

**CREATING A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE: AMERICAN  
DISCOURSES OF RAPE, MURDER AND “MEXICAN-  
NESS” FROM THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION (1910-1920)  
TO CIUDAD JUAREZ AND CHIHUAHUA (1993-2007)**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

Reported on and judged by American citizens and government officials, American eyes have viewed violence against women in northern Mexico as specifically “Mexican” events. This paper juxtaposes American discourse from the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) with United States Department of State human rights reports from 1999 to 2007 to demonstrate similarities, differences and continuities in the discussion of sexual violence within these two time periods that connect American views of Mexican violence against women in Mexico to Mexican “culture.” While the mode of representation moves from a racial argument of inherent “Mexican” violence to an argument of a culture of violence, discourse from both time periods work to construct the image of a barbaric and chaotic Mexico, furthering the divide between “Mexican” and “American” within the border zone. The border itself is integral within this context as it stands as the physical and mental barrier between what constitutes “Mexican” and “American.”

**Keywords:** Mexican-American border; history; violence; women; Mexican Revolution; Ciudad Juarez

**Subject Terms:** United States—Relations—Mexico; Mexican-American Border Region—Social Conditions; Women—Violence against—Mexico; Mexico—History—Revolution, 1910-1920; Women—Crimes Against—Mexico—Ciudad Juarez

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## INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1919, a group of men gang raped an American woman known as Mrs. Correll on her husband's estate in Tamaulipas, Mexico. The rapists murdered her husband during the attack "because he was man enough to try to prevent them having that satisfaction."<sup>1</sup> In January 1993, Alma Chavira Farel, a thirteen-year-old girl, was found dead after being raped vaginally and anally, beaten, strangled and dumped in an empty lot in Ciudad Juarez.<sup>2</sup> These events are not directly related. They are, however, linked to a century long discourse concerning Mexican violence. American eyes have viewed violence against women in northern Mexico as specifically "Mexican" events. This paper juxtaposes American discourse from the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) with United States Department of State human rights reports from 1999 to 2007 to demonstrate similarities, differences and continuities in the discussion of sexual violence within these time periods that connect American views of Mexican violence against women in northern Mexico to Mexican "culture." While the mode of representation transitions from a racial argument of inherent "Mexican" violence in revolutionary discourse of rape and sexual violence to an argument of a cultural fundamentalism associated with the gender-

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from the Office of Jon I. Newell, to the Honorable N.J. Gould, Washington, D.C., July 30, 1919. Buckley II, Other Correspondence, Assorted, 1919, folder 12.

<sup>2</sup> Alma Guillerprieto, "A Hundred Women: Why has a decade-long string of murders gone unsolved?" in *The New Yorker: Letter from Mexico* (Sept 29, 2003) p.2. Information regarding the sexual violence Chavira Farel endured came from Debbie Nathan, "Work, Sex and Danger in Ciudad Juarez," in *NACLA Report on the Americas: Report on the U.S.-Mexico Border* 33(3) (Nov/Dec 1999) p.25.

based murders, or *feminicides*, of contemporary Chihuahua<sup>3</sup>, discourse from both time periods works to construct the image of a barbaric and chaotic Mexico, furthering the divide between “Mexican” and “American.” Cultural fundamentalism within the contemporary documentation replaces racialized arguments of violence from revolutionary discourse, taking “race” as a visual biological marker and replacing it with judgments based on culture: “[R]ather than inferiorizing the “other” it exalts the absolute, irreducible difference of the “self” and the incommensurability of different cultural identities...it reifies culture conceived as a compact, bounded, localized, and historically rooted set of traditions and values.”<sup>4</sup> The association of violence to either Mexican race or culture ultimately marks Mexico and Mexicans as inherently violent, further marginalizing Mexico within the border zone.

All of the documentation discussed here recorded extreme violence against women: be it rape, murder, physical attack, torture or a combination of all four. The events themselves, however, are not the focus of this analysis. The rhetoric and discourse surrounding the subject of sexual violence in these two periods is analyzed in order to understand the ways Mexican violence is represented to and by Americans, particularly the racial and cultural implications of these practices. While rhetoric and discourse within the two periods seem to indicate a change in American beliefs concerning the cause of the violence itself—shifting from a biological racial argument in the 1910s to a cultural

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<sup>3</sup> The *feminicides* of Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua City are a string of gender based murders occurring from 1993 to the present which have claimed the lives of approximately 500 women.

