that some of them wanted to truly help in the searching. Just as Rogelio Loya, a public servant of the Juárez County who offered himself to convince the Police to look for the missing girl. Nevertheless Loya's help did not last for long because his mother personally

⁷⁰ Irma Pérez has also become one of the symbol mothers in Ciudad Juárez, and she has been interviewed many times by different journalists, film-makers, students and researchers. In fact she was interviewed, just like Evangelina Arce, Paula Flores and Guillermín González, by Lourdes Portillo in her documentary “*Señorita Extraviada – Missing Young Woman*”. Yet she has also declared that they (*Voces Sin Eco*) “*have been used by the US and Italian press. As many as three interviews a day were given by one poor person (family member)*”. For further references to this declaration see the web site: <http://www.nmsu.edu/~frontera/jul01/today.html>

called Irma to ask her to stop involving Rogelio into the search, as long as he had been threatened to death ever since. Rogelio's mother just asked Irma to leave him alone, but he never talked to her again to explain who had threatened him and under which circumstances.

Apart from Rogelio Loya – who was a *Regidor* (County advisor) in Ciudad Juárez in 2003, while Jesús Alfredo Delgado was the Mayor – there was another *PAN* member whose name came out during the investigation. It was Luis Arenal and he was one of the last persons who saw her alive at the *PAN* premises after the political meeting. He had been dating Olga Alicia for a couple of weeks before she got murdered, but the police declared he had nothing to do with her abduction and no charges were made on him (Washington Valdés, Diana. 2005: 25-36).

A month later, on September 9th, 1995, Olga's tennis shoes were found in the desert with a young woman's skeletal remains. Eight other bodies turned up in the area about the same time. The Police Report⁷¹ stated that the semi-naked remains were found at the *Zacate Blanco* lot, in the *Lote Bravo* desert area. The skeleton was wearing *Lee* black jeans, a red torn vest, white underwear, white socks and white tennis shoes with blue stripes. Her right breast had been mutilated with a sort of knife, while her left nipple had been bitten off. She had been stabbed in her neck and thorax, and strangled after being raped (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 269).

Irma saw her daughter's vest and tennis shoes at the city morgue on September the 10th, but could not bring herself to look at the bag of bones that police said were Olga's remains. - "Just some bones that looked like they had been there for a long time," – she recalled. "He (a Police officer) put the little head back together for me because it was coming apart. He put it together so I could see the jaw, but I couldn't look at it anymore."

- "I never thought those bones were Olga", Irma said, speaking of her dealings with police, who have not made an arrest in the case. "It's very difficult to accept when you leave your daughter alive somewhere, and they give you back just bones".⁷²

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Back in her bedroom I was absorbed listening to Julia's narration when I realized about the time: we had been talking for more than forty minutes without stopping and it was almost time to finish our interview which, by the way, took place on a Sunday sunny and fresh morning almost in the borderline between Mexico and the United States. I had many other questions I wanted to ask her, but I needed to carefully choose those which could have been more useful to understand the process she and her family were still going through to get justice for María Elena's assassination.

- So the first member of your family murdered in Juárez was Olga Alicia in 1995... then your own daughter five years later, but unfortunately you mentioned another relative of yours who got also killed after María Elena. Could you please tell me about it?

- Sure. This time it was not a distant relative like Olga Alicia... After all her mother is one of my husband's distant cousins and we were not in contact very much. Two years ago my own sister,

⁷¹ See the Police Reports No. 15561/95 and 17610/95, and the Legal Procedure No. 174/02, included in the 1998 Report made by the "Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos" (Mexican Human Rights Commission) about the Juárez femicides. Web site: <http://www.cndh.org.mx/lacndh/informes/espec/juarez2003/cedulas/22-F.htm>

⁷² The researcher got some information about Irma Pérez and Olga Alicia Carrillo from Julia Caldera, who is Olga's aunt. When I asked Julia if I could get Irma's phone number she was suspicious again and she told me she needed to look for it carefully because she didn't know where it was. Later Marisela Ortiz, from "Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa", also mentioned her during our interview.

who lives in Torreón (in the State of Coahuila, which is located right in the South of Chihuahua), called me saying that her daughter had not come back home after school anymore. That she had been looking for her with all her friends, acquaintances and relatives and that everybody ignored where she could be. She was sure that something strange was going on and she asked me for advise about what to do... You know, as soon as I heard the bad news it was like if I were reliving my daughter's story once again... It was very painful to realize that our family was going through so many coincidences... it wasn't normal... I couldn't believe it!

- And what did you suggest, Ms. Julia?

- The first thing I told her to do was calling on the media and organizing a Press conference. I told her to invite the local televisions but also the national networks, and I personally called some journalists and TV reporters I met some time ago when we were still looking for María Elena. Then I traveled to Torreón and we informed the Press about her disappearance... we said that she was the third abducted member in our family and that we hoped to find her alive. I already had some experience when talking to the media, so I could advise my sister about what to say and how to say it. I had done it many times in the past but I never thought it would be necessary to do it once again.

- Were you able to find your niece? Did the Police help you in the searching? – I asked her hoping to hear a happy ending ... at least this time.

- A week passed by and we could not find her anywhere. We went to the hospitals, the morgue, the police stations, without any success... then the Press spotlights turned off and I came back to Juárez but my sister continued looking for her daughter. Some days later they called my sister to inform her that a Police man from Juárez had just found her dumped in the middle of a deserted road right at the entrance of Torreón. Just imagine: he was a Juárez Municipal Police man, not a Torreón one, and according to his declaration he was coming alone to Torreón just by case when he stopped to get some gas at an isolated petrol station located in a deserted area before getting into the city. After filling up the tank while he was going to the bathroom behind the station he found her corpse lying in the middle of the desert, just by pure case ... Unbelievable, don't you think?

- Absolutely. How could it be possible to accept such an unrealistic story? Nobody could trace her right after her abduction and suddenly, just by case, a Juárez Police man was so lucky to find her body just in the middle of the desert... Too strange to be true, Ms. Julia. But what did the police say afterwards? Could you speak to him to get any further information?

- "No, pues se nos fue" (No, he escaped)... After giving his declaration to his colleagues in Torreón the Police discovered that all his personal data – address, phone number, work references, etc. – were false. "O sea, sí era un Policía, pero todo lo demás era falso" (he was actually a Police man, but the rest of the information happened to be false). They couldn't trace him anymore and we never knew what happened to her. They never found the murderer and her crime is still unsolved.

- Excuse me for the question, but don't you think there have been so many coincidences within your family? Is it possible that your niece's assassination and strange finding could be a sort of intimidatory action against you and your political activity for the human rights promotion? Could it be all related somehow? – I questioned her admiring her courage and strength showed during the whole interview.

- “Sólo Dios sabe” (God only knows). When my niece disappeared I was actively participating in some events organized by “Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa”. Some of us – the mothers – had just gone to the United States promoting a bi-national rally in which we demanded the Government to stop the impunity in Juárez. It was a very important action supported by some famous American actresses such as Jane Fonda and the other short one...er... I don’t remember her name, but she is a very good actress as well...⁷³

- Sally Field, you mean – I helped her smiling because I was having the opportunity to listen to a live testimony about such an important bi-national event, fully covered by the Mexican media.

- Yes... Maybe my niece was killed out of Juárez as a sort of warning against our actions, but “Sólo Dios sabe”...

- Have you ever been threatened, Ms. Julia, or has any member of your family ever had? – was my next question, right before finishing our interview.

- Personally I have never been threatened and we have never received threatening visits or phone calls. There was just a period in which someone used to call us but when we picked up the phone there was no answer on the other side of the line... but those calls stopped after a while and we have not received them anymore ever since. However, every time my oldest son, Mario, goes downtown, the Police stops him with no reason, takes him and his friend to the Police station, beats him and robs his belongings. The following day he gets here all beaten, without money and once even without his tennis shoes! It is always him the one the police officers catch and take with them to the station, so he is afraid everytime he needs to go downtown.

- Have you ever pressed charges against them?

- No because my son has not been able to recognize them. Anyway I have told him to look at the Police patrol number or plate number next time this happens to him, or even to the Officers’ badges so we can identify them when placing the report.

- Are you afraid, Ms. Julia? – was my last question after almost an hour of an easy-going talk.

- I’m just afraid of not finding the truth about María Elena’s murder. I need to know what happened to her because otherwise I will get crazy. As time passes the possibilities to find out about her murder decrease, so we need to continue fighting to know the facts. We can’t surrender... Even if my youngest daughter, Brenda, is so terrified to go out that she has quit her studies without even finishing the High School. And just imagine that María Elena was working so

⁷³ Julia referred to the event which took place on Valentine's Day 2004, when NGOs and victims' families organized a protest to demand justice in Juarez. Jane Fonda, Sally Field, Christine Lahti, Representatives Hilda Solis (Deputy-CA) and Janice Schakowsky (Deputy-IL), Eve Ensler (author of the Vagina Monologues), and other celebrities joined thousands of protestors in a rally starting at the international bridge connecting Ciudad Juarez and El Paso. A coalition of Mexican organizations, including Casa Amiga and the Center for Labor Workshops and Studies (CETLAC), were involved in organizing the Valentine's Day actions, though the U.S. press credited only Amnesty International and the V-Day Foundation, both of whom participated in the protests. Organizers were happy to note that the two new federal officials, Guadalupe Morfin and María Lopez Urbina, participated in the march, marking the first time authorities participated in a public event protesting the murders.

Three weeks later, the body of Rebeca Contreras Mancha was found, raped and strangled, in the desert outside of Juarez. Incredibly, the investigation into her case is the first in which the crime scene was preserved, according to human rights workers. In May 2004, the Chihuahua State Attorney General formally charged two narco-traffickers from the Juarez cartel with the rape, torture, and murder of Contreras.

hard with the intention to help her little sister to finish the school. That was her illusion and now it will never come true.

All I could do after listening to her was hugging her in a fraternal, supportive embrace. Words could have never expressed my feelings, so the only thing I could do then was showing all my female empathy with a simple hug, and a very weak “Thank you so much”.

*

Once I got outside Julia’s house and after saying goodbye to all her big family, she asked me just one thing:

- Please don’t forget about us. Keep in touch. Call me or send me a letter from Italy if you can. I am very pleased when I receive letters from people living abroad who show interest in our family. It helps us feel less lonely in Juarez. It makes me feel stronger to know that, on the other side of the world, there are people interested in helping us to get justice. So many people had come to interview me and then they never write or call again. They just come, write their articles, stories, even books and after getting what they need they just leave and completely forget about us. Just imagine: Brenda was interviewed by an American woman when she was making her documentary,⁷⁴ and we have never even seen it! She promised she would have sent us a copy, but we never received it... The only person who sometimes calls me is that young girl who interviewed me for a documentary too... Her documentary is the one we (she means “Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa”) have in our site, have you seen it?⁷⁵ She sometimes calls and informs me about the actions they’re doing in the U.S. to support us. She is so kind...

*- Don’t worry Julia. I will be in touch and hopefully I will see you again... and maybe then the circumstances will be different and you would have found the truth about María Elena – were my last words before getting into the taxi that was waiting for me outside her house, in the middle of the desert because the *Ballena 10715* address was on an unpaved street, just like all the other streets in Rancho Anapra. And from there we could see the freeway in the U.S. and, a little bit behind it, the white, tidy, enormous buildings of the Sunland Park Shopping Mall in New Mexico, right after the metallic fence that geographically divides two very different but complementary worlds.*

*

After such an intense experience the taxi driver – who was the one I had met at the hotel where I was staying during my on-site research period, and who practically took me everywhere in Ciudad Juárez – could not continue hiding his surprise towards my visit to the Chávez Caldera house. It was not the fact of visiting them, but the idea that someone ‘like me’ (and those were his exact words, which I couldn’t completely understand then and I still can’t so far) wanted to go to Rancho Anapra, which is well-known to be an extremely dangerous neighborhood.

⁷⁴ Julia referred to Lourdes Portillo. The documentary in which her youngest daughter, Brenda, participated, was “*Señorita Extraviada*” (Missing Young Woman) by Lourdes Portillo, 2001, 74 minutes, USA-Mexico. Xóchitl Productions.

⁷⁵ Julia referred to the ‘chicana’ Zulma Aguiar, who made the video as a final job to graduate from University. In fact she flew to Ciudad Juarez on March 28th, 2005 – April 5th, 2005, and again in August 2005. Her video “**Juarez mothers fight Femicide**” was created to help the Mexican non-profit called “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa. A.C.*”. To see such a video for free visit the site: <http://www.elnorteproductions.com/>

- *I don't want to disturb you, but do you mind telling me why you visited that family? Are they friends of you?* – he asked with his *acento norteño* (Northern accent), which is famous for being so direct.

- *Not at all. I did not know that family before today. But I am doing a research about the femicides here for the University and they got their daughter assassinated six years ago, in June 2000. The incredible thing about them is that in their family there have been three young women savagely murdered, so it is a strange coincidence, don't you think?*

After giving me his opinion about what was going on in the city, he realized that some meters ahead there was a '*retén policiaco*' (Police checkpoint) and that two Mexican patrols were parked there watching the cars pass. He immediately asked me to hide my video camera because the policemen could have found suspicious someone recording such a poor, inhospitable place instead of the Juárez golden zone. No tourist will do it, unless she/he may be interested in recording the place where many female corpses had been found before, *Lomas de Poleo*, which was very close to the Chávez Caldera home, right at the end of Rancho Anapra.

And he was right to be worried because once he got stopped by the police while he was taking a TV crew up and down the city. They were making a documentary for a national TV network called '*Televisión Azteca*' and they were recording some scenes from the taxi in movement, so a Patrol stopped them and even if the taxi driver explained that he was just doing his job, they didn't want to let him go. Then the reporters called their bosses in Mexico City and, after a long negotiation, they got released at the end.

In Mexico there is freedom of speech and the Mexican Constitution guarantees to voice one's opinion publicly without fear of censorship or punishment. However, the Constitution also guarantees the right to have a life without fear, but in Ciudad Juárez neither the media reporters nor the women live fearless.

*

My last conversation with Julia Caldera took place at the end of January 2008, when I called her at home while I was spending some days in Mexico. Unfortunately it was just a phone conversation because it was not possible to me to go to Ciudad Juarez, which is very far away from Toluca, my hometown.

Julia recognized who I was because, as promised when leaving her house, I kept in touch last year in different ways. She called me too when the Lawyers Association called *Centro para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer A.C.* (Women's Development Centre from Ciudad Juárez) organized a fund collect to go to Washington to get informed about the follow-up of the petition made to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights about Silvia Arce and Griselda Mares. During their trip they were also supposed to present María Elena Chàvez Caldera's case to the Commission, that is why Julia called me in July 2007.

At the beginning of 2008 her husband had just had a car accident without any serious consequences, but they were trying to collect some money to pay the damages provoked. She let me know she had just called me home in Italy to ask for a little contribution to their collect, and she also mentioned that she was waiting to get some fresh news from the *Centro para el Desarrollo Integral de la Mujer A.C.* about the admission of her case by the Inter-American Commission.

In the meantime her youngest daughter, Brenda, has given birth to a baby-girl who was 9 month-old in January 2008. Brenda's older sister, Judith, had also had another child after my visit, so she already has four children in spite she has also splitted from her young husband. That means that Julia has five grandchildren with her at home now, plus Brenda, Judith, Mario, Gabriel and Martín. Mario, her oldest son, has just brought his girlfrind to live with them, but they do not have any children yet. Gabriel and Martín, on the contrary, are the only ones who are studying and helping their parents in their grocery store.

Life has not changed very much for them and on the phone everything seemed to indicate that they have not been able to break the poverty vicious circle (Lewis, Oscar. 1973), common to most of the inhabitants of Rancho Anapra, which has been present within their family from the cradle to the grave.

II. POWERS BEHIND FEMICIDE IN CIUDAD JUAREZ.

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

- Alice Vachss, Sex Crimes

Talking about femicide is talking about power. The power to sodomize, neutralize, cancel, abolish and literally exterminate not just a woman’s life, but in many cases her body as well, just because her vagina gives her executioner the right to diminish and delete her from the surface of the Earth. It copes with an unbalanced gender relationship that gives a man the right to possess a woman as if she were an object: something which can be easily disposable, interchangeable and controllable.

But talking about femicide in Ciudad Juárez is going far beyond the pure concept of male violence and control over females. It goes further the masculine domination of women in a male dominant society. By saying this I do not mean that the origin of such assassinations in the border between Mexico and the United States is not based on this male superiority feeling pervading our societies up today – either in developed and developing countries with just a very few exceptions. After all violence against women and femicide as the very final momentum of such a misogynist hate, are derived from a male ownership and domination feelings over women. What I mean – and it is completely necessary to make it clear as long as femicide in Ciudad Juárez is much more than ‘just’ domestic violence and misogynist hate, which may be present in any patriarchal society – is that the symbols which emerge from Juárez, and which dangerously can make of it a sort of laboratory of our future, come from a ‘*higher-positioned*’ and hidden power that uses women not just to show the female members of a society that their murderers are superior, unreachable and omnipotent because they are males. It is a much more intricate and complex symbolic, psychological, economic and even political domination of a secret and unreachable sort of ‘*fraternity*’ over the most miserable, the most vulnerable and the weakest part of the society. And by this I am not just talking about women – even if female bodies have been used in Ciudad Juárez to convey such a meaning – as the weakest chain in the society, but all the other people who remain out of such an evil, wild and mean brotherhood. It is the domination of those who are ‘inside’ the group, over the remaining ones who stay outside and who will never get close to the powerful members of the fraternity. And femicides in Ciudad Juárez, at least at the very beginning, were a sort of symbol to warn the ‘*outsiders*’ about the danger of facing the dominant ones, the danger of changing the existing *status quo* at that time, the danger of modifying some behavioural patterns that had always existed and that were being threatened by the globalization trends that fully reached Mexico in 1994, when the *North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)* came into effect.

What came after the main demonstration acts of such a fraternity secret power, specifically translated into the collective findings of corpses and the similar criminological patterns of sex serial femicides in the city, was related to domestic violence and even copycat crimes. But such female murders would have never taken place if the Government had fully taken over its responsibility of stopping impunity, convicting the assassins, and bringing justice to the families of the deceased girls and women. Moreover, the dimensions femicide has reached in Ciudad Juarez are not just symbolic, but mainly imply a forced structural adjustment provoked on purpose by a powerful group struggling to try to maintain their privileges, their power, their domination.

Femicide in Ciudad Juarez has become a structural phenomenon because the life conditions in such a society, which imply the economic organization mainly based on the *maquiladoras*, the political response to the problem, and the cultural patterns that have always linked the city to the entertainment industry – not to mention the life of excesses over the edge, and the corruption culture that allows everything for money – are the perfect environment for such crimes. However, these conditions are not exclusive of Ciudad Juárez but exist in many other border states such as Tijuana or Nuevo Laredo, in Mexico, and in other border cities in the world. So it would be too much reductive to say that because of the structure of a society such a place can become the perfect scenario for femicides to happen.

So, why and how is Ciudad Juárez different from other cities with the same characteristics? Why such women assassinations have taken place there and not in other border city? What elements are different in Juárez from the rest of the world? Which powers are behind those crimes in a city that implies mainly women as its labour force, and which has the lowest unemployment rate in the whole country? The city is the perfect mirror where all the contradictions of globalization get reflected. It is there where all the globalization evils are present and survive by sucking their women's blood. It is a city where some concepts such as gender, migration and power are closely related with a negative connotation.

In recent years, immigration trends are changing the former tendencies that saw men as the main immigrants at least at the very beginning of the flow, and their women and children afterwards. Nowadays immigrant women actually seem capable of assuming new positions with respect to the migration paths, the choice to emigrate and the integration into the new city or country, and above all the link between their original culture and the changing culture of the accepting place. Indeed, in some cases, the woman is the main ring of a long migration chain, or else she is an active part of the labour market. This new background of women immigration is made up not only of women who decide to follow their husbands but also women wishing to look for new jobs as home domestic labourers, or wishing to improve their careers on their own accord. And Ciudad Juárez has always been the most powerful magnet for females in the Mexican border cities, thanks first to the popularity it has got all over Mexico due to the job opportunities it offers to the newly arrived, and second because simultaneously it might also become the perfect springboard to the United States.

So, how can the typical paths of the “female exodus” to Juárez become so dangerous specifically for the poor, young women traveling mainly alone to the border? I may say it is all a matter of power. So let's just spend some words about it to understand how people in the city are influenced in subtle ways by the other people around them, how people get ahead in spite of all the problems pervading the community, who makes controlling decision within the society, and whether the State, in fact, protects and guarantees its people's lives.

* **Some words about ‘Power’**

In the two last decades there seems to have been an unvoiced shift away from the Weberian distinction (Weber 1944) between power (as the ability to elicit compliance against resistance) and authority (as the right to expect compliance). This shift owes much to Michel Foucault and postmodernism, and possibly reflects the ongoing loss of state authority to both sub-national and global organisations. Foucault distinguishes between central ‘regulated and legitimate forms of power’ and ‘capillary’ power at the ‘extremities’ (1980:96), which perhaps refracts somewhat differently Blau and Scott’s (1965) older distinction between a ‘formal’ organisation and ‘informal’ relationships underpinning its operation. He may also parallel the understanding of power as deriving from the state in contrast to authority rooted in popular approval. People's action, connoting revolt from below against the bureaucratisation of power, and anti-judicial ‘popular

justice' are positively recommended by Foucault (1980:29, 34-5) to counter bureaucratised judicial power.

In Foucault's own words: “*individuals...are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation...the vehicles of power, not its points of application*” (Foucault. 1980:98)

There is also a hint here of that contemporary usage of ‘empowerment’ which implies the drive by individuals, singly or in combination, to get what they want. Moreover, Foucault (1980:99) advocates an ‘ascending’ analysis of power focusing on its ‘techniques and tactics of domination’ (1980:102)—which initially seem to contradict any bottom-up analysis.

But such an approach helps us to understand how socially equal individuals (academic colleagues, for example) can exercise power over others and for themselves—and get what they want when they want it—merely by ignoring the normal rules of polite social interaction; for example, by barging into a group and interrupting its conversation in mid-sentence, such that those hamstrung by their own internalised rules of politeness do not even voice their upset at such rudeness, but meekly resume conversing when the interruption withdraws. And of course, were the interruption a child (and therefore not the social equal of conversing adults), this example would be one of domination exercised from below. Changing *habitus* must, by definition, disempower those who operate by the rules of an older *habitus* undergoing replacement (Bourdieu 1977). Further along the scale from impoliteness, insults absorbed without retaliation likewise disempower their recipients, and come close to an official New Zealand definition of bullying as ‘*the power...to hurt or reject someone else*’. While such mundanities of power at the personal level might be thought unworthy of societal recognition, publicising previously suppressed conflict may encourage individual ‘victims’ to empower themselves, for, as Miller (1976:127) notes, ‘*It is practically impossible to initiate open conflicts when you are totally dependent on the other person or group for the basic material or psychological means of existence*’.