<sup>4</sup> Verena Stolcke, “Talking Culture: New Boundaries, New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe,” in *Current Anthropology* 36(1) Special Issue: Ethnographic Authority and Cultural Explanation (Feb. 1995), 4. Marisol De la Cadena phrases this as “essential cultural differences,” arguing along with Stolcke that the movement away from a biologically based racial argument led to “neoracist discriminatory rhetoric.” *Indigenous Mestizas: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 26. De la Cadena furthers this idea by stating that due to cultural differences, people will always react xenophobically to those outside of their cultural group. *Ibid.*, 26.



argument in the present—discussions of sexual violence as “Mexican” within either time period furthers the cultural divide between the United States and Mexico. In these texts, strengthening the “border” or divide between the two nations becomes imperative as Mexico is repeatedly represented as inherently violent, chaotic and dangerous while the United States represents modernity and civilization.

I focus on cases of extreme violence for two reasons: first, extreme violence is more commonly reported or commented on within both time periods; second, very few scholars have analyzed the historical peculiarities of rape and discourses of rape. Sexual violence is often the focus of sociologists, criminologists, or anthropologists. Historical enquiry into the issue allows us to see changes over time in the public perception of sexual violence and its consequences. This in turn provides the information required to see the roots of violence and its connections to culture and society, increasing our ability to eradicate violence and rehabilitate victims.

I use cultural studies of rape within this analysis because biological studies of rape do not take into account the various levels of violence found within different

contexts of sexual assault.<sup>5</sup> Cultural rape studies argue that “sexual attitudes are learned, not instinctual.”<sup>6</sup> They focus on rape as a form of male domination over women that maintains patriarchal societal structures and allows for the continual subjugation of women. Culture and society influence the level of sexual violence within its population by either promoting or negating attitudes associated with violence—such as aggression and domination on one side and subjugation and passivity on the other—that increase the chances of societal acceptance of violent acts.<sup>7</sup> Cultural rape studies are generally divided into two main schools of thought. Radical feminist works—such as Susan Brownmiller’s

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<sup>5</sup> As Myrdene Anderson notes, “It resolves nothing to attribute ‘aggression’ let alone ‘war’ to genes or instincts or biology, especially when we observe such a variety among cultures in styles of violence, and its mediation.” Myrdene Anderson, “Epilogue: Denaturing Cultural Violence,” in *Cultural Shaping of Violence: Victimization, Escalation, Response*. (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2004), 296. While some biologists have attempted to explain rape as a form of reproductive instinct (such as Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer’s *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), this argument is ludicrous as it refuses to take into context battery, torture and murder that often accompany rape, let alone instances of rape with contraceptives or the rape of infertile persons (such as the elderly, children and men). Scholars such as Tim Edwards have heavily criticized these shortcomings. Biological arguments also ignore the historical variance of rape and patriarchal domination. Anna Clark, *Women’s Silence Men’s Violence: Sexual Assault in England 1770-1845* (London: Pandora, 1987), 2. Cultural studies present the idea of rape as a learned behaviour “not an alien and uncontrollable part of human nature but the power dynamics of a particular culture.” Sabine Sielke, *Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 2. What is problematic about cultural theories of rape, however, is the extrapolated explanation that if men learn to be sexually violent through cultural learning then women within that culture should alternately learn to accept violence towards themselves. Cultural explanations can also negate the free-will or choice required to rape. Therefore, while cultural studies of rape help to explain why certain societies may have increased numbers of rape, they do not adequately explain the personal choice required to rape.

<sup>6</sup> Dianne Herman, “The Rape Culture,” in *Women: A Feminist Perspective* 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Ed. Jo Freeman (California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1989), 21. Cultural rape studies argue that rape is learned within societies that “essentialize masculine and feminine conduct as an active/passive polarity.” Joseph Dorsey, “‘It Hurt Very Much at the Time’: Patriarchy, Rape Culture and the Slave Body Semiotic,” in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*. Ed. Linden Lewis (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 294.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, “Epilogue,” 297. “The more shaped and nurtured by culture, the more violence can be rendered to appear innocuous or inevitable.” Myrdene Anderson and Cara Richards, “Introduction: The Careless Feeding of Violence in Culture,” in *Cultural Shaping of Violence: Victimization, Escalation, Response* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2004), 1. Along with cultural rape studies by Caroline Moser, Anna Clark, Lorenne Clark and Debra Lewis, Dianne Herman, Joseph Dorsey, Nicola Gavey, Karen Dubinsky, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Pamela Scully, and Laura Edwards, my methodological approach to this topic incorporates ideas regarding discourse analysis, gender and sexuality from Michel Foucault, Joan Scott, Ann Laura Stoler, Shani D’Cruze and Anupama Rao, Trihn Mihn-ha, Philip Bourdieu, Jeffrey Weeks, Adele Perry, Sarah Carter, William Roseberry, Ana Maria Alonso, and Pablo Vila; as well as sociological theories of violence from Peter Iadicola and Anson Shupe.

*Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*—argue that all men are capable of rape in order to maintain patriarchal hierarchy and male domination. Socialist feminists such as Karen Dubinsky, on the other hand, argue that rape is rooted in both patriarchal domination and material inequality.<sup>8</sup>

The discipline of history has largely ignored studies of rape until recently.<sup>9</sup> Dubinsky is one of the most prominent historians who has recently taken up this topic. She argues that historical studies of rape are invaluable to the field due to “[history’s] insistence on looking at the differences in meaning over time in a set of behaviours, and its concern for discerning the significance of those behaviours for the people involved.”<sup>10</sup> Societal views regarding rape are constructed and enforced by the governing elite at any point in history.<sup>11</sup> Rape itself is viewed in different ways within different time periods depending on the gender, class, race and societal positions of those involved. Shifts in societal standards regarding sex, gender, race and class change perceptions of rape and sexual violence. Dubinsky argues that historians need to understand the historical meaning of assault from the perspective of those involved, and to understand how the official state response to rape can further subordinate women. She writes: “contested

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975). Lorraine Clark and Debra Lewis present a socialist feminist perspective on rape in their study *Rape: The Price of Coercive Sexuality* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1977) which ties rape to male control over female productivity and economics. Sociological works such as Tim Edwards’ *Cultures of Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) and Michael Kimmel’s *The Gender of Desire: Essays on Male Sexuality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005) study rape as a societal construct or normative behaviour linking rape to masculinity. This is by no means a comprehensive list of cultural rape studies, these examples are meant merely to exemplify the range of focus for academics working on this topic. While each of these studies are unique in their perspective and contributions to the discussion of rape, they all enforce the argument that rape is both a physical and symbolic form of male dominance and control over female bodies.

<sup>9</sup> Karen Dubinsky, “Sex and Shame: Some Thoughts on the Social and Historical Meaning of Rape,” in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History*. Eds. Veronica Strong-Boag, Mona Gleeson and Adele Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Clark, *Women’s Silence Men’s Violence*, 5.

gender relations result in many forms of coercion, of which sexual violence is one particularly brutal component. Rape alone does not cause or maintain patriarchy, but it is an effective and remarkably durable facet of women's subordination."<sup>12</sup>

### **The U.S.-Mexican Borderlands**

Much of the function of the US-Mexico border and the physical restrictions in place along the borderline are reflections of past and perceived future relations between the two nation-states. Border zones are used as a means of controlling and subjugating the populations on one or both sides of the line.<sup>13</sup> While the borderline marks a political line used by nations to define their space through the use of national markers and controlled movement, borderlands complicate the border system as they expose the fallacy of imagining the border—and nation—as a closed system.<sup>14</sup> Borderlands demonstrate the interdependence of two states as the constant movement of people, goods and ideas across the international border contests the physical and mental barriers supposedly at work within the area. The US-Mexico border is unique to border systems because of the high levels of exchange across the border, as well as the fact that these

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<sup>12</sup> Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 34.

<sup>13</sup> Kathleen Staudt and David Spener, "The View from the Frontier: Theoretical Perspectives Undisciplined," in *The U.S.-Mexico Border: Transcending Divisions, Contesting Identities*. Eds. David Spener and Kathleen Staudt (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998), 13. There is no cohesive historiography of borderlands history due directly to the lack of homogeneity along the borderline. Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, "Conclusion: Borderlands Unbound," in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History*. Eds. Samuel Truett and Elliott Young. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 325. I have focused on studies dealing directly with the Mexican border, specifically the relationship between Texas and Chihuahua.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, "Introduction: Making Transnational History: Nations, Regions and Borderlands," in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History*. Eds. Samuel Truett and Elliott Young (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 2. A "borderland" is defined as a "loosely defined geographic region or zone that straddles the borderline." Daniel Arreola and James Curtis, *The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1993), 6.

connections are made between a “modern” industrialized state and a developing one.<sup>15</sup>

While not necessarily a symmetrical relationship, economic ties and trade create a situation of cultural transfer and increase national concerns about immigration, trade competition, smuggling and ethnic nationalism to a degree where border control has become a primary concern.