Returning to Foucault—who might well disagree with the above—he himself is not entirely consistent in his various descriptions of power. ‘*Power in the substantive sense, “le” pouvoir, doesn’t exist...power means...a more-or-less organised, hierarchical, co-ordinated cluster of relations*’ (1980:198), despite the fact that it ‘*is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity*’ (1980:98), never alienable or transferable. Foucault rejects what he calls the juridical/liberal/economic view of power as ‘*that concrete power which every individual holds, and whose partial or total cession enables political power or sovereignty to be established*’ (1980:88). Yet he sometimes reifies power as beyond individual or even collective control: ‘*the impression that power weakens and vacillates...is...mistaken; power can retreat...reorganise its forces, invest itself elsewhere*’ (1980:56).

Perhaps for these reasons, many anthropologists interested in applying Foucault’s concepts have diplomatically avoided his descriptions of power, and instead concentrated on his idea that power is vested, even created, in discourses of ‘truth’ or knowledge rather than in any Weberian command of (potential) force (domination).

Many have, therefore, sought to disseminate alternative, non-scientific, local knowledges as one form of exercising power (Foucault 1980:34): it is always possible that these, too, may become powerful ideas. Foucault sees discourse as ‘*a political commodity*’, and ‘*the articulation of discourse and power as a phenomenon of exclusion, limitation and prohibition*’, so the link between discourse and (dis)empowerment is easily made.

Freely available words and their changeable meanings have thus been shifted to central stage by Foucault and his followers, not as the purveyors of information as any basis of power (Foucault 1980:34), but in ways curiously reminiscent of cosmologies that attribute magical power to words. The term ‘empowerment’ as used in the 1990s seems above all to be about being vocal, having a right to ‘voice’. The constantly repeated rhetorics of public policy and institutional good practice seem designed to strengthen individual choice within the market, and to weaken dependency, merely by verbal reiteration.

Wikan (1990:206, 193) has also expressed scepticism about words and what they convey: ‘*wordstuck...anthropology’s romance with words, concepts, symbols, text and discourse may be counterproductive*’ in understanding precisely how intersubjective communication of meaning occurs. Not only do words express and reinforce the existing power of representative spokespersons (usually older males) to define what *is*; not only are precise words frequently misleading in their literal meanings; not only do people change their minds and re-word at will, but, above all, Wikan argues, the power of ‘resonance’ as the fusion of emotion and rationality is what ‘*evokes shared human experience*’ (1993:208) and the transmission of meaning.

Pro-Foucauldian analysis after Foucault seems largely to have ignored, rather than refuted, such points, particularly that currently disempowered people subvert dominating structures and relationships and come some way towards achieving their goals precisely by *not voicing* their resistance to hegemonic power openly, but by exercising some other capacity or resource.

“*Patterns of domination can...accommodate...resistance so long as... [it] is not publicly and unambiguously acknowledged...voice under domination...[includes] rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, anonymity...each oral performance can be nuanced, disguised, evasive, and shaded in accordance with the degree of surveillance from authority to which it is exposed...the particularity and elasticity of oral culture...allows it to carry fugitive meanings in comparative safety*” . (Scott 1985:57, 137, 162)

Scott’s view of surveillance, as a challenge to be outwitted, thus differs from Foucault’s concern with its ‘productivity’ (1980:119) as a power mechanism which ‘*permits time and labour, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies*’ (1980:104) through ‘*social production and social service*’ (1980:125). But these differing views of Foucault and Scott are not incompatible: unvoiced, suppressed conflict and indirect manipulation are, according to Miller (1976), the strategies used by women to cope with their gendered dispowerment in modern America, where Foucault’s view of their surveillance as subordinates is equally applicable.

A focus on capacities or resources, including social networks, leads to the hard question of whether there is a quantum of power. The liberal democratic view of power as infinitely expansible, is that of the free market: when the cake is expanding and empowerment is vocality (through ballot box or communications media), questions of quantum and distribution are more easily fudged. The zero-sum view of power is more likely to be found among those competing for some, whether they define it as based on guns, land and land-based resources, or access to state-controlled resources. As Wright (1994:163) has already indicated, the term ‘empowerment’, when used in the 1970s with reference to the Third World, was initially understood as ‘*the development of economic activities under the control of the weakest...so that they had their own resources for development*’. At least in its zero-sum conception, power clearly implies control of resources rather than—or in addition to—‘voice’.

To those using the zero-sum conception of a fixed quantum of power, a Foucauldian approach is not only unattractive, it is also dangerously mystificatory, and not only because it is totally insensitive to the ways in which power is gendered, racialised, and classified. More generally, the very discourse of empowerment itself, particularly but not only in the global context of Third World inequality and development, may obscure the ‘real’ or hegemonic relations of power linking states, developers and empowerers to poor people lacking resources, and thereby render the already vulnerable even less capable of defending their self-identified interests. The very language of empowerment masks any collusion among the empowering by ‘screening off’ their power relations from ‘public discourse’: such screening may be particularly important where the exercise of power is popularly associated with *ying* (Barnes 1994:78) and, by their public exposure of such masking, social scientists will themselves intervene in the balance of power.

As state power is reconfigured in the postmodern era, authority has tended to be ‘professionalised’ as sets of rules known to only one set of the social actors involved in specific relationships. These actors are usually bureaucratically organised and use ‘all the mechanisms and effects of power which don’t pass directly via the State apparatus, yet often sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximising its effectiveness’ (Foucault 1980:72-3), especially through their lawful practice. Such professionals in turn argue that their (statutory) rules empower their advice- and representation-purchasing consumers (formerly called clients) to make their own decisions. Frequently, it seems, such consumers end up quite dissatisfied as a result of their (partial) empowerment by such rules. They do not know exactly how these rules work but consider that their interests—compromised by their own un- or poorly informed decisions—have been negatively affected in the final outcome. The frustrations of such mediated empowerment, for those allegedly empowered, are apparently routine, at least among those who are the ‘recipients’ in the empowerment game – mainly if the empowerers are foreigners or come from a higher economic and social environment (for not saying class).

Empowerment, of course, implies that all intervening brokers should be eliminated from the consumer’s capacity to choose. Adjudicators, mediators, advocates, advisers and representatives are all, by definition, irrelevant, deprived of their former capacity to control and alienate empowered people and/or their interests. Yet, the devolution of power from state to community may increase rather than decrease the potential for brokerage, not least among anthropologists (among whom there is, of course, already an impressively large discourse on advocacy and mediation). And those who have examined the devolution of development assistance from economically advanced states to non-governmental organisations (the new brokers in direct contact with aid-recipients—state, collective or individual), have been very critical of its outcomes.

The mystifying rhetoric of empowerment as expandible, vocal power is the offspring of an optimistic postmodernism linked to democratic and negotiated organisational structures. These, in turn, are related to rational social preferences arising from individual choices. Yet any such liberal democratic transfer of power from those who currently have it to those who do not, could (and should) be expected, not to slip past unnoticed, but to engender resistance in those whose ability to get what they want is affected by others’ access. Conceptualising power as postmodern, warm-fuzzy, expandible not only conceals its hard edges; this cloak of opacity also discourages nasty questions of who benefits and how, and runs the danger of collapsing objectives, processes and outcomes alike into an undifferentiated rhetorical empowerment. Dismantling structures has been a real process as well as an iterative voice, and we have heard little about the power plays involved. Hence it is not altogether odd that Gramsci and issues of hegemony and consent (Gramsci 1972) appear very rarely in Foucauldian and postmodernist discourses on (dis)empowerment, even among those who have analysed the spatial, presentational, kinaesthetic, status and ritual components (see

Collins 1994; Edwards 1994) of what might be called silent—Scott's (1985) publicly unvoiceable—power.

So how might (dis) empowerment be achieved? One view seems to be that empowerment can be conferred by some on others. Critics seem generally unhappy with this view: after all, the very conception of the free market on which such a 'free gift' rests, is that there are no free lunches. As numerous anthropologists (e.g. Cockburn 1991; Wright 1994) have already noted, devolution of state functions and finance has allegedly disempowered bureaucratic service-deliverers and empowered those previously dependent on such bureaucracies. Rolling back the state has been popular in most liberal democracies (and many other states) over the past couple of decades, allegedly to give consumers greater choice in education, health care, retirement benefits, even penitentiary detention. These authors have also indicated that such empowerment has been, at best, ambiguous. While there is no longer any danger of 'locating power in the State apparatus, making this into the major, privileged, capital and almost unique instrument of the power of one class over another' (Foucault 1980:72), declining states nonetheless remain for the present the self-defined guarantors not only of service-delivery to their citizens, but also of rule-changing empowerment processes.

Self-empowerment sounds more viable; and networking has apparently allowed some previously uninfluential individuals collectively to make bigger waves. But grabbing power (if necessary against resistance, e.g. by publicising hidden and suppressed conflict) can be a messy business, ranging from domestic violence to more general warfare, and is generally discouraged by all who stand to lose by it. Internal redefinition of basic institutional rules (Cockburn 1994) is more acceptable, but involves processes of negotiation that derive from past practice and therefore advantage the power-holders, assuming their willingness not only to negotiate in good faith, but also to withdraw gracefully from their advantaged positions. Both techniques of self-empowerment have tended to generate later backlash reactions from those disempowered. And in the final analysis, states still stand as both referees and guarantors of such negotiated outcomes, if not of more Machiavellian techniques of self-empowerment whereby rules may simply be subverted rather than changed.

Such statements suggest that power remains a difficult, elusive concept, particularly when the traditional forms of power have changed with the globalization trends and the State has lost authority to multi-national organisations. But it is even more difficult to talk about power when it is the State which colludes with shady and gloomy – and many times illegal – sub-national or global associations in a non-zero game in which the profits are much more attractive than the losses. The examples are multiple and some of them have been properly documented: powerful states involved in wars worldwide for economic, hegemonic or political interests; the CIA involvement in the consolidation of the crack consumption in Los Angeles, as a secret national strategy to get funds to finance the Contras revolution in Nicaragua (Webb, Gary. 1998); the international money laundry networks that use some official organizations (even NGOs) to laundry money coming from drugs, people or weapon-trafficking; just to mention some. In this way all the powerful key-players get protected and the collateral effects of their alliances are not important at all.

In Ciudad Juárez the symbols emerging from the stories, the episodes and the events lived in the city since 1993, when the first femicide was discovered almost by case at a time when female assassinations were not an alarming urban sign yet, take us to a holistic scenario where, in uncountable times, the State authority seems to have colluded with shady and 'anonymous' powers that, by using Foucault's words, in 1993 decided to '*reorganise their forces, to invest themselves elsewhere*' (1980:56) to continue protecting the hegemony they had always had, but which slightly

started to be threatened by the eminent signature of the *North America Free Trade Agreement* (*N.A.F.T.A.*), which came into effect on January 1st, 1994.

I will use narrative again, understood as a holistic story comprised of symbols, such as episodes and events that mix verbal and non-verbal meanings and behaviours, to explore the nature of dominant and subordinate relationships in the city, to figure out which are the ‘hidden’ powers stalking around, and to identify the practices of resistance that the victims’ families have planned to counterbalance, at least to a certain extent, those kinds of domination which have combined either legitimate and illegitimate powers against mostly poor, young, working women in Ciudad Juarez up today.

And through narration I will also point out to the key-role the media has also had in the whole story and in hundreds of individual stories, by assuming a symbolic role characteristic of our postmodern times: the spectacular resonance! The impact of some press coverage that, at a large extent, distorts, nuances, veils or totally hides the truth behind the murders, independently of whom the murderers could be – Mexican or American serial killers, drug-traffickers, gang members, important people, policemen, jealous husbands, boyfriends or lovers, or just sadists men sheltered by the shadows of the night – or the type of crimes committed – sex-serial or crimes related to situational violence.

What is certain is that ‘*las muertas de Ciudad Juárez*’ – which is a common euphemism to call femicides in the city as long as the victims actually were brutally killed by men – reflect an undeniable reality valid for the whole country: how difficult it is to get justice and the corruption and ineffectiveness of the legal system’s paraphernalia. Moreover, the incredible story emerging from ‘*las muertas de Ciudad Juárez*’, which apparently may seem too far away from the rest of the world, is also little by little expanding beyond the ‘village’ perimeters, until getting into the ‘global village’ ones.

KEY ACTORS BEHIND FEMICIDES

*** The Police**

The femicides in Ciudad Juárez is not a case of a few deranged men on a killing spree. The femicides happen in a social context characterized by corrupt and/or inept officials, narco-trafficking on an historically unprecedented scale, and neoliberal economic programs that expose the ugly underbelly of capitalism.

During the first half of the 1990s the average impunity index in Mexico City was 96.2%: just 38 out of every 1,000 crimes were resolved by convicting the criminals and passing the proper sentences. Unfortunately this negative data is a constant all over Mexico up to now. If we want to make an international comparison the Mexican percentage equal to 3.8% of resolved crimes is lower than the 15.96% of Rio de Janeiro and the 31.40% of London. This means that if in Mexico for every 1,000 crimes just 38 are satisfactorily resolved, the number increases up to 159 in Rio and up to 314 in London (Ruiz Harrell, Rafael. 1998).

In 1999 the daily number of crimes in Ciudad Juárez was 350, and the estimates show that approximately the 80% of the real crimes in the city went un-reported as long as the population consider denouncing them just a waste of time.

The role the police is supposed to have in any society is that of protecting its people, safeguarding the good of community, and monitoring the application of law to give the inhabitants a peaceful life. Unfortunately in Ciudad Juárez there have been uncountable testimonies – by residents and some discouraged investigators such as journalists, academic researchers, criminologists, etc. – pointing out that the police themselves may be behind some of the murders. At the very least, many think the police are involved in an ongoing cover-up

* *Searching missing women*

When a woman disappears in Ciudad Juárez the first thing her family does to search her is setting a report at the closest Police Station. The most common complaint given by the relatives when interviewing them⁷⁶ deals with the first comment they got from the officers in charge of filling out the reports:

- *Don't worry. Your daughter must have walked away with her boyfriend for sure... Or with friends. It is always the same. Go home and wait for 72 because by law there is nothing to do before.*

Before February 2007 Police did not use to open investigations until 72 hours after the disappearance was reported, and by that time it was often too late. All because of the weird belief that the vanished person could have walked away with her/his sentimental partner. Until January 2007, almost fourteen years late for Juárez, a new law was promoted in the Mexican Parliament to guarantee women a life without violence (“*Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*”). Unfortunately it has not been officially published yet and it still needs to be fully regulated. However, nowadays the waiting period has changed, specially in risky places such as Ciudad Juárez, so that the investigations can start right away after receiving the report.

Nevertheless the Police attitude towards the desperate relatives used to be rude and undelicated. According to most of them they were forced to tolerate malicious comments about the sexual behaviour of the missing girls, usually pronounced with a mischievous glint in the police officers' eyes.

This may represent the first irregularity in the active role the police was supposed to have had in Ciudad Juárez every time a woman was reported as missing. But such an improper mis-conduct was the most insignificant of all. Amazingly there are uncountable further examples that have made people think the policemen themselves could be behind some of the murders, or involved in covering them up. The list of irregularities and policemen involved seems endless, so the following are just some stories that may help us to figure out the reasons that gave birth to the popular suspicion on the police. However, this does not mean that all the law representatives in Ciudad Juárez are corrupt or inefficient, but just that there is the tendency to easily adopt shared patterns that accept bribes, kickbacks, payoffs and corruption as a valid and extended practice. It has always been like that in a bordertown where all kinds of smuggling has become a lifestyle... a very dangerous but lucrative lifestyle.

⁷⁶ Since the beginning of the research in 2005 I have been able to interview some of the mothers who got their daughters assassinated in Juárez. Most of the interviews took place there in 2006, but some others were arranged in Italy every time a mother was brought here by some Italian associations such as ‘Amnesty International – Rome’, the University of Turin and the Cagliari Government. The interviewed mothers and sisters were: Julia Caldera, Judith Chávez Caldera, Ramona Morales, Evangelina Arce, Julia Cano, Irma Pérez, Marisela Ortiz Rivera, and Norma Andrade, whose stories are somehow reported throughout the paper.

*** Rapist Police Officers*

After 18 months of shooting her documentary “*Señorita Extraviada*” (Missing Young Woman), Lourdes Portillo was able to get an extraordinary testimony from a woman called María de Jesús Talamantes Rodríguez. She explained that in 1998 after taking part in a street riot to defend her husband, who had been attacked for banal reasons by some of their neighbours, the police took them all to one of the Juárez Police Stations located downtown (popularly known as the ‘Cárcel de Piedra’) for charges. After releasing those who were able to pay the fine, María de Jesús and her husband were the only ones left there all night long because they did not have enough money to pay. They were staying in separate rooms and a police woman was the first officer who tried to abuse María, while her male partners were staying out of the room. One after another three police men plus the woman raped her – after having assumed drugs in front of her – and at the end took her to a room, unknown for the public to be at the end of the station hidden somewhere inside, full of women’s clothes. According to her description there were bunches of all kinds of clothes all over the room – including underwear – and the police officers obliged her to look at a photo album in which they were torturing, biting off their nipples, raping, strangling, killing and finally burning, different young women somewhere out in the desert. They threatened her to take her to *Lomas de Poleo* if she dared to report them, and mysteriously left her free the morning after.

At the very beginning she did nothing against them and decided to stay at home as long as a suspicious car was constantly parked out of it, but after getting some gunshots into their house she decided to report her sex offenders to the proper authorities. The press coverage of such a news was resounding and after identifying the guilty officers, their photos were on the local newspapers’ front pages for at least a week. They were removed from office and imprisoned in October 1999, but after spending a short time in jail they were released because the judge considered there wasn’t enough evidence to accuse them. Afterwards their traces got lost. María de Jesús left the city almost immediately and nobody knows her current whereabouts⁷⁷.

But before such a resonant fact happened there had been many other irregularities concerning the police. Many police names have been made to be the responsible of several abnormalities related to the femicides in the city. Furthermore perhaps one of the most astonishing facts deals with the invention of different scapegoats to dis-lead the public attention, in a sort of conspiracy game to protect other still unknown people. The only certain thing by now is that such powerful people are still very well protected and have used not only the police, but also the authorities at the three governmental levels in Mexico (Federal, State and Municipal), to remain unpunished and free, hidden in the shadows of the city.

In fact, police have jailed more than a dozen suspects - the first in 1995. Each new arrest is hailed as a "solution" to the grisly murder spree, but the body count still increases.

⁷⁷ The first time Lourdes Portillo interviewed María de Jesús Talamantes Rodríguez she did not mention anything about the photo album her victimizers obliged her to see after raping her in 1998. She just focused on the sexual assault she suffered by policemen. She was afraid of mentioning about the open responsibility of some police officers who actually killed several young women in *Lomas de Poleo*, at the end of Rancho Anapra. However, Portillo convinced her to talk in spite of her fear and her testimony just confirmed some popular suspicions: it was the police who raped, tortured, killed and pointed out to non-existent scapegoats. People expected justice from the authorities in front of such an evidence, but the policemen and woman involved were soon released, after the media spotlights had turned off. See “*Señorita Extraviada*” (Missing Young Woman) by Lourdes Portillo, 2001, 74 minutes, USA-Mexico. Xóchitl Productions.

*** The scapegoats*

Suspect Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif was born in Egypt in 1946. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1970, settling first in New York City, where he soon established a reputation for alcohol-fueled promiscuity. Fired from his job for suspected embezzlement in 1978, Sharif moved to New Hope, Pennsylvania.

By 1981, Sharif had settled in Palm Beach, Florida. Reportedly a chemist and an engineer, Sharif was hired by Cercoa Inc. His talents were sufficiently impressive that the company created a department specifically for him. In that year he was accused of beating and raping two women (Case No. 8103-1225 – aggression on Joanne Collins Poldesmink. Case No. 8105-2568 – aggression on Molly Fleming). Cercoa bankrolled Sharif's defense in the first case, and again in August, when he attacked the second woman in West Palm Beach. Sharif received probation for the first rape and served only 45 days for the second. Cercoa fired Sharif the next year because of his mounting legal bills (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 88-102).

Resettled in Gainesville, Florida, Sharif was married briefly. The divorce was the result of beating his bride unconscious. Then in 1983 another woman presented charges against him for raping and sexual battery, just like in Palm Beach (Case No. 83-4231 – aggression on Susan Wait). Held without bond pending trial in that case, Sharif escaped from the Alachua County jail in January 1984 but was soon recaptured. On January 31st, 1984, Sharif received a 12-year sentence for rape. Gordon Gorland, the prosecutor, promised reporters that on the day Sharif was released he would be "*met at the prison gates and escorted to the plane*" and be deported to Egypt.

But when Sharif was paroled in October 1989, he was not deported. He moved at once to Midland, Texas, and got a job with Benchmark Research and Technology. The U.S. Department of Energy singled him out for praise, and Sharif was photographed shaking hands with former U.S. Sen. Phil Gramm.

Sharif was arrested again in 1991, this time for drunk driving. The arrest alerted a former acquaintance from Florida, now living in Texas, who reported Sharif to the Border Patrol as a fugitive from deportation proceedings. A lengthy series of hearings ensued. The matter was still pending two years later when Sharif held a woman captive in his home and raped her repeatedly (Case No. CRB-20-863 – aggression on Nancy Díaz in Midland, Texas).

His deportation defense lawyer offered the government a deal: if the latest charges were dismissed, Sharif would voluntarily leave the U.S. In May 1994 Sharif moved to Ciudad Juárez, working at one of Benchmark's *maquiladora* factories, and resided in the exclusive *Rincones de San Marcos* district. In October 1995 a young *maquiladora* worker accused Sharif of raping her at his home. She also said that Sharif threatened to kill her and dump her corpse in Lote Bravo, a desert region south of town where several other victims had been found. Those charges were later withdrawn. But detectives had learned by then that Sharif had dated 17-year-old Elizabeth Castro García, who was found raped and murdered in August 1995 – even if Sharif has always denied having ever met Elizabeth.

Sharif was charged with that murder and finally convicted at trial in March 1999. He received a 30-year sentence just for the murder of Elizabeth Castro García – even if the process was full of irregularities and the victim's corpse did not match Elizabeth's physical features, – as long as the charges for the murders of Olga Alicia Carrillo Pérez and Silvia Elena Rivera Morales were withdrawn. Although police called Sharif a serial killer, the conviction did not solve the grisly mystery of Ciudad Juárez. The murders continued - even escalated - after his arrest. One month

after Sharif was in custody, police acknowledged that 520 people had vanished in the past 11 months and that "*an important percentage of them are female adolescents.*"

Sharif's defense was taken by a human rights activist named Irene Blanco, who always declared Sharif was the perfect scapegoat because he effectively had 5 condemnations for rape and sexual battery in the U.S. – he was sentenced to 12 years, but actually spent 5 years and 4 months in jail for good conduct – before being voluntarily deported to Mexico. Moreover, he was a foreigner and did not speak Spanish when he got to Juárez, which were two very important elements that made him defenseless, in Blanco's words. Blanco always stated that Sharif was innocent and that there were some evidences that could be attributed to serial sexual-killers, such as a triangle mark in some of the women's bodies, or their nipples bitten off and stabbed. After her declarations on May 21st, 1999, Irene's son Eduardo Rivas Blanco got some gunshots while he was driving his van with a friend. He just got hurt and was not able to recognize the shooters, but Irene knew it was a direct warning for her and had to quit Sharif's defense in 2001 (Washington Valdés, Diana. 2005: 145-152).

Sharif was moved from the Ciudad Juárez *CE.RE.SO* prison (*Centro de Readaptación Social*) to the Chihuahua's one and once he got there he was isolated from the rest of the prisoners. He could not receive anybody – there were many journalists waiting to interview him – and, on June 1st, 2006 he died from a cardiovascular disease in jail⁷⁸.

But after Sharif's imprisonment in October 1995 the corpses of young women continued being discovered dumped in the city, so another solution was needed - and authorities offered it in the form of a bizarre conspiracy theory.

In fact between Sharif's arrest and the first week of April 1996 at least 14 more female victims were slain in Ciudad Juárez. Their ages ranged from 10 to 30. Where cause of death was known, 10 had been stabbed, one shot and one strangled. At least four suffered unspecified mutilations after death, and one victim, Adriana Torres, 15 year-old, fit the pattern of three other slayings, with her right breast severed and her left nipple bitten off.

The continuing slaughter belied official reports that the city's homicide wave had ended with Abdel Sharif's arrest. Residents were frightened. The local police was embarrassed. They needed an explanation for the murders; but one that would not exonerate their prime suspect. They got their wish on April 8th, 1996, when 18-year-old Rosario García Leal's raped and mutilated body was discovered.

Among those questioned in the latest case was Héctor Olivares Villalba, a member of a local street gang called *Los Rebeldes* ("The Rebels"). In custody, Olivares claimed he had participated in García's murder on December 7th, 1995. Half a dozen *Rebeldes* were involved, he claimed, including gang leader Sergio Armendáriz Díaz (also known as *El Diablo*). Armed with Olivares' confession (later recanted as the product of police torture), officers raided several nightclubs and detained 300. They winnowed out nine more *Rebeldes*, including Armendáriz, Juan Jorge Contreras Jurado (*El Grande*), Carlos Hernández Molina, Carlos Barrientos Olivares, Fernando Rubén Germes, Fernando Gómez Aguirre, Luis Andrade, José Luis Rosales Juárez, and Erika Fierro.

The nine, with Olivares, were accused of plotting with Sharif to free him from prison by murdering local women and thus make it seem as if the original "Ripper" was still at large. Police claimed that

⁷⁸ Sharif's death had very little press coverage at the national level. The only news found in the national newspapers was in the "*Reforma*". Friday June 2nd, 2006. National Section p. 6. «*Fallece feminicida egipcio*» (Egyptian femicider dies).

some of the *Rebeldes* had visited Sharif in jail and were paid for their "copycat" crimes. Juan Contreras told police Armendáriz had sent him to collect "a packet" from Sharif in prison. The envelope contained \$4,000 in cash. Later, Contreras alleged, he had joined Armendáriz and other *Rebeldes* in the rape-murder of a young woman known as Lucy.

Contreras also later recanted his statement, and the charges were dropped against suspects Germes, Fierro, Rosales Juárez, Gómez, Hernández and Olivares. The remainder are incarcerated pending trial (a slow process in Mexican courts), and *El Diablo* earned a separate six-year prison sentence for leading the February 1998 gang-rape of a 19-year-old fellow inmate. The other *Rebels* all claim they were tortured by police. Some displayed burn scars, which they said were the product of crude torture with cigars and cigarettes. Authorities, meanwhile, stand by their charges, claiming that Sharif and the *Rebels* together committed 17 murders. Chihuahua's medical examiner goes further, telling reporters that dental casts from Armendáriz "identically" match bite marks found on the breasts of at least three victims⁷⁹ (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 103-118. Washington Valdés, Diana. 2005: 127/153).

But a Mexican court ruled in 1999 that there was insufficient evidence to charge Abdel Sharif as a conspirator in any of the slayings attributed to the *Rebeldes*. Even before the ruling, police concluded that their conspiracy theory was deficient. Just as the murders had not stopped with Sharif's arrest, neither did they end with the round-up of *Los Rebeldes*. In fact, the rate of killings continued to climb.

So the arrest of *Los Rebeldes* changed nothing in Juárez. The brutal murders continued and community groups accused police of negligence or worse. At least 16 female victims were slain between late April and November 1996. Eight remain unidentified. Five were stabbed, three shot, and one was found in a drum of acid. In several cases advanced decomposition made determinations about cause of death or sexual assault impossible.

The following year there were 17 unsolved murders of females. Again they ranged in age from 10 to 30 years, and seven of the dead were never identified. While rape was confirmed in only four cases, the position and nudity of several other corpses suggested sexual assault. In the cases where the cause of death could be determined, five were stabbed, three were strangled, three shot, and two beaten to death.

Statistically, 1998 was the city's worst year yet. There were 23 on the books by December. Six remain unidentified. The killings reflected the usual pattern of stabbings, stranglings, bullets and burning. Rocío Barrazza Gallegos was killed on September 21st in the parking lot of the city's police academy. She was strangled and shot inside a patrol car by Pedro Valles, a cop assigned to the "murdered women" case. Authorities could never find Valles after he run away and he is still a fugitive.

And indeed, by 1998 the long-running investigation had become a numbers game. In May, media reports referred to "more than 100 women raped and killed" in Ciudad Juárez. A month later,

⁷⁹ Such an affirmation was never scientifically proved as long as the forensic surgeon Dr. Irma Rodríguez Galarza, in charge of the Ciudad Juárez Forensic Department then, established that Sharif's bite marks did not match those found on the breasts of the victims. Dr. Rodríguez was then immediately dismissed and on July 25th, 2001 her daughter and her daughter's husband were killed in an attack by a special command. The police said the attack was related to the organized crime and one of the suspects was an ex-cop called Sergio Rodríguez Gavaldón, who was supposed to have hired 2 gunmen to murder Dr. Galarza's daughter . By mid-2002 Dr. Galarza told the journalist Diana Washington Valdés that in the Juarez Forensic Department there were still 42 female and 70 male skeletons – found between 1995 and 1996, – waiting to be identified, but that the Police did not want anybody to know about them (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 285. Washington Valdés, Diana. 2005: 117-118).

reports from the same source (Associated Press) raised the number to 117. In October 1998 another AP report placed the official body count at 95, while a women's advocacy group, Women for Juárez, placed the total at somewhere between 130 and 150.

Mexico's Human Rights Commission issued a report in 1998 castigating the police. But politicians suppressed it to avoid adverse impact on upcoming state elections. Still clinging to suspect Abdel Sharif, Attorney General Arturo Chávez Rascón told Reuters on June 10th, 1998 that "*police think another serial killer may be at work due to similarities in three crimes this year.*" At year's end, on December 9th, the Associated Press reported: "*At least 17 bodies show enough in common - the way shoelaces were tied together, where they were buried, how they were mutilated - that investigators say at least one serial killer is at work. And 76 other cases bear enough similarities that investigators say one or more copycats may be at work.*"

In fact, all that anyone really knew was that the murders were continuing.

The first quarter of 1999 brought with it the usual catalog of carnage: at least eight more female victims. Abdel Sharif's trial for the murder of Elizabeth Castro began on March 3rd, but if authorities thought it would solve the case, they were sadly mistaken.

In the predawn hours of March 19th a 14-year-old girl named Nancy Villalba González staggered up to the door of a stranger's home on the city's outskirts. Bloody and sobbing, she told her story of rape and near-murder. She said she had been assaulted and nearly choked to death by the hands of a *maquiladora* bus driver named Jesús Manuel Guardado Márquez. His nicknames were *El Drácula*, *El Chacal* and *El Tolteca*. A background check on Guardado revealed one prior conviction for sexual assault. By the time police went looking for him, he had vanished from Ciudad Juárez with his pregnant wife.

Authorities in Durango arrested Guardado a few days later. Guardado later claimed that he was beaten by police on arrival in Ciudad Juárez; the officers countered with claims that Guardado confessed to multiple murders and named four accomplices. The other men in custody were: Víctor Moreno Rivera (*El Narco*), Agustín Toribio Castillo (*El Kiani*), Bernardo Hernández Fernández (*El Samber*) and José Gaspar Cevallos Chávez (*El Gaspy*). All were *maquiladora* bus drivers, collectively dubbed *Los Choferes or Ruteritos* ("The Chauffeurs"). Police claimed that Moreno was the ringleader of the rape-murder team, collaborating with Abdel Sharif in another copycat scheme intended to spring Sharif from prison.

Charged with a total of 20 murders, all the *Choferes* denied any role in the crimes. They said that their confinement was brutal, that they had been beaten, choked and shocked with electricity. It was the torture, they said, that accounted for their incriminating statements. The statements could not be trusted because they were given under duress. Sharif, for his part, denied any contact with *Los Choferes* and maintained his innocence.

While police were convinced of their latest conspiracy theory, the facts contradicted it. The media reported in May 1999 that "nearly 200 women" had been murdered since 1993 - a substantial jump over October 1998's body count of at least 117. Retired FBI profiler Robert Ressler had already come and gone from Ciudad Juárez, leaving more questions than answers in his wake. A team of active-duty FBI agents also tried their luck at profiling the Juárez Ripper, with no success. Steve Salter, the Mexican official who enlisted the FBI's help, told the Dallas Morning News, "*These homicides are up to a point where we have to do whatever is possible to resolve it.*"⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Corchado, Alfredo. "U.S. Officials Push for Closure in Juarez Deaths." Dallas Morning News. (August 29, 2004).

With another desert summer approaching, police and civilians alike feared that the situation would only get worse.

The advent of a new millennium did nothing to relieve the Ciudad Juarez's ordeal. On Tuesday and Wednesday, November 6-7, 2001, skeletal remains of eight more women were found in a vacant lot 300 yards from the Association of *Maquiladoras* headquarters (A.M.A.C.), a group representing most of the city's U.S.-owned export assembly plants. Police announced creation of a special task force to investigate the murders, with a \$21,500 reward offered for capture of the killer(s), but the new display of energy consoled no one.

The latest victims were still unidentified on November 10th, when Chihuahua officials announced the arrest of two 28-year-old bus drivers, Javier García Uribe and Gustavo González Meza, on charges of killing the eight women found three days earlier. Fernando Medina, a spokesman for the prosecutor's office, claimed both men "*belong to a gang whose members are serving time for at least 20 of the rape-murders,*" and that they had identified the victims found on November 6-7 by name. Police named the dead as 19-year-old María Acosta, 20-year-old Claudia González, 15-year-old Esmeralda Herrera, 20-year-old Guadalupe Luna, 20-year-old Bárbara Martínez, 19-year-old Verónica Martínez (no relation to Barbara), 17-year-old Laura Ramos, and 17-year-old Mayra Reyes.

The suspects, meanwhile, declared that any statements they had made were products of torture. Their lawyers received death threats, and one of them, Mario Escobedo Jr., was killed by the police in a high-speed chase on February 5th, 2002, after officers allegedly "*mistook him for a fugitive.*" (In June 2002 a judge declared the shooting to be "self-defense."). Mario Escobedo's death (his father was also a famous Lawyer in Ciudad Juárez and they worked together), represented the worst hypothesis about the Juárez police: they had just killed in front of the whole society a young lawyer who had recently declared at the New York Tv News Program *ABC Downtown 20/20*, that police had created false evidence to blame Javier García Uribe and Gustavo González Meza, who were totally innocent. The New York news program about the femicides in Juárez was on air on January 31st, 2002, and less than a week after Escobedo was shot by the police in an impressive chasing downtown, a few blocks before arriving at the International Bridge "Paso del Norte" on the Juárez Avenue, in front of everybody's eyes (Washington Valdés, Diana. 2005: 73-92).

During the chase there was a testimony who pointed out to the police Commanding Officer Alejandro Castro Valles as the one who broke Mario Escobedo's window and who shot him right in his head after his car had crashed. However the judge in charge of the case did not consider such a testimony because it had been presented after the due-date. The commander was exonerated and left the State for a while, but by the end of 2003 Castro Valles and his assistant Jaime Gurrola, who also participated in Mario's chasing, were hired as *Administradores de Justicia* of the *Secretaría de la Función Pública* in Mexico City (Justice Public Officers at the Public Office Ministry). They were directly hired by the former *PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional)* Governor of Chihuahua, Francisco Barrio, who had been called to collaborate as the new Anti-corruption Czar by President Vicente Fox. After some Chihuahua journalists wrote about the news in the *Norte* newspaper, Castro Valles and Gurrola were removed from office.

Eleven weeks later, on April 22nd, police grudgingly confessed that DNA tests had failed to confirm any of their early victim identifications. Waffling again on November 5th, 2002, prosecutors declared that new DNA tests had apparently confirmed the identity of Verónica Martínez, while yielding no results on the other seven. In the meantime Gustavo González Meza, Mario Escobedo's client, died on February 8th 2003, allegedly from complications arising after surgery in jail.

On July 14th, 2005, Víctor Javier García was released because there were not enough evidence to charge him with the criminal offenses against the eight women. On January 26th, 2006, his lawyer, Sergio Dante Almaraz Mora, was killed. On the same day, before being assassinated, Sergio Dante Almaraz said that he lodged a complaint for the torture of Víctor Javier and that he had information about civil servants involved in the criminal offenses against the eight women.

The García-González arrests - bringing the total of suspects in custody to 51 by some reports - had no apparent effect on the murder activity. Ten days after García and González were jailed, another young woman was found stripped and beaten to death in Ciudad Juárez. Six days after the "accidental" death of attorney Escobedo, the *Inter-American Commission for Human Rights* dispatched Marta Altolaguirre to investigate reports that would-be protesters around the city were harassed and threatened by police⁸¹. The new publicity moved Mexican President Vicente Fox to order a new investigation by "federal crime specialists." Local prosecutors, resentful of that move, protested that "27 of the 76 cases were solved, while the other killings involving women have been isolated incidents."

Global publicity only shortened tempers in Ciudad Juárez. On March 9th, 2002, Texas state legislators joined in a bi-national protest march through El Paso. Jorge Campos Murillo, a Federal Deputy Attorney General in Mexico City, stirred reporters when he claimed that some of the slayings were committed by "juniors" - sons of wealthy Mexican families whose money and connections had spared them from prosecution. Shortly after making those remarks, Campos was transferred to another job and refused all interviews. The FBI resumed its investigation in October 2002. Their profiling efforts had been fruitless so far.

The corruption of police and government officials in the state of Chihuahua was also illustrated by events in the early months of 2004. Chihuahua State Police arrested thirteen agents, issued warrants for three agents and one commander, and fired five commanders in relation to the torture and murder of twelve people whose bodies were discovered buried behind a Juárez home. The officers were members of *La Línea*, a gang of drug traffickers that include Juárez and Chihuahua State police. Around the same time the Dallas Morning Times quoted a former drug dealer affiliated with *La Línea*, who claimed that women were raped and killed to celebrate successful drug runs into the US. He specifically referred to border crossings from Puerto Anapra to Sunland Park, in Arizona - "*Sometimes, when you cross a shipment of drugs to the United States, adrenaline is so high that you want to celebrate by killing women,*" he claimed⁸².

Just weeks earlier, two young women brought a criminal complaint against a Senior Law enforcement official in Ciudad Juárez. The official was charged with attempting to form a prostitution ring of under-aged girls. Prosecutors say he took pictures of five adolescent girls to make a catalogue for his clients and he was caught *in-fraganti* when he was trying to recruit a young lady in a restaurant. The accused was Héctor Lastra Muñoz, in charge of the Criminal Investigation Department of the *Procuraduría General de Justicia de Chihuahua* (Special Attorney Office of the State of Chihuahua), who got dismissed but was soon released after paying a caution. According to the existing reports he provided young women to important police officers and rich businessmen, but he always said he acted by himself and nobody was behind him (Washington Valdés, Diana. 2005: 138-141).

⁸¹ See the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights Report on "The Situation of the Rights of Women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico: the right to be free from violence and discrimination" - March 2003. Web Site: <http://www.cidh.org/annualrep/2002eng/chap.vi.juarez.htm>

⁸² Corchado, Alfredo and Sandoval, Ricardo. "Inquiry Indicates Police, Drug Ties: Disturbing Reports Say Women Were Tortured and Slain as Celebration." Dallas Morning News. (March 1, 2004).

On March 8th, 2004 Jesús José Silva Solís resigned as Attorney General of Chihuahua, accused narco-trafficking. He was replaced by Jesús Antonio Piñón, who had a close working relationship with Silva Solís.

Also in March 2004, a prosecutor for the State of Chihuahua issued arrest warrants for Juárez social justice activists Lucha Castro and Gabino Gómez, accusing them of a series of felonies. This was part of an ongoing campaign against activist demanding justice in Chihuahua. Activists charged that authorities spent more time intimidating the families of victims and their allies than solving the murder cases.

On April 1st, 2004, the United Nations released a report⁸³ condemning Chihuahua authorities for improperly handling the Juárez femicide cases, claiming investigations were tainted by corruption. In particular, the report condemned the obstruction and slow pace of investigations, and the falsification of evidence. The report also condemned the harassment of victims' families, and the use of torture to obtain confessions. The committee recommended the Mexican government to sign a protocol with the U.S. to carry out a joint investigation. The confidential UN report also denounced possible police collusion and nexuses with drug trafficking in the disappearances and murders. It called the government policies "late" and "ineffective," and urged the Mexican government to sign an assistance protocol with the US government to conduct joint investigations. A particularly relevant piece of information from this report was that convicted sex offenders from all over the United States are taken to El Paso, a city in Texas that borders on Ciudad Juárez, for their pre-release phase. The number of such people in any given year is high: 756 in 2001 and 600 in 2004.

In turn, the assessment of the Human Rights situation in Mexico prepared by the UN High Commissioner's office concluded that the crimes in Juárez were "*an extreme case of the state's absence at various levels.*"

*** The corrupting influence of Narco-dollars*

In Ciudad Juárez there have been many police names related to the drug-trafficking industry. Furthermore some officers have moved to the cartel organization as long as the economic benefits as being part of it are higher than the monthly salary they usually get at the police. Moreover, in 1996 the Mexican government recognized that the 80% of the police forces in the country were not reliable because they were infiltrated by the narco-dollars⁸⁴.

Mexico is mainly a country of drug transit, but also of drug production at a lower extent. As noted earlier, about 70% of all cocaine that enters the United States passes through Mexico. From the Mexican perspective, two facts are of consummate importance in understanding the situation, especially in Juárez, which is the center of drug transit to the United States. First, drug trafficking at the border is driven by demand in the United States, and second, the corrupting influence of narco-dollars reaches the highest levels of the Mexican government and often leaves narco-traffickers immune from prosecution. Neither of these issues is seriously addressed in DEA or American State Department reports, especially reports produced under the Bush administration. While the corrupting influence of narco-dollars generally receives passing notice, Bush administration

⁸³ See United Nations Summary of the Report "Murders and Disappearances of women and girls in Ciudad Juarez and the State of Chihuahua". – presented to the U.N. Committee Against Torture, 37th session. Mexico, March 2005.

⁸⁴ The Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce De León (1994- 2000) made this declaration just a few months before his administration captured the Mexican Anti-Drug Czar General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo. Furthermore, Zedillo himself was appointed by some Intelligence reports as having connections with the Juárez Cartel.

officials appear more interested in downplaying these problems in an effort to curry favor with the Mexican administration in charge of the newly elected (2006 – 2012) Felipe Calderón (but the tendency actually started before when Vicente Fox, also a *PAN* member such as Calderón, was in office). In the context of an international diplomatic disaster associated with the war in Iraq, the Bush administration can't afford to alienate any more allies.

Narco-corruption affects virtually every level of the Mexican government, and is particularly prevalent among security forces and the army. The arrest on February 6th 1997, of Brigadier General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, appointed only nine weeks earlier to head the *Instituto Nacional para el Combate a las Drogas* (INCD - Mexico's drug enforcement efforts), shocked the Clinton administration, but surprised few analysts in Mexico. The general was arrested following "secret meetings between Mexican army officers and the country's biggest drug mafia: The Juárez Cartel led by Amado Carrillo Fuentes, "*El señor de los cielos*". Officials said there was growing evidence that military officers discussed a deal to let the drug gang operate in exchange for huge bribes and, at the same time, they chased the bosses of the other Mexican cartels (specially the Tijuana Cartel, but also the Golfo and Sinaloa ones) to leave Carrillo take over the drugs control to the U.S. According to some DEA Reports during its best period the Juárez Cartel made weekly revenues up to 200 million dollars, and the 10% of them were used as bribes⁸⁵. Furthermore Gutiérrez Rebollo was also charged for trafficking weapons that exclusively belonged to the Army.

The impact of narco-dollars in Mexico is astounding. The cartels spent about 10% of gross income to bribe politicians (Buita, Jeff. 1997), which would mean bribes in excess of \$3 billion annually. Bribery is pervasive throughout Mexico. In the southern state of Quintana Roo, Governor Mario Villanueva and more than 100 other officials were arrested in 1999 for money laundering and protecting cartel members. The former head of the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) and competitor of Felipe Calderón during the Presidential elections in 2006, Roberto Madrazo Pintado, is widely suspected of extensive links to narco-trafficking, though his political power makes him virtually untouchable.

In January 2003, the Federal Attorney General shut down the *Fiscalía Especializada en Atención de Delitos contra la Salud* (FEADS) offices (Mexico's equivalent of the DEA) throughout the country and held all 200 agents on suspicion of taking bribes from dealers. President Zedillo created FEADS in the wake of the Rebollo scandal as a way of recuperating US confidence in the "war on drugs."

The State Department reported that, "the *Procuraduría General de la República PGR* [Federal Attorney General] levied more than 2,500 sanctions in the first half of 2003, to include 514 suspensions, 395 fines, and 146 firings; some 90 employees faced criminal proceedings, resulting in 15 convictions." The State Department optimistically cites these figures as proof of advances in fighting drug-related corruption, but they can be equally read as a stinging indictment of the ongoing levels of corruption. Do hundreds of arrests each year really mean progress, or are officials corrupted just as fast as they can be replaced? Both the United States and Mexico regularly cite figures "proving progress" in the "drug war," but a look at the broader picture indicates a loosing battle. Even the DEA can't completely hide the pervasive corruption of narco-dollars and maintain their credibility, despite their annual efforts to put a good face on the "drug war" in order to defend ever-increasing budgets. The following is buried deep in a DEA Country Profile Report from 2003: "*Violence perpetuated by Mexican drug trafficking organizations persists with relative impunity because of law enforcement corruption, a scarcity of resources to properly investigate these crimes, and a lack of resolve due to the threat of retaliation*". (DEA Country Profile for 2003 - Mexico)

⁸⁵ See the Reports about Amado Carrillo Fuentes on the American Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Web site: <http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/index.htm>

Narco-corruption is particularly widespread in Ciudad Juárez. In May 2001, the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, a mission of the United Nations, visited Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua City and Mexico City. His report offers a withering critique of corruption in the Mexican justice system: “*During his mission, the Special Rapporteur observed that the process, begun in 1994, towards the establishment of a culture of judicial independence has been slow. Impunity and corruption appear to have continued unabated. Whatever the changes and reforms, they are not seen in reality. Public suspicion, distrust and want of confidence in the institutions of the administration in general and the administration of justice in particular are still apparent. ... In general, there is a perception of a high-level of impunity (95 per cent) for all types of crimes. Many crimes are never reported, many arrest warrants are never executed. Part of the problem is also the lack of efficiency of the criminal investigations, with reports indicating that as little as 10 per cent of all criminal files opened lead to charges being made. The level of impunity and corruption in Mexico is a wide societal problem brought on by a political system controlled for nearly a century by a single party that did not need to account for its acts. The situation has been aggravated by the expanding drug trafficking. ... At one of the interdepartmental meetings, in response to the Special Rapporteur's observation that the high level of impunity had driven the public to lose confidence in the administration of justice, one interlocutor said "not that the people have lost confidence, they have never had confidence"*”⁸⁶.