The colonization of the Mexican north depended heavily on the militarization of settlers within the area as the Mexican state combined territorial conquest and control of indigenous populations, such as the Apaches, into a militarized system where soldiers or militia members received land for their service.<sup>16</sup> These racial conflicts, as well as the mode of settlement used by the state to control the frontier, helped to build a distinct frontier society focused on militarization and racial divide.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Oscar Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson and London: The University of California Press, 1992), 27; 9. Named by Oscar Martinez as the “borderlands milieu,” border zones are subject to inter-governmental transnational activities and negotiations dealing with interaction, conflict, accommodation, and ethnicity in a way that separates the borderland from the centre of its particular national affiliation, specifically tying it to the border instead. Ibid., 10. The borderlands milieu develops regionally as individuals within both nations actively participate in formal and informal systems of cultural exchange that expose both groups to foreign ideas, knowledge, education, customs, traditions and values through interpersonal relationships. The borderlands signify an area of decreased state power and authority but increased attempts at control as population growth and migration within the area increase with an economic pattern tied to another nation-state. Power relations work differently within this region as its distinct history, economic foundation and physical and mental geography shape legitimate authority within its realm. In the case of the U.S.-Mexico border region, power relationships of dominance and subjugation range from international, national, governmental and institutional differences down to power relations between citizens of different nationalities, genders, races and classes in everyday situations.

<sup>16</sup> Ana Maria Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1995) 7. Warfare remained systemic and sporadic within the region until 1886 as both settlers and Apache groups fought for control of the region. Josiah Heyman, *Life and Labour on the Border: Working People of Northeastern Sonora, Mexico, 1886-1986* (Tucson: the University of Arizona Press, 1991), 7. Alonso argues that the promotion of militarization within the region led to the development of a northern identity premised upon performance and honour within frontier warfare. Alonso, *Thread of Blood*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Martinez, *Border People*, 33.

First settled in 1659, Ciudad Juarez connected ranching and mining districts within the northern-most reaches of Mexican territory to the Mexican government.<sup>18</sup> After the Mexican-American War and the implementation of the US-Mexican border in 1848, the original settlement was divided into El Paso, Texas, U.S.A. and Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico.<sup>19</sup> While the border ran directly through the city, it continued to connect the territories on either side of the border through trade and social networks. The economies of the United States and Mexico increasingly intertwined across the length of the border from the 1880's onwards as the Mexican government heavily promoted the development of its northern states under Porfirio Diaz.<sup>20</sup> US-based capital and companies increased employment opportunities, industrial development and the foreign purchase of both land and resources.<sup>21</sup>

In the early twentieth-century, the border began to be used as a political tool of demarcation: the border—and the rules and regulations put in place to restrict access

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<sup>18</sup> Arreola and Curtis, *The Mexican Border Cities*, 16; 36.

<sup>19</sup> Arturo Aldama, "Borders, Violence, and the Struggle for Chicana and Chicano Subjectivity," in *Violence and the Body: Race, Gender and the State*. Ed. Arturo Aldama (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 19. The Treaty of Guadalupe ended the Mexican-American War in the 1840s, forcing Mexico to concede to an imposed borderline and the forced purchasing of Texas by the United States.

<sup>20</sup> William French, *A Peaceful and Working People: Manners, Morals and Class Formation in Northern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 9.; Heyman, *Life and Labour on the Border*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> The increased connectivity between the U.S. and Mexico along the border line "was grounded in new fiscal reforms, the opening of the border to investment, the dispossession of land, and the rise of a national police to maintain at least the appearance of law and order." Truett and Young, "Introduction," 17. By the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, the economies of the Mexican north and the United States were fundamentally tied together. Continuing the focus on agriculture and mining that dominated colonization of the region, American companies offered increased wages, creating a beneficial situation for both wage earners and merchants. Alan Knight, "The United States and the Mexican Peasantry, circa 1880-1940," in *Rural Revolt in Mexico: U.S. Intervention and the Domain of Subaltern Politics*. Ed. Daniel Nugent (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 50. Mexican labour backed by American investors became key to running and building railroads and mining developments throughout the borderlands. Economic expansion drew settlers and migrant labourers to the area, enforcing the idea of "the prosperous north" within the Mexican imaginary. This economic development also served to create tension between the two countries as racial conflicts between indigenous groups and settlers continued and illegal activities such as banditry, filibustering, smuggling and bounty-hunting pervaded the area. Martinez, *Border People*, 32.