The discovery of 12 bodies buried in the yard of a middle class Juárez home in January 2004 prompted Chihuahua officials to issue warrants for 17 state police linked to drug trafficking. The owner of the house implicated other police affiliated with the Vicente Carrillo cartel. Although over 300 officers from the Ciudad Juárez police force had been fired in the previous years, drug dealers corrupt new officers nearly as soon as they are hired, either with huge bribes, threats or a combination of the two. As a result, the city can't recruit new police and are losing existing officers who are unwilling to risk their lives in the drug war. Moreover recent recruitment drives turned up only fourteen potential new officers, not enough to re-open the state police-training academy, which closed in 2001.

To make things even worse Ciudad Juárez's civic leaders remain keenly focused on business. After a large wooden cross was erected near the border, as a memorial to the murdered and missing women, Major Jesús Delgado received an angry letter from the *Asociación de Maquiladoras A.C. (A.M.A.C. - Association of Business Owners and Professionals)*, complaining that the display was “a horrible image for tourism”. The same day that the letter was written, on September 23rd, 2003, police found two more women's corpses in Ciudad Juárez. One victim was strangled and partially disrobed, and the police claimed the other had died of a drug overdose. But the people were “skeptical” of that determination. Another young woman, apparently beaten to death, was found on October 8th.

As the femicides continue and the issue gains international attention, government officials have begun to address the serious problem of faulty investigations. On October 7th, 2003, the Senate formed a commission to oversee the investigations. The commission included: Dulce María Sauri, Martha Tamayo, Lucero Saldaña and Doroteo Zapata of the *PRI*, Luisa María Calderón, Micaela Aguilar and Jesús Galván of the *PAN*, and Leticia Burgos and Maricarmen Ramírez of the *PRD*, plus Sara Castellanos of the Green Party.

In October 2003, following close on the heals of the Amnesty International report, President Vicente Fox created a new federal office to prevent and investigate the murders. He appointed Guadalupe Morfín Otero as Special Federal Commissioner on Violence against Women in Ciudad

⁸⁶ Coomaraswamy, Dato'Param, “*Independence of the Judiciary, Administration of Justice Impunity in Mexico*,” UN Economic and Social Council - Commission on Human Rights, January 24th, 2002.

Juárez. Her office is in charge of mandating federal programs to prevent and investigate violence against women, which were outlined in her "Forty Point Plan." Morfín was in charge of coordinating federal programs with state and municipal policies regarding violence against women. Families of victims initially welcomed the commission, but soon found it to be unresponsive and ineffective.

In November 2003, Mexico's National Human Rights Commission released a report accusing Chihuahua investigators of negligence, sloppy work, and inexperience, and listed several problems, including lost documents and the use of torture to obtain confessions. The report focused on Ciudad Juárez to the exclusion of the femicides in Chihuahua City, and found only 263 murders since 1993, in addition to 4,587 missing women. In the cases of missing women, the state Attorney General provided the commission files on only 395 women, indicating that the state is not investigating the majority of disappearances.

In January 2004, Fox named María López Urbina as the latest in a series of special prosecutors investigating the murders of women in Juárez and Chihuahua (*Special Prosecutor in the Killings of Women in Ciudad Juárez*). Her office was under the *Procuraduría General de la República PGR* (Federal Attorney General), but dislocated in Ciudad Juárez. She was charged with conducting a review of all open cases in Juárez and deciding which fall under federal jurisdiction. In cases where the federal government did not have authority, the special prosecutor was charged with suggesting lines of investigation to state authorities. López Urbina's office assumed jurisdiction over only a handful of cases that deal with federal crimes, leaving the vast majority in the hands of local and state police. Human rights advocates believed that the limited jurisdiction of the special prosecutor's office greatly diminished the office's effectiveness.

In June 2004, Special Prosecutor María López Urbina and Special Federal Commissioner on Violence against Women Ciudad Juárez (*Comisionada para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez*, also under the *Procuraduría General de la República PGR* but under the 'Coordination Sub-commission' of the PGR), María Guadalupe Morfin Otero, released their first reports on the Juárez murders. López Urbina's report offered the harshest official assessment to date of state authorities. López Urbina charged 81 police officials with negligent or incompetent investigative work. At least 54, including police investigators, patrol officers and forensics specialists, now face formal investigations. López Urbina's report focused on 50 cases of femicide in Juárez, chosen because they were the first files obtained by her office. The Special Prosecutor planned to report on about 50 cases every four months, and her next report was due in October 2004. Of the first 50 cases reviewed, she found that most were related to domestic violence. Although many of the suggestions in López Urbina's report were well-researched and clearly necessary, her efforts to treat cases in isolation minimized the appearance of systematic gender violence.

While happy that the report at least took the crimes seriously, activists in the state of Chihuahua and the international community were not satisfied with López Urbina's work. Human rights advocates criticized the report for its focus on low-level officials, excluding the State Attorney General and the Governor. The report was considered too little and too late, and revealed no new information not already available in the Amnesty International report released the previous year. And the report did not include murder victims in Chihuahua City, site of a growing number of femicides. This omission was a result of the unfortunate fact that the mandates for both the Special Commissioner and the Special Prosecutor were limited to Ciudad Juárez and did not include cases in Chihuahua City.

The report released in June by Special Federal Commissioner Guadalupe Morfin included some innovations such as an improving forensic identification of victims and the establishment of a law enforcement agreement between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez in an effort to professionalize Juárez police. Morfin's report offered an analysis of the root causes behind the murders, criticized state and federal authorities for inaction, and condemned the "blatant complicity" of state institutions, which acted on behalf of drug cartels and not the population.

The destiny of those Commissions changed in 2006, when the *Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos relacionados con los Homicidios de Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez*, led by María López Urbina, became part of the Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (Inmujeres); and the *Comisión para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia contra las Mujeres en Ciudad Juárez*, under the supervision of Guadalupe Morfín Otero, disappeared in February (2006) when President Vicente Fox decided to create a brand new commission called *FEVIM – Fiscalía Especializada para la Atención de Delitos relacionados con actos de Violencia contra las Mujeres*, which will assume the tasks of fighting against violence on women not just in Ciudad Juárez anymore, but in the whole country. The new commissioner Dr. Alicia Elena Pérez Duarte was hardly criticized in 2007 due to two statements she declared to the press about the femicides in Juárez: first, she said that Juárez was not the state with the highest index of violence on women, but it was far beyond some other states such as the State of México or Veracruz; and second, she declared that in Juárez there had never been sex-serial murders. Nevertheless Pérez Duarte resigned soon after, in December 2007, due to her great disagreement with the decision of the Supreme Court of Justice of not recognizing the serious human right violations of a Mexican journalist who had been brave enough to denounce – in her book named "*Los Demonios del Edén*" – a children-pornography network led by the Governor of Puebla – who, by the way, is still in office – and a rich businessman of the state of Quintana Roo. The journalist was Lydia Cacho and she was illegally and with no charges captured in Cancún and taken to the prison in Puebla immediately after her book was published, which represented a series of violations not just against her but also against the right of the press to be free, as established in the Mexican Constitution. In Duartes's words, "*her resignation was to show that her Commission had not been able to protect a single woman from the systematic violence of the State not just against women, but against journalists as well*".⁸⁷

As a response the *FEVIM* stopped existing in February 2008 and on February the 4th the Federal Government created, once again, another special commission under the *Procuraduría General de la República PGR* (Federal Attorney General): the *Fiscalía Especial para los Delitos de Violencia contra las Mujeres y la Trata de Personas*, under the leadership of the former commissioner Guadalupe Morfín Otero. It will not just focus on Juárez but, among other things, it will absorb the remaining Technical Office in charge of providing economic assistance to the relatives of the homicide victims in Ciudad Juárez.

From all the facts mentioned above we can deduce that the police has effectively been involved in many irregularities about the femicides in the border. Furthermore there have also been some other important cops and public servants' names which have been crucial in the whole story, but specially at the very beginning. Names such as Francisco Molina Ruiz (Attorney General of the State of Chihuahua in 1995), Javier Benavides (Commanding Officer of the Judiciary Police in the same year), Hernán Rivera (Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Police), Jorge López Molinar (in charge of the Northern zone of the Attorney General Office), Francisco Minjárez (Head of the Special Investigations group of the Police) and Antonio Navarrete, a judiciary police in the

⁸⁷ See the motivations given by Alicia Elena Pérez Duarte in her resignation letter presented in December 2007. Web site: <http://contralatortura.wordpress.com/2007/12/17/rnuncia-la-titular-de-la-fevim-fiscalia-especial-de-violencia-contra-mujeres/>

city in the same period, who have been accused of irregular conducts such as protecting the Cartel somehow.

The paradox is that not all the actions of the people involved in drug-trafficking are completely illegal, otherwise they will not be able to act indisturbedly. They need to collude with the legitimate powers represented by the authority in order to pact new rules that may allow them to continue with their business, all based on a complicity and protection strategy. In fact in the last two decades the drug-trafficking industry in Mexico has considerably grown at the same time that the State basic functions have got weaker (functions such as the defense of law and sovereignty, or its commitment to ensuring social peace). In 1997 it was estimated that the drug-trafficking money-laundering in the country exceeded 15,000 million dollars a year, which represented approximately the 3 – 4% of the Mexican Gross Domestic Product (GDP). And the people in charge of laundering the money kept 15 cents out of every dollar, which were divided in equal parts in the following way: one third went to the capital supplier, one third to the one who triangled it, and the last part to the person who received it and made it ‘legal’ by laundering it (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 107-109).

A lot of important people such as Mexican Presidents, politicians, bankers, businessmen, State governors, militaries, policemen and even priests, have been linked to the most powerful drug-cartel somehow. Many of them have been killed as a retaliation act when they tried to remove themselves from their bonds. It is a world on the edge where legality and illegality live together and where corrupted and corrupt actors seal their ‘fraternity’ pacts by using female bodies.

* **The Politicians**

The role some top politicians have played in Ciudad Juárez has been, at a certain extent, similar to the role that some policemen had in the city since 1993. However, since they occupy the top of the pyramid it has been even more difficult to read between the lines in order to understand how they could be involved in covering up the members of such an evil and powerful ‘fraternity’.

Some writers such as Sergio González Rodríguez (2002), Rafael Loret de Mola (2005), Diana Washington (2005) and Carlos Monsiváis, have also pointed out to the undeniable responsibility that former Mexican President Vicente Fox Quezada (2000 – 2006) had as long as apparently he knew who the real murderers were and never did nothing to punish them. Their economic bonds were too powerful to be broken by some assassinations of poor, young women in Juárez.

This lack of political will to solve the pending cases, to stop femicides, to bring justice to the relatives of the victims and to prevent the crimes, can only be understood if we follow the subtle, thin trace of narco-dollars and all the political, social and even cultural implications they leave behind. And to follow it we have to start since the time in which Amado Carrillo Fuentes took over the Juárez cartel and became the most powerful and richest trafficker in Mexico.

In fact his reign started in the mid-1980’s, but it was during the Presidential mandate of Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (from 1994 – 2000) that he was able to get infiltrated into the federal government due to the nexus established with Zedillo’s particular Secretary, Liébano Sáenz. According to the testimony provided by Tomás Colsa McGregor – who was the jeweller who provided not just jewels to “*El señor de los cielos*”, but also the proper coverage for the drug’s money-laundering - the cartel received official protection from the government after bribing some of the most important Army officers in charge of leading the anti-narcotics war (such as General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, Mexico’s top drug enforcement official who was the Head of the *Instituto*

*Nacional para el Combate a las Drogas – INCD). Gutiérrez Rebollo was identified as being the main protector of the cartel, but unfortunately not the only one. Also Liébano Sáenz was mentioned by Colsa McGregor, and Francisco Barrio as well (Andrade Bojorges, José Alfredo. 1999 : 189)*⁸⁸.

According to the journalist and writer Diana Washington Valdés (2005), the DEA has information proving that the cartel could infiltrate into the right-wing *Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN)* – which has always been associated with the Catholic church and the entrepreneurial circles in Mexico – since the early 1990's, as a political strategy to get the favour of the future political class ruling not just the Juárez County but the whole State of Chihuahua, as long as the people were tired of voting for the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)*, which had been permanently in office since 1917. It was Amado Carrillo himself the one who took the decision of supporting the *PAN* during the administration of Governor Francisco Barrio Terrazas (1992-1998), who had previously been Juárez Mayor (1983-1986). In this way the cartel got protected to act indisturbedly at the same time that Governor Barrio got narco-funds to finance the political campaigns of the three Juárez Mayors that followed him: Francisco Villareal, Ramón Galindo and Gustavo Elizondo, all *PAN* members as well.

But the narco-funds were also used to partially finance the Presidential political campaign of Vicente Fox Quezada in 2000, when he became the first Mexican President from an opponent political party such as the *PAN*. The funds that Fox got in the northern part of the country – but specially in Chihuahua – were all collected by Lino Korrodi⁸⁹, a personal friend of Fox who became his campaign financial coordinator and founded a group of businessmen called “*Los Amigos de Fox*” (Fox’s friends), to economically support his presidential campaign. Such a group included some very important people from Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua, such as Barrio Terrazas himself, the Fuentes Téllez family (owner of the biggest gas company in Ciudad Juárez, which also provides gas services to El Paso and has recently opened some branch offices in Guatemala as well) – one of its members, Valentín Fuentes Téllez, who has been accused of being one of the ‘*juniors*’ (name given to the sons of the wealthy families in Mexico) who went on a murder spree against some of the women in Ciudad Juárez, in 1999 got married to Karla Korrodi, one of Korrodi’s daughters – the Zaragoza (who are related to the Fuentes, and who had faced charges for drug-trafficking activities in 1990, according to a report made by the American Customs and Treasure Department)⁹⁰. Nevertheless , the Molinar, the Sotelo, the Hank, the Rivera, the Fernández (owners of the Coca Cola and the minds behind the ‘*Strategic Plan for Ciudad Juárez*’, which was supposed to ‘clean’ the city’s image after the bad popularity got due to the femicides), the Cabada, the Molina, the Hernández, the Urbina, the Cano, the Martínez and the Domínguez families, among others, are some of the Fox’s friends there and they all contributed to pay his running for the Presidency (Washington Valdés. 2005: 229-237).

All the money collected by those people – including the funds given by Governor Barrio Terrazas, which were supposed to come from the drug-cartel – was concentrated in an American bank called ‘*Bank of the West*’ at El Paso, Texas, and it was sent afterwards to the headquarters of candidate Fox, located in Mexico City. The nexus were clear and the favours President Fox owned to those people were undeniable. He would have to pay the bill when the right moment arrived. And the moment arrived with the veiled presidential reject to effectively investigate and punish some

⁸⁸ Tomás Colsa McGregor’s testimony, which involved Francisco Barrio Terrazas with the traffickers, was reported in the official document by the *Procuraduría General de la Repùblica* (Attorney General) No. PGR/UEDO-157/98.

⁸⁹ In November 2007, once former Mexican President Vicente Fox Quezada had finished his mandate (2000-2006), Lino Korrodi presented legal charges not just against Fox but also against Fox’s wife, Marta Sahagún. The charges were for unjust enrichment during his six-year mandate. The press stated that such a gesture was motivated by the fact that Fox denied to place Korrodi as the Tourism Secretary.

⁹⁰ See the Newsletter “*Narco News*” dated June 24th, 2000 – American Customs and Treasure Department.

important people who have been accused to be behind some femicides – specially the ones committed during the first years following the sex-serial pattern – in three federal investigations done by three Mexican governmental agencies: the *Procuraduría General de la República PGR* (Attorney General Office), the *Policía Federal Preventiva* (Federal Police) and the *Centro de Investigaciones de Seguridad Nacional CISEN* (Intelligence Agency on National Security).

The first official investigation, done by the mid-1990s when Ernesto Zedillo was still the President and Antonio Lozano Gracia, the only *PAN* member working in his Presidential cabinet, was the *PGR* boss, pointed out to some public servants of the *Procuraduría del Estado de Chihuahua* as the people in charge of providing young women for orgies. After their families had reported them as missing, the female corpses were found dumped somewhere out in the desert. Despite such public servants were accused of providing the girls for the parties, they were not formally charged with their murders. One of them was also included in the 2004 special report done by María López Urbina, the *Special Prosecutor in the Killings of Women in Ciudad Juárez*, as one of the 81 police officials with negligent or incompetent investigative work.

The second 1999 official investigation brought about the names of some *juniors* who had been involved in some of the femicides mainly occurred at the very beginning. In fact, the report established that the year 1993 – when the femicides started – was not a coincidence or an arbitrary year, but mainly the perfect time to protest against the *North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)* as long as it would bring disadvantages for the local producers, who would not be able to compete with the foreign industry after liberalizing the market. That's why it was then necessary to damage the *maquiladora* industry that represented the maximum symbol of the *NAFTA* agreement. The strategy of killing women was thought in order to demand some concessions from the government related to the *NAFTA*, before it came into effect on January 1st, 1994.

The third and last federal investigation, completed in 2001, also implicated some very important people of Juárez behind the femicides. They were powerful enough to organize spree murders to seal up '*fraternity pacts*' as long as they were involved in millionaire businesses in connection with drug-trafficking and money-laundering, and their influence was so widespread that their presence went beyond the Mexican borders. Some members of the richest families in Juárez were part of the list of suspects, but as usual everything was stopped by some authorities after the investigators had concluded their analysis.

But we need to go further into the analysis to know why these people were using female bodies either to protest against the *NAFTA*, to seal up illegal conducts in pacts of silence, or simply to mark out their territories by showing the government and the whole population that they were free to kill whenever and whoever they wanted. A complicity game between powerful people who got protected by corrupt police officers and public servants as well. Maybe a hypothesis lies in the top secret "*Chihuahua Pilot Project*", which was a governmental program implemented in 1995 by Ernesto Zedillo to try to control the drug-trafficking into the U.S. Such a program was strongly supported by the American administration and consisted in replacing the *PGR* (*Procuraduría General de la República*) anti-drug agents in Chihuahua with the Army, to double the controls thanks to their military discipline. In this way 120 judicial federal officers (*PGR*) – who were popularly known for being corrupt – were replaced by soldiers to fight against drug-traffickers. The project was supposed to spread over other states with a significant trafficking presence, but it failed since the very beginning as long as many of the soldiers newly promoted as anti-drug agents, moved to the traffickers' side. In that way many ex-federal cops and ex-soldiers started being paid by the cartel (Freeman, Laurie and Jorge Luis Sierra). According to the femicide statistics 1995 and 1996 were the most violent years in Juárez and there was the highest number of victims during those years too (48 femicides in 1995 and 43 in 1996). This is a proof that there was a cold-blooded

and merciless war between the organized crime and those anti-drug agents who decided to remain in the legal side.

At the same time that Chihuahua became the experimental state for the governmental anti-drug battle, it was also the chosen scenario to remorselessly test the negative consequences of globalization and the free market effects, and to realize about the cruel and violent response of the organized crime that did not hesitate to sacrifice women and to use their bodies to counterattack the State strategy. In such a battle it was impossible to distinguish between the honest and the corrupt police officers, anti-drug agents and soldiers as long as many of them were hired to kidnap, torture and kill the trafficker opponents.

Although the crimes cover-up seemed to have started since the very top of the pyramid – President Fox himself – it did not stop there. In May 1999 the ex-municipal cop Víctor Valenzuela Rivera presented himself to the *CE.RE.SO* (*Centro de Readaptación Social*) prison in Juárez and asked to have an interview with the Egyptian Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif. As an act of remorse he gave Sharif two names of the real women murderers. He talked about the responsibility of a rich *junior* named Alejandro Mányez and his cousin Melchor Mányez, whose parents were the owners of several bars and nightclubs in the city, but he also provided the name of some politicians in charge of covering up the assassins since their public positions. One of them was a Chihuahua *PAN* senator named Francisco Molina Ruíz, who protected the organized crime in Juárez since the Senate (1997-2000). Before being elected as a Senator Molina Ruíz was the Chihuahua Attorney General from 1992 to 1996, when Francisco Barrio was the Governor. When he was occupying such a position the cartel flourished and was able to cross the highest number of drugs to the U.S., at the same time that the female assassinations increased. Then Molina was called by Antonio Lozano Gracia (the Mexican Attorney General and a *PAN* member too) to work as the anti-drug Czar in Mexico and, after Vicente Fox became the President and placed Francisco Barrio as the Anti-Corruption Secretary (*Secretario de la Contraloría y Desarrollo Administrativo – SECODAM*), Molina worked as Barrio's Security Coordinator, organizing the first official contact between the newly elected government of Vicente Fox and the American Attorney General Janet Reno (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 173 – 285).

Furthermore the bonds between some politicians and the cartel were also explained in the book “*Todo lo que debería saber sobre el crimen organizado en México*”, by the *Instituto Mexicano de Estudios de la Criminalidad Organizada* (IMECO – Mexican Institute about the Organized Crime). In it they showed further links between Francisco Barrio and the cartel through Barrio's pilot, a man called Héctor Valdés, who was also a member of the Juárez cartel. In fact Valdés was supposed to be in charge of hiring the crew and organizing the logistics for the air-shipping of drugs to the U.S. Everything by using governmental planes: Francisco Barrio's planes (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 197-218).

From what mentioned above it is clear that throughout all these years there has been an evident participation of important politicians in an on-going femicide-cover up. It is also evident that at least the serial-sex femicides, which approximately represent one third of the total, are the consequence of a ‘*sacrificial orgy*’ in which misogynist men rape, torture and kill their victims in a systematic way to show their power, to control their territories, and to reaffirm their supremacy over the State. And all this was possible thanks to the protection and omissions carried out by the Mexican authorities, specially police officers, soldiers and judiciary police, who were strongly supported by a group of wealthy entrepreneurs whose businesses were just a front for laundering hot money or for different kinds of trafficking. The general motive was the need to seal up, bring together and guarantee the silence of the fraternity members through a sexual, homicidal rite on women. Everything to keep the secret of such a brotherhood. On the other hand the particular

motive may be, as stated by the FBI serial profiler Robert K. Ressler, a non-motive: “*The serial assassin kills just for killing; he doesn’t usually have a particular motive*” (Washington Valdés, Diana. 2002). The real murderers are free and the authorities have mainly imprisoned scapegoats. Moreover, there has been a lack of scientific police investigations, without taking into account the warnings, threats or direct attacks to different people who have dared to testimony or to go deeper into the femicide investigations. Everything is linked together in a perfect chain made of impunity: drug-trafficking, kidnappings, disappearances and mysoginist femicides.

* The businessmen

There is no doubt that in economic terms Ciudad Juárez represents a strategic place not just because of the great twin-plant concentration, which makes of it a paradigm of modernity: a city with the lowest unemployment rate in the whole country, but with poverty levels in average with the rest of it or even worse than in many other regions. A place where apparently gender subordination – which has been culturally accepted and adopted in Mexico – was being subverted as long as ordinary women, mainly *maquiladora* women, had been able to bargain with patriarchy to leave their original hometowns, to move to the North alone in many cases, and to manage to get a job and to ‘survive’ by themselves without the need of male partners. It is also the city where the flows of globalization are more than evident due to the immigration patterns South to North and North to South. Women are the protagonists of such migrations and by arriving to Juárez they modify many of their old customs and traditions to adopt the unwritten social rules of the peripheria, the shanty towns, the life on the edge. An edge not just between the richness they contribute to produce with their work, but which rudely vanishes in front of their eyes, and the miserable economic conditions surrounding them at any time; but also an edge between two countries with very different lifestyles and levels of development that place poor people – sometimes even geographically in some places such as *Rancho Anapra*, a shanty town from which you clearly see the lights of the glamorous Sunland Park mall, in New Mexico – in front of a cruel and harsh reality that permanently traps them in a culture of poverty with no exit possibility.