across the boundary line—clearly marked the Mexican body as “other,” racializing Mexican nationality and enforcing a fear of “barbarous Mexico.” Increased implementation of border control projected American concerns over the degenerate forces in Mexico, linking ideas of violence, disease and transgression to Mexicans and the border.<sup>22</sup> Border control projected the foreign-ness of Mexico to American citizens, demarcating northern Mexico as a distinct racial zone, regardless of the shared history and heritage of northern Mexicans with many of the citizens of the Southern U.S. The Border Patrol, created in the late 1920s and fully implemented in the 1930s, continued this process by framing borderland workers—previously granted freedom of movement throughout the area—as “alien” and “other” to the American people.<sup>23</sup>

The American Prohibition era encouraged movement to the Mexican north, however, as the Mexican borderlands became a tourist destination for American citizens.<sup>24</sup> The borderlands became known for supplying prostitution and “pleasure” to Americans. Ciudad Juarez is historically referred to as “the city of vice” along both sides of the border and contemporary beliefs regarding the city strongly link its economy to

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<sup>22</sup> Alexandra Minna Stern, “Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood: Medicalization and Nation-Building on the U.S.-Mexico Border, 1910-1930,” in *Hispanic American Review* 79(1) (1999), 52. The exclusionary practices used along the border were also at work in border cities, such as El Paso, where Mexican heritage or nationality became conflated with race “through eugenic, medicalized, and statistical knowledge about human bodies and identities.” Stern argues that inspectors along the border enforced a negative representation of Mexicans by presenting the violence of the Revolution in conjunction with the violent history of the US-Mexican War and connecting both events to theories of evolutionism and Social Darwinism. *Ibid.*, 64. Through this connection, uprooted refugees from the Revolution became cast as dirty and diseased. Alexandra Minna Stern, “Nationalism on the Line: Masculinity, Race, and the Creation of the U.S. Border Patrol,” in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History*. Eds. Samuel Truett and Elliott Young (Durham and London: Duke university Press, 2004), 303.

<sup>23</sup> Stern, “Buildings, Boundaries and Blood,” 70; “Nationalism on the Line,” 299. This inferiorization of Mexicans, and subsequently all Latino groups, particularly dominated (and continues to dominate) people of campesino or proletariat background as class position, ethnicity and skin colour further marked Mexicans as “non-white” and therefore “other.” Aldama, “Borders, Violence and the Struggle,” 23.

<sup>24</sup> Pablo Vila, “Constructing Social Identities in Transnational Contexts: The Case of the Mexico-U.S.-Border,” in *International Social Science Journal* 159 (March 1999), 76. Narcotics trafficking and illegal migration over the border increased in conjunction with the development of tourism in the borderlands zone. Martinez, *Border People*, 37.

“banditry, gangs, homicides, drugs, and, prominently, female prostitution.”<sup>25</sup> The Border Industrialization Program (BIP) was implemented in the 1960’s in an effort to increase industrialization and foreign economic investment in northern Mexico through the *maquiladoras*.<sup>26</sup> Owned predominantly by American and Japanese companies, the *maquiladoras* strengthened the link between the Mexican borderlands and transnational economics. By 1992, over 2000 *maquiladoras* functioned along the border, employing approximately 500 000 workers.<sup>27</sup>

The initial intention of the BIP program was to relieve unemployment rates within the border zone and “rescue border women from prostitution.”<sup>28</sup> The Mexican government hoped that increased US investment in the area would eventually lead to the development of Mexican companies for supplying parts and services to the *maquiladoras*.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the *maquiladoras* have increased Mexican economic reliance on American investment and created a system of employment that preys on the extreme inequalities of the area. Women and children are targeted as employees within the plants as they are easily exploited.<sup>30</sup> This exploitation has had even more dangerous

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<sup>25</sup> Pablo Vila, “Gender and the Over-Lapping of Region, Nation and Ethnicity on the U.S.-Mexican Border,” in *Ethnography at the Border: Cultural Studies of the Americas*, vol. 13. Ed. Pablo Vila (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 80. Martinez, *Border People*, 21.