Furthermore due to its strategic geographic position the flows of globalization have not just stopped at human migrations, but they have also included an intense flow of goods, services and vehicles that cross the border everyday under the *North America Free Trade Agreement* frame. And it is such a privileged geographic position the one that makes of the city an excellent territory for bi-national projects that may produce millionaire profits for the people involved. Wealthy people, of course. Businessmen for sure.

The first of these projects is related to the gas industry. During the mandate of former Mexican President Vicente Fox (2000 – 2006) the southern part of the United States, but mainly California, had massive blackouts that showed up the poor American capacity to produce electric energy by themselves. As a consequence the U.S. government urged President Fox to promote the creation and development of gas industries in the North. Furthermore in February 2004 the American company Halliburton – which is partially owned by Dick Cheney, former U.S. Vicepresident – announced that one of Halliburton companies had just signed up a five-year technology agreement with the Mexican state company *Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX – Mexican Petrol Industry)*, in order to get further gas from Mexico. Moreover such an agreement was just the last one established between Pemex and Halliburton, as long as they had been in business together for almost fifty years by then⁹¹.

⁹¹ See the article “*Halliburton Awarded 175 Million Contract by PEMEX*”. Halliburton Newsletter. May 6th, 2004.

As Fox was the first President from the *Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN)* political party, he tended to privilege the border city which had been ruled by the PAN as well, and from where he got the money for his political campaign. The time to pay the favours to Juárez entrepreneurs had arrived, for not mentioning that Ciudad Juárez was the cradle of one of the most powerful gas groups in Northern Mexico: the group formed by a good few families such as the Zaragoza, the Fuentes and the Téllez, who effectively have entered with their gas industry not just into the U.S. territory, but into Guatemala as well⁹².

With such important entrepreneurial and presidential interests between Mexico and the United States, it is easier to understand why the businessmen who have been related to the femicides in Ciudad Juárez had not been investigated nor even disturbed by the proper authorities, and why there has been such a silence around the close circle of those “*Amigos de Fox*” (Fox’s friends) whose names have been somehow implied in the femicides⁹³.

The second main project that also represents a great source of money for the beneficiaries, is the construction of the “*Transnational Boulevard*”, which will be a huge urbanization work that will connect Chihuahua with New Mexico at the international crossing spot known as *San Jerónimo-Santa Teresa*, located in the west side of Ciudad Juárez. Such a boulevard will be in the space that currently hosts the *Puerto Anapra* shanty town, where there have been multiple findings of female corpses mainly in the area known as *Lomas de Polo*.

Puerto Anapra stretches for over 7.190,000 square meters that belong to four owners: Pedro Zaragoza Fuentes, Alfredo Uriás, Oscar Cantú and the Lugo family, according to the Public Registry of Property, published by the *Diario de Juárez* newspaper on May 26th, 1999 (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 38).

Consequently the multiple findings of corpses exactly in Anapra has to be read between the lines, as long as it could represent two things at the same time: that the use and possession of the public space when throwing out the bodies in the desert is simultaneously linked to a territorial domination strategy in the borderline, just to speculate with the lands that will host the “*Transnational Boulevard*” – which by the way had been illegally occupied by thousands of poor emigrants in the last decades. On the other hand they could also be the consequence of ‘sexual-sacrifice orgies’ of drug-traffickers that privilege *Puerto Anapra* for the illegal drug crossings, celebrating their success by using female bodies until the end afterwards.

This only means that in Ciudad Juárez the origin and growth of capital, the urbanization development, the construction and real estate companies, the property speculation and the *maquiladoras*, altogether, are mainly based on the territorial domination of the public space and on the fortunes of a bunch of families that historically have been in the top of the pyramid thanks to their nightclubs, their alcohol, beer and sodas businesses, their basic infrastructure services, such as the gas distribution, or their communication networks. Everything mixed together in a sort of ‘evil ecology’ that has been using the desert to dump young female corpses of poor girls to send ‘coded

⁹² Guatemala is one of the countries with the highest femicide index in the world, just followed by Russia. In fact since 2001 there have been more than two-thousand women assassinated there, and just 14 cases have ended in Court. Just in 2006 there were more than 150 femicides reported, according to statistics provided by the U.S. Congress. (See “*Alarma a Estados Unidos Feminicidio en Guatemala*” – Reforma Newspaper – Mexico, May 12th, 2006).

⁹³ Diana Washington Valdés could get some secret FBI and Mexican intelligence files that reported some surnames of wealthy people in Juarez who could have provided valid traces to get to the murderers. The surnames are: Molinar, Sotelo, Hank, Rivera, Fernández, Zaragoza, Cabada, Molina, Fuentes, Hernández, Urbina, Domínguez, among others. This does not mean that they had a direct participation in the crimes, but just that they could know some important facts related to the killers and the surrounding circumstances. Although the Mexican government has these names, such families have never been investigated.

messages' to the government, to their opponents and to the whole world. The uncoded message may be: "*This is our territory and we are the only masters of it*".

* The Drug-dealers

By any measure, illegal drugs have a huge economic impact and take a devastating toll on society, both north and south of the border. In the United States, the street value of illegal drugs sold during 2000 was estimated at more than \$62 billion and illegal drugs cost society an estimated \$118 billion annually in lost work, crime, law enforcement and medical expenses, according to the *Office of National Drug Control Policy*⁹⁴ estimated (some NGOs place societal costs as high as \$500 billion annually). By far the most popular, destructive and profitable drug is cocaine. US Customs estimated that \$30 billion from drug proceeds were smuggled into Mexico during FY1999, the majority from cocaine sales. According to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA):

"The Southwest Border is the most prominent gateway for drugs into the United States. ... The international bridges and the large transportation industry available in this area provide drug traffickers with innumerable drug and money smuggling opportunities. The desert-like areas in New Mexico and West Texas and easily crossed sections of the Rio Grande offer tremendous smuggling opportunities to drug trafficking organizations. ... Cocaine smuggling is our most serious regional threat. ... Mexican drug trafficking organizations utilize the El Paso ports of entry as their primary conduit into the U.S. ... Three major Mexican drug trafficking organizations are responsible for smuggling illegal drugs across the West Texas and New Mexico area of the Southwest Border. Although these organizations are in agreement to work together without trying to control each other, recently one of the leaders has been consolidating his power, to demonstrate that he is still in charge of the El Paso/Juarez corridor. His methods include violence and executions of smaller organizations that do not pay his "fees" to move their drug shipments through "his" corridor. For example, in the last eight years, there have been 325 drug-related executions in this corridor". (DEA Congressional Testimony, April 15th, 2003)⁹⁵

A report from the U.S. State Department sheds further light on the problem: "*Mexico ... produce[d] about one-third of the heroin consumed in the United States and exported about 5,000 metric tons of marijuana to the United States... Mexico is the principal transit country for South American cocaine entering the United States; an estimated 70 percent of the U.S.-bound cocaine shipments pass through its territory*" (US Dept of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2003 - Mexico).

From the U.S. perspective, illegal drugs result in increased crime by users in search of money to feed their addictions and high murder rates in inner city areas where gangs battle for turf and markets. Drug use is viewed as a criminal activity rather than a health problem. The solution of choice is interdiction at the border and incarceration of drug addicts and dealers. The federal government spent \$19.2 billion on drug control programs in 2003, of which two-thirds went to interdiction and law enforcement, according to the National Drug Control Strategy FY2003 Budget. About 60% of US prisoners are in jail for drug-related offenses.

In the U.S. context, the corrupting influence of drug money is generally seen as an isolated problem without serious or continuing implications. This is a popular myth belied by the regular arrest and conviction of law enforcement agents, from both border areas and interior cities, for their direct

⁹⁴ "National Drug Control Strategy, FY 2003," The White House, February, 2002.

⁹⁵ DEA Congressional Testimony, April 15, 2003, Statement of Sandalio González, Special Agent in Charge of El Paso Division, Drug Enforcement Administration, before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources.

involvement in the illegal drug trade. The popular myth would have us believe that drug cartels exist in Mexico but somehow don't accompany the drugs across the border, an astonishing argument contradicted by a 1998 report from the General Accounting Office (GOA)⁹⁶, which cites examples of publicly disclosed drug-related police corruption in Atlanta, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Los Angeles, Miami, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Savannah, and Washington, DC - and this list is by no means exhaustive. Half of all police officers convicted as a result of FBI-led corruption cases between 1993 and 1997 were convicted for drug-related offenses, according to the GOA report.

Corruption reaches to the highest levels of the U.S. government, with the Iran-Contra affair perhaps the most publicly known, though certainly not the only, example. The Senate Committee Report on Drugs, Law Enforcement and Foreign Policy⁹⁷, also known as the Kerry Commission Report, found "*payments to drug traffickers by the U.S. State Department of funds authorized by the Congress for humanitarian assistance to the Contras, in some cases after the traffickers had been indicted by federal law enforcement agencies on drug charges, in others while traffickers were under active investigation by these same agencies.*"

Corruption is not limited to the government. About \$500 billion - including drug-related profits and other illegally obtained money - is laundered through U.S. banks each year, according to the Bureau of National Affairs. Four of the largest banks in the United States - Citibank, J.P. Morgan, Bank of America and First Union - are among the worldwide leaders in money laundering, according to a March 2001 Congressional report.

While we could spend many more pages discussing drug-related corruption in the United States, the major focus of this introduction into the drug-dealers' role related to femicides in Ciudad Juárez, is to dispel a commonly held myth concerning drug cartels in the United States, as long as the collective immaginary usually thinks that the cartels remain in Mexico and corruption stays down in the south. On the contrary, drug cartels are perfectly well established transnational organizations able to control, corrupt and bribe whoever necessary in both sides of the border.

In 1998 the *Instituto Mexicano de Estudios de la Criminalidad Organizada (IMECO)*, reported in its book "*Todo lo que debería saber sobre el crimen organizado en México*" that basically the crime is organized by the State, protected and defended by the State itself. In fact the Mexican 'mafias' live right in the heart of the State. This is why it is so difficult to fight against drug-trafficking especially if we focus on the assassinated women in Juarez: first because stating that someone's murder is related to drug-trafficking damages the victim's reputation. Second, relating a murder to drug-dealers causes that human-right activists hesitate to defend or support the victim's relatives because they get very much exposed to retaliation acts that usually conclude with further murders. And finally because relating any crime to the drug-industry guarantees almost total impunity for the killers, as long as murderers linked to drug-dealers usually remain unsolved.

In Ciudad Juárez the femicides are just a collateral effect of the great drug-trafficking business, which also implies great profits from money-laundering. Everything is possible because there is total complicity between some corrupt politicians, businessmen and drug-dealers, of course. The fraternity bonds started to weave during the 1980's and they were used to bring instability and panic to some states that were used as tests: Chihuahua, México and Morelos, where there is a huge presence of kidnappings, retail drug-dealing (street peddlers) and extreme violence. This was

⁹⁶ General Accounting Office, 1998, Report to the Honorable Charles B. Rangel, House of Representatives, Law Enforcement: Information on Drug-Related Police Corruption (Washington, DC: USGPO, May).

⁹⁷ Senate Committee Report on Drugs, Law Enforcement and Foreign Policy, 1987, Chairman Senator John Kerry, <http://www.webcom.com/pinknoiz/covert/contracoke.html>

exactly the strategy followed by the drug-lord Amado Carrillo Fuentes, “*el señor de los cielos*” to take over the drug industry in Mexico. Something that has been called the “*Colombianización*” of Mexico.

But what is amazing about the Amado Carrillo cartel is that since the end 2001 there has been an internal fight in Ciudad Juárez to reorganize the forces and to take over the “*plaza*”. In fact that year general violence – over men and women – sensitively increased between three drug groups: the Carrillo Fuentes’ one/Juan José Esparragoza (alias ‘El Azul’) – which hosted the remains of the former Juárez cartel; the Arellano Félix’s one (the Tijuana cartel, which has been able to insert into Juárez in the new millennium); and the ‘new’ cartel of Juárez (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 246-247).

The presence of the ‘new’ cartel was noticed for the first time on January 17th, 2001, when Patricio Martínez, Governor of the State of Chihuahua, suffered an attack: a female judiciary police shot him straight at his head, but fortunately he could save his life by turning around in the last moment. On June 3rd, 2001, the journalist Isabel Arvide – who has been threatened many times in the past for her articles about drug-trafficking and its bonds with the state forces – published an article in the *Milenio* newspaper about a net formed by important politicians and businessmen in Chihuahua, who gave protection to the drug-dealers (the article was based on military intelligence sources). The names involved were Jesús José “*Chito*” Solís Silva – who was the coordinator of the *Consejo Estatal de Seguridad Pública* in Chihuahua – Crispín Borunda; Raúl Muñoz Talavera – who was the brother of former drug-lord Rafael Muñoz Talavera, shot in 1998 – Dante Poggio – ex-agent of the Federal Judiciary Police (*Policía Judicial Federal – PJF*); and Osvaldo Rodríguez Borunda – owner of the newspapers *Diario de Chihuahua* and *Diario de Juarez*. All of them were close friends of Governor Patricio Martínez.

The federal authorities never refused the shocking news about the new Juarez cartel, and the only person who placed a legal complaint against Isabel Arvide, in August 2002, was Rodríguez Borunda. To turn it down she presented the copy of a federal capture order for drug-trafficking against Rodríguez Borunda. Moreover, on January 7th, 2002 Chihuahua Attorney General, Arturo González Rascón, was replaced with Jesús José “*Chito*” Solís Silva, who had been linked to the Juarez cartel and organized crime. There was a general unsatisfaction with the new position, but neither Governor Patricio Martínez, nor President Fox or Santiago Creel – Internal Affairs Secretary – listened to the people’s complaints.

** *Narco-Satanists’ rituals in the border*

Since the period of the Spanish domination in Mexico (popularly known as ‘*La Colonia*’ (1521-1821)) and throughout all XIX Century, the northern part of the country started to elaborate some cultural patterns that mix together the beliefs, practical knowledge and rituals related to *witchcraft* and *santeria* (a mix of traditional African beliefs with Christianity). The specific territory where these practices are still common starts in Las Cruces, New Mexico, goes through El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juarez in Chihuahua, and ends in Brownsville, Texas and Matamoros, Tamaulipas.

It has also been a fact that drug-traffickers not just in the border, but in the whole country, have used the witchcraft as an important ally as long as all the rituals related with such a ‘*sopranatural*’ activity help to reinforce the bonds between the social groups and individuals who work underground and whose practices remain secret. The trinity formed by *satanismo*, drug-trafficking and human sacrifices has expanded as an evil sign throughout the border – but also beyond it – during the last decades of the XX century.

In Mexico every now and then there are yellow press news informing about the discoveries of satanic rituals involving animal and human sacrifices. In November 1998, Víctor Manuel Soto Camacho, Vicepresident of the *Comisión de Seguridad Pública de la Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal* (Public Security Commission of the Legislative Camera in Mexico City), revealed sensitive information dealing with the links, structures, language, habits and practices of the organized crime in Mexico City. According to it they acted under the police protection and police officers and criminals were united by *initiation rituals*. In fact a new member entrance into the ‘fraternity’ implied committing a crime or participating in ‘narco-satanic’ ceremonies, where drug consumption was a must (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 70-75).

In such ceremonies the brotherhood worships the “*Santa Muerte*” (Holy death) as their privileged saint. A saint that represents a sort of contemporary syncretism that puts old traditions established in the Catholic faith together with *santería*, *voodoo* and some other modern beliefs coming from satanism: sacrifices to invoke the favour of negative forces. Everything is an esoteric game of criminal behaviours characterized by violence and wilfull misconducts. The ritual would allow the establishment of blood and silence pacts able to move the organization and to promote a permanent level of impunity at the same time.

In fact Amado Carrillo Fuentes, ‘*el señor de los cielos*’, was known to use the *santería rituals* within the Juarez cartel to link its members together. But he was not the only drug-baron to follow such practices. Also José de Jesús Amezcuá, the metanphetamine and efedrine lord – captured in 1998 – named himself a ‘*santero*’ close related to the Tijuana cartel of the Arellano Félix brothers.

In Ciudad Juarez there have been many female corpses presenting similar characteristics that may be related to satanism and satanic sacrifices. We are talking about the murders following the sex-serial pattern in which women had their nipples bitten off or stabbed, and some incisions – particularly triangles – ripped out in their skins. Furthermore the real cause of their death was strangulation while they were being raped by their assassins. In their final moments alive, while being raped, their victimizers strangled them to provoke their vaginas to contract and, consequently, bring more pleasure for the rapists. All of them seemed to have been sacrificed in the same way and considering that the Juarez cartel uses this sort of practices, it was very possible that such murders could be related to *narco-satanist rituals* as a sort of initiation act for a new member of the fraternity.

However, the police has never considered such a motive as a valid one, and everything stopped without any further investigations.

Moreover, in March 1996 after María Guadalupe del Río Vázquez disappeared, her family started to look for her in the desert as long as most of the corpses had been found in the immense desert public space. They got to *Lomas de Poleo* – in Puerto Anapra – and found an old, abandoned cottage full of elements leading to think to satanic rituals. Out of the cottage they found some black and red candles, fresh blood and a wooden cross 2 meters tall and 1.5 meters wide. On the cross there were stylized designs such as scorpions, naked women – one of them was lying naked in the middle of the cross, waiting to be sacrificed – and even some soldiers placed behind some marijuana plants. In the lowest part of the cross there were also four men who were hooded executioners.

When the Judiciary police of Chihuahua knew about such a finding, they demanded the del Río Vázquez family to directly deliver the cross to them for the proper analysis. The family disagreed and handed it in personally to Victoria Caraveo, a human-right activist who sent it to the *Subprocuraduría Norte del Estado de Chihuahua* (Sub Attorney General office) as a very valid

evidence. Later the police said they had sent it to another city for the test, but after that final explanation the cross got lost and nobody has ever seen it again (González Rodríguez, Sergio. 2002: 66-78).

The cross and the elements found at Lomas de Poleo were just a proof of a probable ritual involving satanic practices. The police could have investigated such a hypothesis but they never did it. On the contrary, the collective corpse findings have gone unsolved so far in spite of all the evidences the police has got. Once more the crimes have gone uninvestigated. As a matter of fact this complicity game has been the normal practice in Juarez, and the messages sent to the authorities through female bodies is just the worst and most lethal consequence of the drug-trafficking game.

What it is clear from the facts mentioned above is that the responsibility of the femicides in Ciudad Juarez is not exclusive of a single man or a single group. The suspects may be serial-killers, copycats, street gangs, drug-traffickers and a group of powerful and rich people. Just a very few responsible have been imprisoned while there have been many scapegoats instead. There have also been corrupt police officers covering up the whole situation to protect the killers. And such official complicity makes us talk about State crimes as long as the impunity caused by the State has generated crimes against humanity.

3. NUESTRAS HIJAS DE REGRESO A CASA (NHRC)... The Mothers

The murder of hundreds of women in Ciudad Juarez during the past decade has compelled women to mobilize. This mobilization is a parable of women's struggle for human rights because the factors that cause gender-based violence in Mexico are common throughout the world, the authorities' failure to punish those crimes constitutes a form of gender discrimination that is prevalent in all the world, and the imperative for Mexican women to mobilize in defense of their own human rights is also shared by women worldwide. This struggle involves a double transformation: the transformation of women's organizations into human rights organizations and the transformation of human rights advocacy through the integration of the gender perspective.



Source: Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa website
María Elena Chávez Caldera Funeral mass
Ciudad Juárez - 2004



Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa March
Mexico City, June 20th, 2004

I first saw Marisela Ortiz Rivera, the founder and speaker of the Ciudad Juarez civil association “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa A.C.*” (May our daughters return home), in a dry and windy March afternoon almost two years ago. She offered to pick me up at the airport but a delay in my flight changed our plans, so she came straight to my hotel afterwards.

Despite I had already seen her by photo it was shocking the effect she caused on the hotel’s employees when they saw her coming inside. She has become a very popular symbol against femicides not just in Ciudad Juarez but even abroad, and her presence may sometimes be uncomfortable for some people who prefer to stay out of the female assassinations in the city to avoid retaliation acts. She is an uncomfortable person for saying the truth, for defending the victims’ relatives, and for fighting to promote human rights with a gender perspective. This is why either the receptionist, the front guard and all the people in the lobby seemed so astonished that their face expressions and nervousness could not hide their surprise.

Marisela Ortiz is a middle-aged woman whose great self-confidence transmits tranquility and serenity on the listeners. Physically she is very strong and her nice, tidy and even fashionable appearance give her a pleasant look that makes you forget you are interviewing a human-right activist and a committed social advocate that has risked her own life, her relatives’ lives and her whole existence to defend, support, promote and maintain the battle of the mothers, daughters, sisters and other relatives of the assassinated women in Juarez to find the killers and to get justice after such evil acts.

It was evident she noticed the surprised faces around her, but she did not seem uncomfortable with such a ‘hostil’ attitude. She is used to it and has lived with it since she decided to go and look for Norma Andrade not just to offer her condolences after Norma’s daughter, Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, got murdered in February 2001 when she was only seventeen. She went further by proposing Norma to do something together to openly fight against everyone and everything to know what had really happened to Lilia Alejandra, who was her secondary school pupil a couple of years before. Since then she has learnt how to live with hostile attitudes around her and how to survive to the different dangers that have constantly threatened not just her life, but also her family’s lives and mental health. She knew it since the very beginning, since the very moment they decided to found a mothers and sisters’ organization called “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*”. Since then their everyday lives have completely changed as the logical consequence of such a brave and determined decision, taken by an admirable secondary teacher who could not remain indifferent to such an atrocity.

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Around 10:15 pm, on the night of February the 19th, 2001, the neighbors of a trash dump near one of the hundreds of *maquiladoras* in Ciudad Juárez, just across from the Plaza Juárez Mall, called the Municipal Police emergency number - 060 - in order to inform them that a naked woman was being beaten and raped by two men in a large vehicle. No police were sent out to investigate the purported rape. Following a second phone call, a police car was sent out, but it didn’t arrive to the crime scene until 11:25 pm, too late to do anything. The vehicle of the culprits had already disappeared.

Just four days before, the mother of the 17 year old Lilia Alejandra García Andrade had registered her child as missing by the ‘*Center for Attention to Victims of Sexual Crimes and Crimes Against the Family*’. Lilia Alejandra, mother of a five-month old son, and a two-year old girl in spite of her very young age, worked in the *Maquiladora Servicios Plásticos y Ensamblados* (Maquila Assembly and Plastic Services). At around 7:30 pm the night of her abduction, Lilia’s colleagues saw her walk away into an unlighted area around the trash dumpster near the factory. Lilia took this path everyday in order to reach the bus that would take her home where her little son was waiting for her to be nursed. But that night, on February 14th, 2001, Lilia was never to return home.

On the 21st of February, the corpse of a young woman was found in a trash dumpster located close to the telephone where the emergency calls to the police were made. She was wrapped up in a blanket and had obvious corporal signs of physical and sexual violence. The autopsy showed suffocation as a result of strangulation as the cause of death. The body of the young woman was identified by her parents as Lilia Alejandra. The autopsy and investigation came to the conclusion that she had died a day and a half before being found, and that she was held captive for at least 5 days prior to her murder⁹⁸. An extract from the police report related to the emergency line on February the 19th at 11:05 pm, says plain and simply: “*Nothing to report.*” The identity of the woman who was attacked on this day was never determined, and no attempt was made to investigate whether or not there was a connection between her case and the abduction of Lilia Alejandra or, for that matter, any other cases. Furthermore, no investigation was carried out by the authorities in order to determine why no follow-up was made to the emergency calls from Ciudad Juárez. In fact the Police have taken no responsibility for their ineffective emergency response system and thus, the murder of García Andrade, like so many others in Juarez, remains unsolved.

⁹⁸ Sources: Newspaper ‘*El Norte*’, February 23rd, 2001. Articles by Salvador Castro and Karen Chávez. Newspaper ‘*El Paso Times*’, February 23rd, 2001. Article by Diana Washington Valdés

So far the area of the trash dumpster remains unlighted. A small pink cross with the name ‘*Lilia Alejandra*’ bears witness at the place where the corpse was found to remind people that there used to be a pretty, young lady, mother of two little children, who was abducted in her way home from work, raped, tortured for days and cowardly strangled by some jackals who could have been stopped if the police had had a faster response to the emergency call made when she was living her last and worst moments.

But even worse is the fact that federal authorities refuse to investigate and admit the mistakes made in this case, and that a connection exists between the abduction and murder of Lilia Alejandra and the emergency phone calls. Likewise, no reports exist regarding disciplinary actions⁹⁹.

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“I would like you to imagine either your daughter, your sister, your cousin, your girlfriend or your wife. Imagine that she leaves home to go to the school or to work. You can realise how pretty she looks while walking, showing innocence in her face and a great wish to live. The brightness in her eyes makes you see how happy she is. Imagine that when she is coming back home a car blocks her way while three men get out of it to threaten her. Imagine that one of these men pulls her hair while another lifts her by her feet, and together pull her into the car... she’s being kidnapped. Imagine that they get into a house and take her into one of the bedrooms. Imagine they knocked her down while observing her frightened expression. Imagine that one of those men comes close to her, tights her hands up with a lace, and lays her body down on a table. She would try to defend herself but he would punch her nose with his fist. Then he would punch her again on her mouth to make her stop shouting.

- Please, stop... Dad. Mom, help me! Help! Somebody help me! Oh God, why me? Please, stop! No, no, no!

Imagine she is shouting all these phrases while she is being beaten up and raped. Imagine she is saying all these things almost voiceless and bent over by tears. Just then the first man would stop raping her, but the other two are still there and would continue her torture. The second man would come closer and would put out a cigarette in one of her arms. He would start to bite off her nipples while raping her, so the three of them would continue to torture her again and again. At the end they would throw her down to earth and would continue kicking her body which doesn’t stop bleeding. Then they’ll go away and will leave her in such cruel and terrible conditions.

She will continue being tortured for one, two, three days until her victimizers would realize that she is literally dying, so they would consider time has come to kill her. Imagine one of those men gets closer and starts strangling her. In spite of her plaintive conditions she would try to defend herself without success, and he would reach his goal: assassinating her. But for the other two men her death is not enough: one of them would break her neck with a quick movement. Her corpse will remain there with her nose and her mouth broken, her eyes damaged, her arms full of cigarette burns, her legs full of scars, her wrists dislocated and her breast bitten off. They will wrap her body up in a blanket, will put it into the car and will throw it away in an abandoned trash dumpster. But the torture and pain will not end yet as long as the relatives will never know what had happened to her...nor how much she had suffered... just imagine what comes next...

We are not here to look for consolation nor false promises from the Government. We don’t want to receive just statistics or numbers that do not reflect the Juarez women’s reality. We just demand respect but above all we ask you: let us live a normal life!”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ A few links regarding these and other cases can be found at: [Mexico. Intolerable Killings: Ten years of abductions and murders in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua](#), Amnesty International INDEX: AMR 41/027/2003, 11. August 2003.

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Lilia Alejandra García Andrade was savagely assassinated in February 2001, when she was just 17. Nine months later, the *Procuraduría General de la República* (Attorney General Office) in Juárez was responsible for leaking an FBI report handed in to the Mexican authorities regarding Lilia Alejandra's murder. According to journalist Diana Washington Valdés (2005) – who got a copy of such an intelligence report dated September 5th, 2001, directly from the FBI at El Paso, – some gunmen working for the drug-cartel kidnapped Lilia and kept her abducted for a few days. Such a report put under risk the confidential informers who provided such a testimony to the FBI. At the very beginning those informers had contacted the Mexican Special Prosecutor for Women's Crimes, Suly Ponce, without any success.

The confidential witnesses said that on February 19th, 2001 – five days after Lilia Alejandra's kidnapping – they saw a woman fighting inside a Thunderbird, white car parked on *Rancho Becerra* Street, a little bit ahead the 'San Valentín' shopping center, very close to the dumpster where her body was left. The informers also said that one of the men inside the car entered into an electric appliance repair shop called "Servicio Domínguez", which is known to belong to Jorge Domínguez, an ex-technician of the Phillips company. Jorge's cousin, Raúl, is known to be related to the Juárez cartel and some people even say that the repair shop is just a front for laundering narco-money. In spite of the DNA test made to Jorge by the police – which turned out to be negative – they never did it to Raúl, who was pointed out in the FBI report as one of Lilia's attackers. On her corpse there were enough organic traces that could have led to the guilty people, but the police stopped the investigation regarding the Domínguez family and considered the version unfounded.

It may also be important to say that Raúl Domínguez is known to be a friend of Valentín Fuentes Téllez – a wealthy young man who belongs to one of the most important families in Juárez, who got married with one of Lino Korrodi's¹⁰¹ daughter and whose name has been mentioned several times when talking about femicides in the city. According to the testimony of Marisela Ortíz, who has investigated by herself the facts related to Alejandra's murder, she was a sort of "Saint Valentine's gift" for Valentín Fuentes Téllez. Moreover she was kidnapped precisely on February the 14th, and her body was dumped out on a lot belonging to ex-Governor Teófilo Borunda, on the *San Valentín* street. These coincidences have never been proved, but on Lilia Alejandra's corpse the murderers seemed to have sent a hidden message to different actors and there was a sort of manipulation of the public space to get it across¹⁰².

But Lilia Alejandra's assassination was not enough... To make things even worse after the García Andrade family got the corpse, they have been intimidated and even threatened in different ways many times. First of all for many years Norma Andrade could not get the legal custody of her grand-children, Lilia's son and daughter. The state denied to concede it alleging that she was under a lot of stress due to her daughter's murder and her recent husband's death – he got the cancer and died soon after Lilia Alejandra – and that she might not be able to provide the children with the necessary care. Malú García Andrade, Lilia's older sister, has been threatened to death several times and in 2007 she suffered an attack while she was inside an internet point: some unidentified

¹⁰⁰ Letter written by Malú García Andrade, Lilia Alejandra's older sister, when she knew what Lilia was forced to go through according to the Forensic report. See and listen to the original letter in 'Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa' communitary radio *Radiofem – Rompiendo el Silencio*: www.radiofem.org

¹⁰¹ Lino Korrodi's was the financial coordinator of the Presidential campaign of former Mexican President Vicente Fox Quezada. See the second chapter of this work, related to the possible involvement of some politicians.

¹⁰² See also the documentaries: "Juarez Mothers Fight Femicide", by Zulma Aguiar, U.S.A., 2005 (www.mujeresdejuarez.org); and "Juarez: the City where women are disposable", by Alex Flores and Lorena Vassolo, Canada, 2007 (www.lasperlasdelmarfilms.com)

guys threw out a bomb inside and they did not seem to have the intention to hurt the owner, who didn't have any apparent reason to be attacked. Such an episode made "*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*" to organize an international campaign to ask human-right organizations worldwide to be alert about the violence escalation on activists and members of the Juárez association. During the same period Marisela Ortiz suffered another attack while she was driving her van alongwith her family: while they were moving somebody shot at them. Fortunately there were no consequences, apart from the panic and mental abuse they constantly suffer from.

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When Marisela Ortiz Rivera came into the hotel I was staying in Ciudad Juárez, I recognized her immediately as long as I had seen her in many photos not just in the "*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*" website, but also in different national newspapers, television programs and even in some Italian newspapers that had eventually covered the shocking news about the Juárez femicides. My first reaction was to invite her to my room to have more privacy and less interruptions, but also to feel ourselves safer by avoiding beeing exposed to the curious and inquisitive people's eyes.

In the elevator she asked me she had understood I was an Italian journalist interesting in covering the femicide news for the Italian media, so she wanted to know exactly what kind of journalist I was and if I was in Mexico just to cover such a news. My previous communications with her had just been by internet and since the very beginning I made it clear I was a PhD candidate doing a research for the University of Bologna, despite the fact I was Mexican. For some unknown reason she did not understand such a detail and she associated me with a reporter as long as she was used to mainly talk to the media informers. Anyway she was happy to know that there could be someone interested in them at one of the Italian Universities, and she also mentioned she had already been e-mail contacted by a couple of international students who were writing their dissertations about the femicides in Ciudad Juárez before, but it was the first time a PhD researcher visited them.

Once in my room and after having got her some water for a bad cough and a terrible flu she had, she told me she could only stay for about an hour as long as she had to go to El Paso after the interview to meet two of her daughters, and to Houston afterwards. Marisela has three daughters and two sons but since she started her fight to support and assist the assassinated women's relatives, she had to send the three females to the U.S. with some relatives as long as the first time she was threatened to death the guy told her that if she had continued going deeper into the murders, they would have killed her daughters in the same way the other girls had been killed before. After having the gun pointed at her head she understood the great danger her teenager daughters were beeing exposed to, and she and her husband decided to send them to different cities in the U.S. in spite of the high sacrifice this represented for all of them. When the teenagers knew about such a decision the youngest one told her it would have been much better to move somewhere else all together, but Marisela replied that the ones that should leave the city were the 'bad guys' and not them, and that she could not quit her commitment to caring, comforting and counseling the other mothers who have put their trust in her.

Marisela has suffered three attacks since 2001: the first one happened when she was driving her green van alone and two guys blocked her way, made her get out of the car and with a gun pointing at her told her that they would have raped, tortured and killed her three daughters in front of her if she hadn't stopped her commitment with the women of Juárez. It was after such an episode that she decided to send her daughters abroad right away in spite of the whole family's sorrow. In fact on the same day she received the first threaten they got chased by some other people while they were taking the girls to the U.S. She was with all her family in the van when another car started chasing

them at the same time that they were pointing with guns at them. One of her sons called a classmate and she called the federal police to urge them to look for the Ortiz family, who were being chased somewhere in Juarez. During those days – October 23rd, 2004 –the representatives of the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) were visiting the city to write a report on the femicides, so the federal authorities acted soon and sent some police officers to look for them immediately after the call. She is sure that such a sudden response from Guadalupe Morfín, who was the Special Commissioner against the crimes on women in Juárez, was due to the international mission, but anyway they were not hurt and their goal of taking their daughters out of the country was achieved.

The last attack she suffered was last July, 2007, when both Marisela Ortiz and Malú García Andrade, received different threatening phone and e-mail messages. After some international pressure the *Commission to Prevent and Erradicate Violence on Women in Ciudad Juárez*, headed then by the Engineer Liliana Herrera Villanueva, asked the Municipal Police to send some officers to escort them. The police agreed and they kept watching them for four days, but unfortunately the last day Marisela and her family got shot again twice while their van was on movement, in spite of the police protection – which, according to Ortiz, was just interested in collecting a daily signature without keeping effectively watching their homes, as expected.

After the last attack the association “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*” promoted an international campaign to ask for protection and some human rights organizations from Spain, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, France and Italy, participated by sending a petition signed up by several people to urge the Mexican government to protect the physical and psychological integrity of all the members of the Juárez organization, but specially those of Marisela Ortiz and Malú García Andrade¹⁰³.

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After having started our interview with such an intense explanation about those events, the first obliged question I had for her¹⁰⁴ was the one which would help me to understand why it was Ciudad Juárez the scenario where femicides could have occurred for so long ... After all there are some other border cities that share common characteristics with Juárez, such as the intense presence of *maquiladoras* – in Tijuana, Nogales or Nuevo Laredo, – female labour and a high concentration of immigrants as well, for not mentioning the great percentage of international crossings every single day.

- *Why is it Ciudad Juárez the place where femicides are still taking place after so long? I mean, why Juárez and not other border city in Mexico?*

- I think that the phenomenon could have taken place in any other border city not just in Mexico but in the whole world. I explain it to myself as the result of a sick society. It is like a social disease that manifests itself in its weakest and most sensitive part, which are women. Specially because in Juárez there are many elements that, if put together, make a perfect breeding ground for femicides: first of all we have the intense presence of maquiladoras, which mainly require female labour and attract thousands of young women to the city for work. Therefore in Juárez there is a great women

¹⁰³ See the Petition “*Apoyo desde Italia*” (Support from Italy), included at the end of the dissertation, sent by the researcher – alongwith the Italian associations Amnesty International, Nondasola and Donneinsieme, from Reggio Emilia – to the Mexican authorities to ask for protection for “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*”, and the proper response got from the *Juárez Commision* on July 23rd, 2007.

¹⁰⁴ The interview to Marisela Ortiz took place at the “*City Express Hotel*” in Ciudad Juárez, on March 23rd, 2006, during my research period there. After that date we have kept in touch not just by e-mail but also by phone. Moreover we also met in Italy at the end of May 2007, when she came invited by the Sardegna Comune and by the University of Turin.

concentration and they are vulnerable not just for their gender, but mainly for historical and cultural violence patterns over them, which make them even more vulnerable as long as most of them come alone to the city while their families usually stay in their hometowns. So as their relatives stay in the South of the country it is more difficult for them to know what their daughters are doing or where exactly they are living – in Mexico or in the U.S. – as long as most of them come here with the intention of crossing the border to get a higher salary on the American side. So little by little they start losing touch and they are not here with them to report them in case they disappear, or to be advised every time there is a corpse found throughout the city. But this is not all ... we also have to mention the poor living conditions they face when moving to the western side of the city¹⁰⁵. There they live in irregular lots lacking the basic public services such as water, public light, electricity or paved roads. In fact until 2004 none of the roads to Puerto Anapra were paved, and it was just last year (2005) when the authorities decided to pave the main road, which is the route taken by public transport to take the workers from and back home. And these conditions make them even more vulnerable specially in some neighborhoods such as Rancho Anapra and Lomas de Paleo, which are the most dangerous and desertic places in Juárez. In fact until last year the public buses refused to go in there as long as it represented a real danger: if you dare to go in your own car your wheels could get stuck in the sand of the desert or, even worse, if you dare to go at night you could not be able to see the road as long as there was no public light at all... And this was the normal situation until last year when the authorities decided to invest in the road not because they really realized about the importance of such a work, but mainly because we brought pressure to bear on them to improve the women living conditions.

And on the other hand we also have the maquiladora industry which settles down in the city without many social compromises, amongst a starving population who look for a job in the maquilas because they consider them as the paradise when they are nothing else than a mirage. In fact if you take a deeper look at the maquiladoras' premises they are lovely, clean, airy and you may easily fall in love with them at first sight, but once you get inside they become a prison where the workers spend ten to twelve hours everyday, without being able to go out thirty minutes for lunch as long as they need to stay inside in the proper dining rooms. Furthermore there are some maquiladoras that have green areas where the workers can go with their families on the weekends to have fun, so practically they live most of their lives inside the maquiladoras. People consider them as a salvation, but the salaries are miserable and the working conditions are very poor... unfortunately maquilas are the only ones able to offer jobs all the time, so these women know, in advance, that it would be very difficult for them to find another job in the rest of the country and they accept working here in spite of the low wages. And to the maquila industry the working conditions are not important at all. The managers – who are not the owners, but are specifically hired to run them and to report the benefits and advantages that the foreign industries bring to the Mexican economy, do not care for social security at all.

- What you mean is that the maquiladoras do not socially invest in the territory at all? – I interrupted her abruptly.

- Well, you see, they do invest but not because they are interested in their own workers' security. If they do it, if they pave roads or provide transport to the women is just because in this way they will get further benefits as long as the trailers bringing their raw materials to their premises will arrive faster, or because their workers will get there on time every morning. And they also say that they invest in public security as long as they pay the proper quotas for every single worker to the Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS – Social Security Mexican Institute), so if something

¹⁰⁵ Puerto Anapra, where the Chávez Caldera family live and where several female corpses have been found at Lomas de Paleo, is exactly in this side of the city. In fact Puerto Anapra is one of the poorest and most violent shanty towns in Juárez.

happens to their labourers they will get the proper compensation. In fact there have been some children whose mothers have got assassinated in the city, who still receive such an indemnity from the IMSS, but it is so low to think it will be enough for a child to grow up just with it. Every single child receives the equivalent to fifteen dollars a month (150 Mexican pesos), so it does not make the difference. And we have been able to make the IMSS increase such a compensation to the equivalent to forty dollars (400 pesos) for some of the children, but just after a very long and winding road full of endless trams... There have also been different cases in which the maquiladoras refuse to pay such compensations alleging that the assassinated women were not their workers, so this makes the procedure even more difficult as long as you have to prove they were really working there...

- Sorry to interrupt but you mean that there are no documents proving that a woman is or was working at a maquiladora? How is it possible?

- Well, documents do exist but sometimes women get hired with fake documents because in Mexico the legal age to start working is sixteen years old, and a great deal of them are much younger. So they impersonate their older sisters' identities to get a job, but such an irregular practice at the end puts them in a vulnerable position. Moreover even if the documents are regular and in spite of being the real identities of the women the ones given to their employers, the tramit to get the compensation at the maquiladora is so long that many families prefer interrupting their insistence. After all they will only get four hundred pesos a month (approx. 40 dollars) so it is not worthwhile to continue fighting for a pittance. It may seem that the maquiladoras take so long to recognize that the assassinated women used to work for them, to discourage families in their attempt to get the proper indemnity.

Just to give you an example there were two cases promoted by us in which the maquiladoras recognized that two of the murdered women were effectively their employees. It was extremely difficult for us to prove not just that the two women were working at two different maquiladoras, but mainly to demonstrate that they had been killed in the thirty-minute commuting time recognized by the Mexican law. We had to prove that they were going home from work and that they had been kidnapped during the thirty immediate minutes after leaving their jobs. That was very difficult to prove mainly because many of the murder investigations were irregular or because the people who collected the evidence just included those elements that they wanted to show, hiding many other relevant information in many cases. Furthermore there are still many files that have never been recognized as murders, which definitely complicates things even more.

- And such a tendency keeps unchanged so far, in spite of the authorities' effort to train a new kind of crime police to form experts at collecting, analyzing and interpreting the evidence?

- Well, at the very beginning our expectations on the new State Government were very high and they have really worked harder to try to improve the situation, but unfortunately their efforts were just focused on trying to solve the cases occurred during their administration, without paying attention to the previous cases. Furthermore we have also realized that in some cases some of the original evidence has just vanished without any justification. We have followed different cases and when we come back for a second or a third analysis we find out that some series of photos have been lost, or that some important documents are missing, which makes us think very badly about the authorities. And on the other hand it will be just enough to read the local newspapers everyday to realize that some corrupt cops are still involved with the organized crime. Here in the city there have been several police officers involved in the promotion of prostitution, drug-trafficking, in the murder of important lawyers who were defending human rights activists, or in drug-dealers assassinations. The state has also confiscated some drug-dealers' houses where they have found several male and

female corpses, so it is impossible to continue ignoring the links between some corrupt police men and the organized crime. It is not us the ones saying so, it is the everyday facts that anyone can read in the local media. And of course that there is a lot of money ready to be spent to train the new crime-specialized police, money which has been collected also thanks to our international promotion asking for help to prevent femicides. The authorities themselves have recognized our great support at collecting such amounts and, just to give you an example, the American government authorized the transfer of a huge amount to help finding a solution in Juárez. Unfortunately there is also another problem to face: the police men turnover is so high that it is practically impossible to train them professionally to investigate the crimes. It would be like building a house on a dumpster lot: sooner or later it will fall down as long as the base was not solid at all. This is why, in my opinion, the police profesionalization in Ciudad Juárez is a goal so difficult to reach.

However it is very important to recognize our achievements not just as a group, but as human beings too. Thanks to our international mobilization we have accomplished different little things just like the promotion of a better treatment for the victims' relatives, which was terribly mistreatful, rude and impolite at the very beginning. These actions have given us strength and have made us realize as well that our campaigns have been heard and, as a consequence, the conditions of the families have improved too. We wanted the government to repair the damage to the victims' families not just in economic terms, but mainly morally. We wanted the authorities to recognize their responsibility in the femicides as long as they had not been able to stop impunity nor to protect their people's lives. Of course it was just a petition and the authorities never accepted to apologize for their omissions, so we had to accept just the economic help for some of the families who were considered suitable to get the funds – the criterion to choose the families was very selective and imposed some conditions, for not mentioning that the money received was very little. At the very beginning they said that the state government would double the amount provided by the federal government so that the families could get a higher compensation. Later on the authorities mentioned that such an economic help would not be the same for all the relatives, but it would depend on different death conditions: if the women had been raped before getting killed the amount will be higher; if they had just been killed without a sexual attack the money will be less; then they also said that the more the girls had suffered, the more money their families will receive, so the criterion was not just stupid but mainly ridiculous. Many families got angry and expressed that they did not want any money, but just justice for their daughters' murders. Unfortunately some other families accepted the money and kept quiet afterwards, but the amounts are so little and are time-limited too, that maybe when they will run out of money they will start fighting with our same objective. To make things worse just imagine that some of the orphan children have not been able to get all the money that legally belongs to them, due to the fact that it is deposited in a trust and they can only withdraw a monthly ridiculous amount, which is equivalent to 400 pesos (approximately 40 dollars).

Nevertheless and in spite of all the irregularities, the authorities keep saying that everything is doing well and that they are solving the pending cases. We were shocked by the latest PGR Report (Procuraduría General de la República – Attorney Special Office) that does not even recognize the femicides in the city by alleging that so far the murder patterns do not match the serial-sex pattern, but also that they are not related to the organized crime. We have fought so hard to prove that many of the murders have followed identical patterns and share common characteristics, like in the collective-corpse findings in which the girls had the same kind of wounds on their wrists, tight up with police handcuffs.

- In fact and talking about the serial-sex pattern that you have just mentioned, I think that what makes the femicides in Juárez different from the rest of the world are precisely the murders that

follow such a pattern. Let me explain myself better... Domestic violence is present worldwide and for example, in Europe, the main death cause for women ageing 16 to 45 is domestic violence, above the deaths provoked by car accidents and cancer, which are the following two categories. So while domestic violence is similar in the whole world, in Juárez there has been almost a third of the total murders following the serial-sex conduct. What do you think? – I asked her.

- Well, we are extremely worried about domestic violence as long as it has increased considerably...

- Due to the impunity – I interrupted her again

-Yes, due to the impunity because men take advantage of it to kill their wives, throw their bodies in the same places where some other corpses had been found before, and nothing at all happens to them. Their victims just become another cold number to add to the statistics in the city. At the same time domestic violence also depends on some cultural models that have prevailed throughout the time, and gets worsen by the extremely poor living conditions of most of the people here. Poverty boosts violent conducts of men over women, for not mentioning the maquiladora violent effects on the labourers. In fact the maquiladora reproduces domestic violence on some women who have got empowered by working there and are able to rebel themselves against their husbands, lovers or boyfriends, who are usually supported by their women. As long as females are earning their own money they feel free and empowered to send their men out of the house if necessary, which provokes aggressive behaviours on men, so women's assassinations are just the tragic end of the story. They do not want to live with their men anymore and this causes violence within the families. So we are promoting some measures against domestic violence, but at the same time we have kept saying that many of those girls have been kidnapped by unknown and powerful people who have killed them afterwards following the serial-sex pattern... Nobody can say that Alejandra, Claudia Ivette, Silvia Elena¹⁰⁶, were abducted by ordinary people... that's why their crimes are still unsolved, because there may be powerful persons behind.

But we also focus on proving, through anti-reports, that the authorities have also had the power to do whatever they wanted to do with the crime files, they have been able to modify them, to omit some evidence, to loose some important elements. And to prove this I can mention two cases full of irregularities performed by the police: the first one is the case of a little girl who was killed in February 2003, Brenda Berenice Delgado, - which is still unsolved, by the way – whose relatives came to us to ask for help and we were providing legal assistance and support to Brenda's family. We talked about such a case everywhere we were invited worldwide, so it became very popular soon. The authorities got angry and the girl's stepfather was bothered by the police: in fact they 'kidnapped' him for nine hours at the police station – and I say he was actually kidnapped because there was no arrest warrant issued against him. Once there he was tortured, they broke him some ribs and they were questioning him about his activities with our group (Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa) saying that, if he had continued with us, they would have spread some evidence against him to take him to jail blaming him for Brenda's death... after all they were ready to do it. At the end the Delgado family decided to quit the association and Brenda's stepfather told me he was very sorry, but they could not continue with us anymore as long as they had another daughter who might got assassinated too if they had gone on. He was so scared after he got tortured by the police, that he decided to stop fighting. Brenda's case is a crime which has been registered as domestic violence although it does not match that cathegory at all.

¹⁰⁶ She refers to Lilia Alejandra García Andrade; Claudia Ivette González, a twenty year-old girl who disappeared in September 2001 and was found dead and sexually attacked on November the 6th of the same year; and Silvia Elena Rivera Morales. In the previous chapters their stories have been already narrated as long as they have a symbolic connotation when talking about the serial-sex murders.

Furthermore, the police has said that many of the crimes are the consequence of situational violence or crimes of passion, but they have never been able to find the women's lovers to prove that they had really committed the murders, and they have never proved that such women could have a secret love either.

And there is another case that has not even been considered as a murder. It is Ericka Pérez Escobedo's case, who was killed in September 2004. Ericka's corpse was found in a dumpster lot with her pants pulled down under her knees, her blouse off letting her breast out, and her purse string around her neck, as if someone had tried to strangle her with it. Very recently, just a few months ago, the forensic team handed it the only existing report which stated that her vagina and her anus were torn out as if she had been raped. This is the only official document available about her death, as the police has not even opened an investigation file about it alleging that, in spite of all the evidence, she had died from an overdose and, therefore, her death has been classified as suicide. They accepted that there had been sexual activity but they refused to accept she was raped and killed. Her death was not even a crime... it was just a suicide. We started to collect different testimonies in the different maquiladoras Ericka used to work for, and in the church she used to actively participate in, to prove she was not a drug-consumer and if the authorities had found drugs in her body the only reason was because someone had obliged her to consume drugs in order to kill her, and not because she was an addict. We could prove she was a healthy person but nevertheless the case has not been re-opened. Moreover, when the new Government started ruling the State I personally spoke to the new Attorney General, Patricia González, to ask her for help to solve the case because Ericka's family lives in a very difficult situation. Ericka had two children who live with her mother now, but she is an old, sick lady who had to start working again to support her grandsons. The government has not provided any economic help to them alleging that Ericka was a drug-addict and therefore her family did not deserve any support. And there are many other children whose mothers have been claimed to be prostitutes, so the government has not given any compensation to them at all.

- As if being a prostitute or a drug-consumer could be a valid reason to kill a woman or to leave her children abandoned, don't you think? – was my sour and critic comment.

- You are completely right. This is why we could not accept the authorities report as long as there are uncountable irregularities. We can not accept their statistics saying that the 80% of the murders have been solved, and that just the 15% of them have followed a serial-sex pattern. It is unacceptable and there are still many pending things. They can do whatever they want, they have all the power to do so, but the families' testimonies and the evidences show a different reality from the one stated in the files. Moreover, in some cases the police itself has cancelled some investigations or stopped some research lines that would have directly taken to the murderers, who are definitely very, very powerful people who get protection from the police.

- In fact this is what femicides in Juarez are about – I said – and in my opinion there is lack of political will to solve femicides. Do you think there will ever be political will to bring light on the assassinations?

- Well, I don't know. That's what we hope and such a hope keeps us fighting. We are sure that many of the crimes will never be solved.. ever... but we do hope that someday, after all our pressure, all our work and all the insistence we keep doing on the authorities – consider we have presented some cases to the Inter American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC). Some of them are still under revision therefore we are waiting for an answer, but three of them have already been admitted to the Court – the first cases, those occurred from 1993 to 1995 – Silvia Elena

Rivera's case belongs to this group – could be solved at least by the IAHRC, as long as in Mexico they are about to prescribe so the authorities will not be able to punish the killer(s) anymore even if they were able to find him (them), because the Mexican law allows crimes to come to an end after 14 years. This is ridiculous and bizarre, so we think that the first cases will only be solved at the Inter American Commission, otherwise the guilty people will remain unpunished. I think that the Government should make an agreement with the killers... for example, if the drug-traffickers are the ones killing women in Juárez, the Government should establish an agreement with them... and don't ask me how, I don't know how they should do it... the only thing I am certain about is that if we cause the government further political problems they will be obliged to do so. Mexico does not react unless you keep pressing on the political or the economic sides. And our greatest dream is to see the other foreign governments react against our authorities through the suspension or cancellation of their economic loans and monetary help to our country, unless Mexican authorities commit themselves to defend the human rights, and to solve the impunity phenomenon prevailing in Mexico.

- In fact in my opinion the only way the femicides will be stopped is through international pressure. Otherwise internally they will never be solved. Unfortunately the Mexican government just seems to react under international pressure.

- You're right. There is no political will to do so. And the worst thing is that such a reaction is not effective for being more a simulation game than a real policy. They just try to keep up appearances to make the international community believe that they are working to fulfil their demands.

Unfortunately Marisela's terrible flu made us have a break as long as she needed some tissues to clean her nose. And the weather comments become a must between us as long as Ciudad Juárez is one of the windiest border cities in Mexico, and the sand brought up and down the city provokes many allergies among the population.

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The second and last part of our interview started talking about Marisela's job as a teacher in a poor community of Juárez. She commented so because she believed she had got the flu while being at the school where she worked, as long as the installations were not the best ones to protect people from the cold and windy weather of the city, for being located in a poor neighborhood full of people.

- Do you still work, Marisela? – I could not hide my surprise as long as I thought she was completely absorbed by the association she had founded alongwith Norma Andrade, Lilia Alejandra García Andrade's mom.

- Yes, I am a teacher – she replied smiling. I will confess something to you: I always try to combine my work as a teacher with my work in the association, so I can cover many things at the same time. Just to give you an example I take some prevention programs created by "Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa" to the school where I work and to other schools. I do projects at NHRC that are transferred afterwards to the schools, for example, last semester we formed 20 young ladies and men as human-right promoters as long as in many occasions a lot of people get abused because they are unable to defend themselves. This may happen because they do not know their rights, nor the authorities to contact every time they need protection. So I try to take the women organization to the school, and the school projects into the organization as much as possible. Moreover, the Principal of the school where I work is a very conscious man who has allowed me to start with prevention and human-right projects at the school. He has never said a word about it mainly

because he was also one of Lilia Alejandra's teacher, so he knows what we do and he supports us too.

- And have you ever received any threats at the school where you work? Have the authorities reduced the funds to your school as a retaliation act for your gender and human-rights commitment?

- No, never – was her plain and convinced answer. - Look, I used to work at the Special Education Department, I was the Principal of one Special Education Center – I have already retired from that position – and the supervisor there had a direct relationship with the Government of Patricio Martínez, who was very repressive against me. They gave the order of not paying my salary: there were three ‘quincenas’ (in Mexico salaries are paid every fifteen days, so twice a month. Every fifteen days is called a ‘quincena’) that were not paid to me. They did not pay me the Christmas bonus either and every now and then I found at the bank that the school had not credited my salary to my account. And they never gave me back all that money. Some teachers friends of mine – most of the young teachers in Juárez right now used to be my students when they were studying to become teachers, so they know me pretty well – told me, in good faith, that they had just received an order from the State Government asking them to control all my school movements: my material, my timetables, my absences, my groups, everything; to the point that every time that a local television channel broadcasted one of my interviews, the school deducted the day from my salary in spite of my interviews had been recorded on different days and times from my lessons schedule. We recorded them on sundays or in the afternoons when I was free, but my supervisor always told me that they had received such an order from the State government and that there was nothing he could do about it. I think that their real intention of desintegrating our group made them make a lot of mistakes.

- But I think that, on the contrary, those actions just made you stronger, didn't they?

- Of course, and there were many charges against us, for example once they issued an arrest warrant against me for a fact that I did not do. At the very beginning I was completely down and demoralized, but when I saw all the solidarity around me – solidarity coming from different people, associations and NGOs – I could not believe there were so many people who trusted me. It was worse for the government because the more pressure they put on me, the more solidarity I got from many people.

- So, can we say that the civil society in Mexico has behaved as you would have liked it to behave? Let's first start talking about the civil society response here in Juárez, please – I asked her.

- Not at all, there is still a lot of apathy because what has prevailed in Juárez so far is the official speech made by the government and by the industrialists stating that everything is OK in the city... What they try to do is to cover up things by saying that Ciudad Juárez is not the sort of city that has all the problems that the different human rights organizations and the victims' relatives are reporting. On the contrary, it is a very beautiful city and insecurity is everywhere, not just in Juárez. Women get killed everywhere as well and we are far from being the worst city in the world. We have been accused of being ‘vende-patrias’ (selling our own country abroad) just because we have gone abroad to talk about the femicides in Juárez to ask for help... they also said that we had made a nasty and dishonest image campaign against Juárez and, unfortunately, many times the population believes this kind of official speech. I remember that once I was chased by some people who I easily recognized to be police agents, so I pressed charges at the Police department where I made an identikit to identify the police officer who tried to kidnap me. The authorities published the news on the local newspapers, but as the media are also manipulated the message given to the

community seemed to be: Stay out of problems, don't get involved with femicides! This was implicit in the newspapers headlines:

- “Someone tried to kidnap Marisela Ortiz!” – but before such a heading there was another small phrase, in bold font, saying: “She denigrated the name of Ciudad Juárez in Spain” – as long as I had just been invited by Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzón.

And the community believes in that because if you live here you really need to know that nothing wrong is happening in the city... if someone tells you that everything is OK you need to believe so. But we have also had some achievements, for example, everytime we convoke to a march, to a protest, to a mass in memory of our assassinated daughters, there are never more than fifty people. Imagine that there have even been some events attended by just fifteen people! However, last year when three little girls got murdered on dates very close one to the other, the Government convoked to a march to protest... I think it was to protest against themselves, what bizarre, don't you think? They were doing our job! – and her face showed a very nice smile while she was saying so with cynicism. - But the difference is that they forced people to assist to the march: I could realize about it because at the school all my colleagues got the command to attend the march, otherwise the day would not be paid to them. Furthermore, every single teacher needed to take five relatives plus five students, and if the students did not want to take part in it they would get their grades lower – but grades could also increase if they attended the march. Of course it was an enormous march, yes it was! I don't know what the Government was trying to prove... but maybe they were trying to counterbalance the power we have got throughout all these years.

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- While in Mexico you have got threatened, bothered and upset for keeping on fighting, in other places of the world the people recognizes the great importance of your human rights defense. “Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa” has got several prizes in different places of the world: you have just been awarded in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, and the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón gave you an award recently. While all these things happen abroad, here in Mexico you are forced to take your daughters out of the country to protect them. So my question is: how can you live like this? How can you mix being a mother and keeping on your fight to defend the women of Juárez? What is your life like? – was my next question in one of the most intense moments of our interview, as long as we were about to start talking of her personal feelings and emotions.

- Actually my life has completely changed, but also my family's life, my daughters' lives. Now it is full of terrible things that seem senseless. But my efforts have had good results, so I keep on moving and every time my daughters ask me to move out of Mexico myself to be with them, I replied to them by saying that I have a total commitment with these mothers, that I can't abandon them. Here I have my whole life, here I have my beloved relatives, my ancestors are buried here, all my work, all what I do and love is here in Juárez, so I can not abandon it. Unfortunately I needed to take my daughters abroad, but if we give up right now, if we slow down our fight, who will continue the battle to make of Juárez a better place to live? And I always tell them that I want them back with me because this is our homeland. It is not us the ones that should leave the city, but the ‘bad guys’, the corrupt people, the killers, that is our intention. But it is extremely difficult to live like this... it is exhausting and sometimes you keep the whole night awake thinking how to solve hundreds of different problems which are not just yours, but somebody else's. They belong to somebody who has trusted you. And when finally you can fall asleep you start dreaming nightmares that just reflect your fears about the future – she said with tears in her eyes and with a sobbing voice that really reflected all the burdens she has been carrying upon her shoulders.

- *How can the international community help you? Do they need to keep further direct pressure on our authorities?*

- *Well, yes, more pressure is absolutely necessary. But more important than that is the fact that Mexican authorities can understand that the international community does not swallow their lies. Look, we have recently loaded a new website to keep the international community informed about the situation here. We did so because the Mexican authorities did not allow us to start broadcasting through our new community radio. ‘RadioFem’ has not been able to be on the air despite the fact that we have the antennas installed and the equipment ready to operate. We can’t start transmitting and informing our community because they do not allow us to do so... it seems they are afraid of us. The programs we want to broadcast are aimed to impulse a new kind of culture based on human rights, on respectful relationships – specially because our culture has always been characterized for being ‘machista’, – and on people’s re-education to rebuild the social fabric. And we do so through programs aimed at children: by using games and songs we teach them how to establish a respectful relationship between men and women. Some of our programs are a sort of radio-soap-opera that teach them that they have to start with little things in their everyday lives to begin such a re-education process. We have some other programs aimed at men to explain typical male attitudes to make them understand that women are not born with a special gen that obliges them to wash, clean and cook. This is very healthy for everybody and as long as the programs are made by the families whose daughters, sisters or mothers have got killed, they are also used as a prevention tool to alert young women and maquiladora-workers about the dangers they face in the city. Unfortunately, in spite of having some programs already recorded, we have not been able to be on the air here in our community... I don’t know why the authorities are so afraid of us. Our only alternative is internet, so we have our new page www.radiofem.org in which you can find only four programs because it is a very brand new project: in fact we just took the decision of opening such a website last March the 8th, (2006) on the International Women’s Day. They have an MP3 format and the space is very reduced, but we will periodically change the information to allow people who can use internet to listen to our programs.*

- *Your internet community radio is a precious experiment as long as you have also installed some TV speakers out of some houses in different neighborhoods, so the people who don’t have a radio can listen to your programs as well, creating a complete community project. Apart from that I have read that thanks to your community radio you have just been able to find a missing girl who was one of your students at the school where you work... Is that true?*

- *Yes, she is one of my students and she was kidnapped. At the beginning we didn’t have a lot of hope to find her so soon. She disappeared on a saturday night...*

- *Sorry to interrupt, but is she still your student nowadays?*

- *Yes, she is one of my current students. She was kidnapped on a saturday night while she was outside of her house looking at some photographs of her family, sat on the pavement with a neighbour. When her parents came out to tell her it was time to go inside, they just found the photos lying on the floor and a witness who said that she had been taken, by force, to a brand new, white van with dark-glass windows... he even gave the plate number. The family spent the whole night looking for her and waiting for the morning after to call me. When I knew about it I told them they should have called me immediately, because on sundays the Police does not work . The Special Commission to Prevent Crimes on Women in Juárez only has an emergency shift that opens at 9:00 am, but her family called me at 6:00 am desperate because they could not find her. I reacted very soon and I called the Special Commissioner on her mobile. Fortunately she answered immediately – her mobile was on in spite of being a sunday – and then I also called the Federal*

Commissioner Alicia Elena Pérez Duarte, who made pressure on the Chihuahua Attorney General Patricia González. Thanks to all these phone calls the Special Commission opened at 7:00 am that day and the family was immediately received ... Moreover, the public servant in charged told them that they had been highly recommended and had excellent contacts... it was just the Mexican President the only one missing to call, because all the rest have already done it. And as everything was very fresh they were able to rescue the girl, who was kidnapped in a place near her own house... they didn't go very far away and kept her in solitary confinement in some abandoned houses nearby. She was rescued from there and given back to her family.

- *Were the kidnappers arrested?* – I asked her hoping to hear a ‘Yes’ as an answer.

- *No. They didn't catch anybody. But that was not important, the most important thing was that she was alive and I couldn't believe it! It was just great!* – she said with a proud expression on her face that made her look totally satisfied of her work, her high-level contacts and the result of her advocacy actions.

- *Honestly, do you think it was a coincidence the fact she was your student?* – was my direct question without meaning to be rude.

- *Well, I do hope it was just a coincidence! Otherwise I will start feeling guilty for what happens to all the young ladies that get to know me somehow. It would be terrible to know she could have been chosen from that school just because she was my student. I truly hope it had just been a coincidence! But there have been many other coincidences too. For example, one single family has got three female members assassinated! Julia Caldera got her daughter, María Elena, murdered in 2000. Then she realized that her niece, Alicia Carrillo, Irma Pérez's daughter, had also been killed some years before. And later on, approximately one year ago, other of her nieces, daughter of one of Julia's sisters, got kidnapped and her body was found raped and strangled down a hill. And coincidences have not stopped there. There are also some linking elements between different families whose daughters have been killed. For example, Josefina González's daughter, Claudia Ivette González, was a good friend of Sagrario González's sister – Paola Flores was their mother – and there were many other young ladies attending the same Federal Secondary school. Furthermore, the authorities started to look into some teachers' lives because they thought that one of the professors could be the murderer... Bizarre... But there were some arrests of different teachers who were reported as violent persons by their colleagues themselves. For example, one Sports teacher was arrested because the police was told that he used to beat her wife frequently, so he was suspected to be the murderer. The reality is that there are no well-defined investigation lines and the more the time passes, the less they will deeper and further investigate to find the killers.*

- *And what about the Special Commissions to Prevent Crimes on Women? Have they been effective? Have they really worked?*

- *Well, yes, I may say that they do work* – was her positive reply even if she did not look very convinced – *Just consider that opening such commissions was the first step to recognize that something abnormal was taking place in Juárez. And it was a product of our efforts. For example, María López Urbina's biggest achievement was the publication of a list pointing out at some corrupt and neglect authorities and police officers. Nevertheless none of them was punished, all of them were exonerated from blame in the crimes. In spite of our effort of reporting 23 of them that we knew very well because we were in direct contact to know the progress of our cases. One of them threatened us to death, but he was exonerated at the end. And we have also proved that their*

slow performance just delayed the justice procedures and provoked more female murders. So the commissions are both useful and useless at the same time.

- Useful and useless at the same time, but maybe the worst thing is that the tasks and functions are repeated between the different Special Commissions and ‘Fiscalías’ (Attorney Special offices focus on crimes on women in Juárez) created both at a federal and state levels. Some years ago the academic world – the University Colegio de México through the Colegio de la Frontera Norte located in Ciudad Juárez, and the UNAM (Autonomous University of Mexico), placed in Mexico city – proposed the Government to concentrate all the functions in one single commission able to take the whole investigations from the beginning to the end. They even organized a Congress about it, but they were not heard by the authorities – was my comment.

- You’re right: their proposal was never taken into consideration. Furthermore the authorities decided to close the Attorney Special Office here in Juárez (Fiscalía) because they considered it was not necessary anymore. After all the violence levels in Juárez were the same violence levels found everywhere in the country, so it was pointless to concentrate in here. It was like saying to the mothers whose daughters had got killed: ‘Don’t worry m’am. After all you just had one daughter assassinated! There are some other families who got more than one daughter killed, so resign yourself’. I think that what the government of Vicente Fox pretends to do is reporting in his last Annual Government Report that they have solved all the femicides in Juárez.

- And what about the intellectual world? Have you been supported by some of the Mexican intellectuals in your struggle against femicides?

- Yes, we have got the support of some Mexican intellectuals such as Carlos Monsiváis, Elena Poniatowska and some other artists. I think that our group “Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa” would have never reached the impacting position we have now without all the moral support – it was never an economic one – coming from the artistic and intellectual worlds. They started talking and writing about the femicides in Juárez and participating in different forums as well, so in this way this solidarity chain began. This huge net now exceeds one thousand people as long as there have been different art performances who have joined our objectives so far: there have been books, movies, songs, documentaries, plays, and all of them are based on our experiences and stories.

- And I think it is very meaningful to say that these intellectuals and artists always look for your advise and your stories. They look for the facts that you narrate and “Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa” is the most representative and legitimate civil organization in Juárez fighting against femicides. Nevertheless, when the film-production crew in charge of recording the new film “Bordertown”, performed by Jennifer López and Antonio Banderas, asked you for advise, you refused to talk to the producers... Can you please explain to me why did you refuse, Marisela?

- Yes, at the very beginning we refused to talk to the Director and the whole crew because we thought it could be dangerous to show the world what is going on in Juárez through a movie, as long as what they did was just a fiction far away from reality. I mean, there are some elements in the movie taken from the reality, but we did not want the rest of the world to think that femicides are as simple as that. It will be too reductive and it even denigrates the bus-drivers¹⁰⁷ who were unfairly imprisoned in 2001 although they were innocent. They were just scapegoats and their lawyers were able to prove the torture they suffered by the police and how much they were hurt. Their own lives and their families’ lives were destroyed and they spent so many years in jail, so we

¹⁰⁷ She refers to the case of the two bus-drivers imprisoned on November 10th, 2001, Javier García Uribe and Gustavo González Meza, on charges of killing the eight women found three days earlier in a vacant lot 300 yards from the Association of Maquiladoras headquarters (A.M.A.C.). See Chapter II: “Key Actors Behind Femicides: The Police”.

didn't like that version given in the movie. Then a woman called Barbara – I don't remember her last name – came to Juárez to tell us that what they were trying to do was to bring the femicides in the city into the light worldwide. She was Gregory Nava's wife, the film director, and she also stated that in spite of not having a lot of money to invest in the movie, their intention was to support our movement and to provide help for us. They even came to Juárez to record some scenes for the movie and they invited us to shortly perform in some other scenes as well. She told us that we would receive, in return, a special thanks in the movie credits to thank our group for our involvement. We accepted at the end and in the movies there are some real mothers whose daughters have been killed, and even if it may not be very useful, it still represents a further opportunity to show the world – even if in a distorted way – what is still taking place in the city about the coward assassinations of young women with total impunity and a lack of political will to resolve the crimes.

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I have kept in contact with Marisela Ortíz since that windy afternoon in March 2006. When she left the hotel she offered to give me the phone numbers of some of the mothers of the association “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*”, in order to be able to arrange an interview with them. That generous gesture gave me the opportunity to personally know the Chávez Caldera family some days later. Thanks to it I could also speak to Ramona Morales (Silvia Elena Rivera Morales’ mother) and Evangelina Arce (Silvia Arce’s mother), who are some of the most important and symbolic mothers within the association.

Marisela told me that these mothers were usually willing to tell their stories to the people interested in making them popular around the world, so I could have a good chance to interview them as well. Unfortunately the only mother I could meet was Julia Caldera, but then I started looking for some other groups in Juárez which have also been fighting against femicides. Groups such as “*Voces sin Eco*”, headed by Guillermina González and Paola Flores (Sagrario González’ sister and mother, respectively), “*Centro de Crisis Casa-Amiga*”, led by Esther Chávez Cano, and “*Justicia para Nuestras Hijas*”, formed by Victoria Caraveo.

Unfortunately since 1993 civil associations in Ciudad Juárez have been blamed to make profit from femicides. It is reported that just in 2005 there were founded approximately 30 civil associations in Juárez, able to collect funds from the United States and Europe¹⁰⁸. There are so many people who have lived from femicides, even if the mothers and relatives of the victims claim that in real terms none of that money has gone to them. Furthermore, in 2003 Benita Monárrez, Laura Berenice Ramos’ mother, a little girl whose corpse was found amongst the eight bodies dumped out at the cotton field (campo algodonero) on the Ejército Nacional Avenue in 2001, stated that the only ones who were becoming rich were the leaders of the different NGO’s and civil associations, who were making profits with the relatives’ pain. That’s why she asked to be paid for every interview she conceded from then on, and she even blamed “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*” to be one of the groups exploiting the mothers’ sorrow to make a profit.

Unfortunately there is no reliable information to verify this datum. On the contrary, many of those groups and associations have firmly denied such an accusation. However, the suspect of making profit from the relatives’ pain persists and gets extended to some artists, writers, musicians and politicians, in Mexico and abroad. The speech pointing out to the activists as mercenaries started during the Government of Patricio Martínez in 1998, when the public administration tried to weaken the civil society movement against femicides. But it got worse when the human right

¹⁰⁸ Source: “Día Siete Magazine”. Año 6. No. 301 – Ed. El Despertador. “Las ONG en Juárez: Ayudan o lucran?” pp. 42-49.

activist Victoria Caraveo – who has become popular in Juárez for her support against gender violence – was proposed as the Chief of the ‘*Instituto Chihuahuense de la Mujer*’ (ICHIMU – Chihuahua Women’s Institute) as long as from her new position she dedicated to exclusively support the group of mothers called “*Justicia para Nuestras Hijas*”. The 52 mothers enclosed in such a group got an economic compensation equal to 1800 pesos monthly (approximately 180 USD), so they became the official symbol that represented the effective work that the government was doing to improve the justice in Juárez. At the same time Caraveo started a campaign against some of the human rights organizations such as “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*”, blaming the founders of getting rich and visiting the whole world with the excuse of talking about femicides.

This sort of disqualification war has been another constant when talking about femicides in Ciudad Juárez. The worst part has been taken by the independent civil associations and NGOs which have gained worldwide popularity and legitimacy amongst the population. Some authorities at different levels have always tried to disqualify their actions, campaigns and initiatives and the last attempt to do so was in September 2007 when current Chihuahua Governor, José Reyes Baeza, promoted a diplomatic, social and political campaign to ‘clean’ the image of the city after the European Parliament censured the response of the State to solve the femicides. That campaign focused on 5 points: 1) the creation of an interdisciplinary group formed by the Juárez University, businessmen, politicians and journalists able to analyze from a social and scientific point of view the facts going on in the city; 2) an investment fund equal to 10 million pesos (1 million USD) to solve the pending cases and prevent femicides; 3) the construction of a monument against gender violence; 4) the inclusion of topics illustrating gender violence in all school syllabus: from Primary school to Post-grades; 5) a visit to the European Parliament by businessmen, journalists and politicians to invite the European Deputies to come to Juárez and to update them about the gender violence statistics.

At the same time the Government was promoting this new campaign, some associations such as “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*” were attacked and even compared to terrorists, like Osama Bin Laden. In fact they needed to clean their official website www.mujeresdejuarez.org from different free opinions posted by the people, as long as the government could blame them of being so radical precisely for some of those comments. That was what Marisela Ortíz told me during our last telephone conversation, held last January 2008.

III. THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION TO PREVENT AND STOP FEMICIDES IN CIUDAD JUAREZ.

“Our daughters live in each one of you who fight with us to bring those responsible to justice.”

- Norma Ledezma, mother of Paloma Angélica Escobar Ledesma, speaking to students at Amherst College, Spring 2004

*** Human Rights Advocacy – The Mothers of Juárez and Chihuahua**

The harsh light of public scrutiny has not been easy for the mothers of Juárez and Chihuahua, whose daughters have been murdered or disappeared during the past decade. Forced to confront a situation that was not of their choosing, the mothers lead a movement to stop violence and crimes against women in this tough border region.

The movement finds its roots in the emotional despair of families who lost loved ones, but also in the realization that these crimes have a gender basis - young women are the targets. Hundreds of murders occur each year in the border region. In fact, five times as many men are murdered as women. But not a single man has been murdered for the simple fact of being male. Most are victims of drug violence or other criminal activities. This certainly doesn't make the murders any less reprehensible, but they are distinct from the series of unsolved femicides. The roots of the femicides can be found in the most abject chauvinism against women that one can imagine. The young women are killed simply for being young women, and this represents the maximum expression of hatred and discrimination.

Initially, the mothers struggled nearly alone, with only family and neighbors to offer emotional support during the painful moments when their daughters disappeared or when the bodies were discovered. Eventually they turned to authorities with painful questions - Who? Why? How? - but the answers were evasive, or worse yet, non-existent. When the mothers finally gathered the courage to speak out publicly, authorities only responded with harassment and jokes, a horrendous situation that placed public officials squarely on the side of the criminals.

The discovery of the murders enacted a long and apparently unfruitful antagonistic process between local women activists and the authorities. In 1994, faced with the official dismissal and silence surrounding the events, the victims' families and a group of women activists began their confrontation with the local and state authorities by demanding information. In return, those in charge of the investigation hid information, blamed the victims, and overall tried to minimize both the extent of the events and the women's and families' petitions for advocacy and action on behalf of the victims.

One of the first initiatives taken by the mothers of Juárez and Chihuahua was to search for their daughters, using their own limited resources and intuition. Under normal circumstances, this would be the work of local police, but in the state of Chihuahua it is not a crime to "disappear." Police didn't generally open investigations until 72 hours after the disappearance was reported, and by that time it was often too late. The searches represented a courageous effort, considering that the crimes

have always involved extremely poor women. During the first critical hours, mothers posted flyers in business districts and questioned potential witnesses with the hope of finding their daughters alive. Even after weeks or months, when hope was but a faint glimmer, the mothers remained optimistic, doing everything humanly possible to locate their daughters. Often the investigations resulted in unexpected findings. In one case, the murder of Paloma Escobar Ledezma, their investigative work prevented authorities from filing charges against an ex-boyfriend who turned out to be a convenient (though completely innocent) scapegoat.

As the crime wave continued year after year, the mothers quickly lost confidence in legal authorities. In fact, many families suspected officials of complicity in the murders, if not complete indifference. Groups of mothers began to share data and keep extensive records on the disappearances and murders. Esther Chávez Cano, Executive Director of "*Casa Amiga*", has been particularly active in compiling reliable, if painful, data. Other organizations like "*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*" and "*Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas*" keep their own investigative records, which prevents the government from manipulating figures and minimizing the severity of the crisis.

This process of dismissal and silencing was perpetuated mainly through a demeaning process of stereotyping. For instance, the victims and their families were publicly (re)victimized by the authorities through a typical patriarchal discourse that openly blamed the victims for "their licentious way of life." This process was reinforced and recreated mainly by local media and other local hegemonic groups. After years of marches, petitions, forums, conferences, as well as national and international exposure, finally, in February 1998, the state judicial authorities offered a document which compiled their information on the murder files. The files showed a pattern of disinterest, lack of effort, and/or an incapability to identify the victims, to classify and analyze evidence, or to conduct forensic tests (Candia et al. 1999). The deplorable state of the investigations evidenced that the authorities had no intention of finding the murderer(s). The obvious official negligence represented in the files disclosed the most violent and haunting history of social injustice against girls and women in this border community.

Thus, fifteen years ago, in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the "Real" showed its face. The material consequences of the patriarchal discourse, articulated with race, class, and regional discriminatory beliefs and practices pervasive throughout Mexican society were imprinted on the murdered bodies of hundreds of low-income young women. The murders exposed and reconfirmed a long history of impunity and social injustice practiced by a corrupt judicial system, a history routinely reinforced by a misogynist environment sustained by multiple social actors—female and male—in this border community. During the past fifteen years in this apparently paralyzing scenario diverse local women activists have resisted, negotiated, and contested patriarchy as direct participants of an extremely stressful, contradictory, and tragic ongoing story.

Many of the mothers have built relations with non-governmental organizations, including the Coordinator (a coalition of non-governmental organizations in Ciudad Juárez), the Network of Non-Violence and Human Dignity, unions and labor organization like Centro de Taller Laboral (CETLAC), and feminist groups like the 8th of March and Las Hormigas. Often these groups help the mothers organize search brigades that rake the wastelands and hills surrounding the city, or provide security surveillance at maquiladoras at the beginning and end of work shifts.

Following the murder of Sagrario González in June 1998, the first organization of families of femicide victims was founded : "*Voces Sin Eco*". The group quickly disintegrated because of internal squabbles complicated by official efforts to divide families in a highly emotional situation, but the organization set an important precedent by breaking the silence surrounding the femicides.

Hundreds of border residents gathered for a massive march on International Women's Day, 1999. The march, led by mothers of the victims, included the Juárez Mayor and several federal Deputies. A simultaneous march in Mexico City left 183 crosses in the city center in memory of the victims.

"*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*" was formed in 2002 in Juárez, followed later in the year by "*Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas*" in Chihuahua City. Authorities, who thought these humble women didn't have the ability to organize, have tried to silence their voices. For example, local officials tried to "integrate" the mothers into government social programs, a blatant effort to buy their silence in exchange for monthly stipends. The more tenacious mothers were the object of outright threats and intimidation, actions that have been widely criticized by human rights organization. But authorities have largely failed in their intimidation campaign. On April 16th, 2002, dozens of mothers occupied the Chihuahua State capitol, forcing state representatives to increase funding for law enforcement and benefits for survivors.

The mothers also organized letter-writing campaigns and protests at the state, national, and international level. In the summer of 2002, they led a march in Washington, DC, in front of the Organization of American States, site of a hemispheric tribunal that is accepting evidence on several of the unsolved murders. The mothers demanded that the crimes of Juárez could be considered crimes against humanity. As a result of these actions, the Mexican government invited international human rights organizations to prepare reports on the situation in Juárez and Chihuahua. In December 2003, Norma Andrade, the mother of Lilia Alejandra García Andrade, gave testimony in the US Congress. She reserved particularly harsh criticism for Governor Patricio Martínez, accusing him of threatening affected families.

In February 2004, a coalition of mothers, NGOs and US-based organizations organized the largest march to date in Juárez. It was called the "V_Day" march to mean the "Vagina Day" – the author of the popular book "Vagina Dialogues", Eve Ensler, participated to the march too, – the fifth against violence on women, but mainly the promotion of women's human rights. Jane Fonda, Sally Field, Eve Ensler and three US Representatives drew international press attention to the femicides, which was very useful for the relatives of the assassinated women.

But it is, I believe, necessary to establish that the most intense confrontations were visible during the first five years (1994 to 1999) after the revelation of the murders. After the first five years the confrontation gradually began to subside and the events of the murders became normalized in the local imaginary; the murders became a referent of social injustice. Moreover, this period became a symbolic struggle for political recognition and representation of both male and female local activists and politicians. Seemingly, everything became circumscribed around the question of who had the right to speak for the victims and represent their families in the 'plight' for social justice. By the time national and international recognition and support for local activism came—almost six years after the struggle had begun—it was too late; political positions had already been taken. In other words, during the first few years of confrontation the political and social positions among local protagonists—male and female—were contested, rearticulated, and in the process, many, mainly local women had been erased or effectively dismissed. At this point in time locally, whether activist or not, people knew who was recognized at local, national, and international levels as speaking subjects. We knew who could speak, for whom, and for what purpose.

Before the events of "V-Day" took place, the march had already been co-opted by local nongovernmental groups who at that time were in the process of (re)positioning themselves *vis-a vis* the state government. Locally, activists and scholars have learned—the hard way—to be very cautious in what, how, and who they support publicly. Currently it seems they are reflecting on how they have been or may be complicit with those who have appropriated this social justice plight for

their own benefit. Seemingly, for some—hopefully not for the majority—the victims have become a *modus vivendi* at the local, national, and international level.

The Mothers of Juárez and Chihuahua are determined to keep the memory of their daughters alive through their struggle. Working with solidarity organizations, they began placing pink crosses on major thoroughfares in Ciudad Juárez. During a march called ‘Exodus for Life’, organized in March of 2002, the ‘*Ni Una Más*’ campaign placed crosses on the road from Chihuahua to Ciudad Juárez. The pink cross has become a poignant symbol of the struggle to prevent violence against women.

Today dozens of mothers are the moral leaders in the struggle against femicides in Juárez and Chihuahua. Their demands are simple: end the femicides and bring the perpetrators to justice. They are resolute in the face of official negligence and undeterred in the face of threats. There are few justice movements in the world with leaders of such uncontested moral authority and such determined perseverance. The mothers invite international participation in their movement, and encourage like-minded people to join in this important struggle for justice.

*** International Protest starts: actions aimed to solve and prevent femicides in Juárez**

After the assassination of the young lawyer Mario Escobedo Jr. – who was defending Gustavo González Meza, a well known scapegoat captured with the charges of raping and murdering the eight women found dumped in a vacant lot in November 2001, although he was innocent – on February 5th, 2002 – he was killed by the police in a high-speed chase after officers allegedly “*mistook him for a fugitive*”, – the people in Juárez and abroad realized that the worst hypothesis linked to the femicides in the city had just happened: the police had just killed, in front of the whole society, a young lawyer who had recently declared at the New York Tv News Program *ABC Downtown 20/20*, that police had created false evidence to blame Javier García Uribe and Gustavo González Meza, who were totally innocent instead.

His death provoked a protest chain against the Government of Chihuahua that fastly spread at the international level. Furthermore, the movie-documentary “*Señorita Extraviada*” (Missing Young Woman) by Lourdes Portillo, was presented at different Movie Festivals worldwide, so the people started to know what was going on at that latitude. Almost simultaneously were founded some of the most legitimate civil associations in Juárez such as “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*”, or “*Justicia para nuestras Hijas*” in Chihuahua, so the mothers and relatives of the killed women became a driving force attracting attention from different places in the world. Some of the mothers started visiting different universities in the U.S, such as the California University, the San Diego one, the University of El Paso, etc., narrating to the American young people the female assassinations taking place right across the border.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights located in Washington, Amnesty International in London, the United Nations and the Mexican National Commission on Human Rights, are some of the associations that started sending some representatives to Juárez, called by the mothers of the victims to testify to the world all the irregularities, neglect and impunity present in the city.

On November 26th, 2002 the mothers and relatives of the assassinated women in Juárez organized a march in Mexico City. “*Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*” (NHRC) were leading the event that for the first time was taking place in the capital. In summer 2003 NHRC, alongwith the journalist Isabel Vericat, took the movement to Spain where Baltasar Garzón has prized them, stating that from then on the femicides in Ciudad Juárez needed to be classified as ‘crimes against humanity’.

At the same time Garzón denounced the incompetence of the Mexican government to face the problem.

And in El Paso, local legislators, labor-union members, and students also launched a group, called the '*Coalition on Violence Against Women and Families on the Border*', that planned to hold a series of demonstrations on both sides of the border and along the Rio Grande bridges that connect the two cities. "*When people say this is Mexico's business and we should stay out of it, they don't recognize that there are binational relationships when it comes to trade and commerce,*" says one of the coalition's founders, Emma Perez, who chairs the History Department at the University of Texas, at El Paso.

Celebrities including the playwright Eve Ensler and actresses Sally Field and Jane Fonda were in town for the V-Day march, and to raise international awareness of the crisis that has engulfed this city. The march began on El Reforma Bridge, leading to Avenida Laredo. Mothers, grandmothers and entire families were marching with placards showing photographs of the murdered women and those who were still missing shouting, "*Ni Una Muerta Mas!*" (Not one more dead woman!).

During the ecumenical service Jane Fonda expressed her solidarity with the women and families of Ciudad Juárez, "*I feel the suffering of the mothers of the disappeared like a dagger in my heart. I am here to show my support. I am a woman and I want my voice to be heard in solidarity with other women to demand our rights to live in peace and to be respected in every sense.*"

Mostly, the groups have demanded more attention to violence against women in a city where, they charge, the lives of young, poor women haven't counted for much. "*The killings continue,*" says Esther Chávez, who is considered a pioneer in Juarez's women's movement. "*So not much has changed.*"

On the surface, it does seem that little has changed in Juarez in response to the killings. Women still wait for the rickety green factory buses well before the sun is up, on lonely, unlit corners where no one would see them if they were dragged into a car and driven away, never to be seen alive again. The owners of the more than 300 factories that have flocked here in search of low tariffs and cheap labor have said little on the subject of the abductions, rapes, and murders. Though companies have vowed to improve security in the city's industrial areas, there has been no coordinated campaign to protect the young women workers -- even though the eight bodies found in November were discovered in a field directly across the road from the office of the foreign companies' trade organization, *Asociación de Maquiladoras*.

Nor have the plants changed policies that may be endangering their employees. Workers are still turned away at many factories if they are as little as three minutes late, leaving them to return home alone and vulnerable -- as was the case with several of the women who were later found dead. Workers still begin and end their late-night shifts with no police or security patrols in sight. Throughout Ciudad Juárez, fear is palpable. Crosses and messages of remembrance have been nailed to signposts all over town, a constant reminder of the dead. Billboards and bus advertisements warn: "*Be careful -- watch for your life.*" Women are on edge.

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CONCLUSIONS

I was very afraid while I was in Ciudad Juárez doing my PhD on-site research about the femicides that for fifteen years have been a constant in the city life. I must admit I had never been more afraid in my whole life. And I was afraid because such femicides are the result of a well articulated, perfectly planned and cold-blooded program aimed at sending domination messages to all the people, institutions and agents located out of a fraternity of different kinds of power, which mix altogether to totally dominate the city that has always been the biggest entrance bridge of illegal drugs into the United States.

Such domination messages get conveyed through women's bodies that are used as an undeniable mark to show the unlimited power of the organized crime. So women's corpses are used to mark out their territory and to show their uncontrollable domination capacity. Even if sometimes it may seem that the different kinds of murders (situational murders versus serial-sex murders) have no relation at all, if we follow the thin line that seems to separate them we will realize that they are all linked: the on-going assassinations strengthen the silence pact that exists between the members of a sort of '*brotherhood*' or '*fraternity*'. It is a sort of communication system between those who share the power code. A code that gets unfolded and becomes more and more complex all the time, with the only goal of producing and showing impunity, marking out a territorial control, and revitalizing the fraternity through young, female, bloodshed.

It is impossible to conceive femicides taking place for so long and in a such unpunished way without thinking about the existence of a second State, a parallel state as or even more powerful than the State itself, but that acts behind it to get protected under its legitimate status. As long as we continue talking about the drug-barons as marginal outlaws, and we keep saying that gender crimes (femicides) and sexual murders are a natural and persistent evil typical of a region characterized by a patriarchal culture, no one in Mexico nor in the whole planet will bother himself/herself to stop them, because no one will feel threatened at all.

We have to say out loud what we think: that it is something else than pure gender violence... that it goes further domestic violence and that the murderers are not marginal at all... that in spite of the torture signs, of the victims' common marks (such as getting killed by asphyxiation while they are being raped, so the killers can get a higher sexual pleasure when the vagina gets contracted during the very last moments of anybody's life, or getting nipples bitten off and stabbed, or being dressed after death with somebody else's clothes, among many other things) and of the elimination of the bodies in the public space, gender hatred and gender violence by themselves are not the reason behind femicides.

Femicides can not continue without the complicity or authorization of the police and some corrupt politicians. On the contrary, organized crime members, police officers, corrupt politicians and profit-eager businessmen get together and form a sort of fraternity that seals their silence and blood pacts with a female life every time a new member gets into the group, every time a member needs to prove he is a reliable one, when another powerful group challenges the control over the territory, or when a new business gets closed and it is necessary to reinforce the members' loyalty. Femicides represent the maximum power demonstration that, in spite of having its roots in the gender discrimination patterns typical of any patriarchal society, go further gender hatred and become a sort of ritual between drug-traffickers, police officers, urban gangs and corrupt politicians who need to savagely kill a woman to become a member of the brotherhood.

Throughout the years and impelled by impunity, femicides have continued uninterrupted because there are some powerful actors behind them. They are so powerful that the impunity paraphernalia was set, impelled and controlled by them since the shadows, trying to make femicides appear to be the consequence of the violence levels in any northern border Mexican city. To do so there are many apparent motivations such as narco-satanism, the recording of *snuff* movies to satisfy rich people demands. There is of course domestic violence, copycat murders and situational assassinations, but the authorities have never been able to get successful results about these investigative lines.

Furthermore, it is extremely important to recognize that femicides in the border are not exclusively a Mexican problem, but they follow a binational pattern difficult to understand. As a proof of this binational character we can affirm – even if the American authorities have never confirmed nor denied some information – that right now at El Paso there are approximately more than six hundred American people who have been previously condemned to jail for sexual crimes in the U.S. After being released from jail, they get a one-way ticket to El Paso, with the excuse of concentrating them altogether to have a better control for some therapies. Sharif Latif was at El Paso because of this situation, so it is very probable it works this way in the U.S. in spite of the American silence about it. Paradoxically El Paso is the third safest city in the U.S., right after Honolulu and San José in California.

Moreover, the assassinations are extending to some other Mexican states such as the State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Veracruz, Chihuahua city, and even beyond the southern border to Guatemala, in a sort of evil laboratory of our future that will use female bodies to show the whole world that the actors behind femicides are uncontrollable, unlimited and unquestionable.

Beyond all the figures, numbers and statistics – formal or real – femicides in Ciudad Juárez were committed on women who had a name, a family, a job and the dream of a better future. Just like any other woman in any other place in the world. If we forget this and do not read between the lines, two serious facts will dramatically manifest:

- 1) Locally, nationally and even globally, there seems to be an amnesia effect in front of such a gender and classist extreme violence;
- 2) The weird tendency to normalize and tolerate barbarian facts in our modern societies.

Because at the end of the day, when the international light reflectors turn off in Ciudad Juárez, there are hundreds of female lives willing to live a normal life, willing to continue living, willing not to be murdered by the power of men.

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