<sup>26</sup> *Maquiladoras* are manufacturing and industrial assembly plants that use Mexican labour within the free trade zone of the borderlands. Many of these plants work with textiles, automotive parts or appliances. U.S. manufactured parts are imported into the factories, assembled and then exported back into the United States with limited taxation. Heyman, *Life and Labour on the Border*, 8. The US tariff law of 1965 allowed US companies to import any US goods assembled whole or in part in a foreign country making it cheaper for American companies to use foreign labour than to produce manufactured goods within the US. Paul Ganster and David Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border into the Twenty-first Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 100.

<sup>27</sup> Martinez, *Border People*, 39; These numbers have further increased since 2001 as the signing of NAFTA now allows for the duty-free sale of any products made in this area to any part of North America. Ganster and Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border*, 104.

<sup>28</sup> Nathan, “Work, Sex and Danger,” 29.

<sup>29</sup> Ganster and Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border*, 110.

<sup>30</sup> Aldama, “Borders, Violence and the Struggle,” 26.



consequences for working women within Ciudad Juarez, as *maquiladora* workers make up the majority of *feminicide* victims in the city.

The borderlands are distinguished as a distinctive zone within the Mexican national imaginary, linked to increased economic prosperity or opportunities because of its connections to the United States.<sup>31</sup> The image of northern Mexican prosperity is not reciprocated within the U.S. Instead, a common judgment in the American borderlands characterizes Mexico first and foremost by poverty. Pablo Vila argues that a “well-developed ‘all poverty is Mexican’ discourse” dominates within El Paso-Ciudad Juarez.<sup>32</sup> Images of Mexico as the backward and unprogressive neighbour to the south dominate American films and iconography, reflecting a romantic version of the past, focused on American visions of “Old Mexico.”<sup>33</sup> The north continues to stand for independence within the Mexican national imagination, defined by “a rugged and self-reliant...archetype of Mexican masculinity.”<sup>34</sup> Within a national system of identification heavily focused on regional zones, citizens of border cities gain status through their proximity to the United States.<sup>35</sup>

Mexican and American visions of northern Mexico exist at odds with one another: the American vision of a backward Mexico perpetuates the marginalization of Mexican people and culture as the borderline is enforced as both a physical and mental barrier. The border continues to be integral in the division between “us” and “them,” working to “other” the Mexican people by removing them from the physical space of a modern and

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<sup>31</sup> Arreola and Curtis, *The Mexican Border Cities*, 218.

<sup>32</sup> Pablo Vila, *Border Identifications: Narratives of Religion, Gender and Class on the U.S.-Mexican Border* (Austin: University of Texas, 2005), 234.

<sup>33</sup> Martinez, *Border People*, 22; Arreola and Curtis, *The Mexican Border Cities*, 218.

<sup>34</sup> Truett and Young, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>35</sup> Vila, “Constructing Social Identities,” 78.

progressive country. Nationality and ethnicity combine within the border zone to designate Mexicans as the “the contemptible other.”<sup>36</sup>

The representation of Mexico and Mexicans as inherently violent is discussed here through discourse analysis of reports from US government officials and citizens on violence against women in Mexico during the violent phase of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), where the country experienced a decade of intermittent warfare and civil chaos as various regional armies fought for control of the country. These findings are juxtaposed with an analysis of the United States Department of State’s reportage of the *femicides* of Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua City, which have claimed the lives of approximately 500 women and girls since 1993, continuing today without resolution. Analysis of these two eras—and their unique situations—demonstrates that the racial and cultural judgments made by American officials against Mexican citizens and the Mexican state within both time periods continue to both present and represent Mexico as violent, chaotic and unchanging. Instead of demonstrating ties to its past, Mexico is arguably presented as stuck within its past, unable and unwilling to progress towards modernity and equality.

### **Discourses of Rape, Murder and Sexual Violence in the Mexican Revolution**

The revolutionary movement that erupted in 1910 continued through various armed movements for the next ten years. The movement began as a reaction to social issues that developed during the Porfirian era and it continued throughout the 1910s

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<sup>36</sup> Pablo Vila, “Narrative Identities: the Employment of the Mexican on the U.S.-Mexican Border,” in *The Sociological Quarterly* 38(1) (1997), 160; “Bodies that are marked as ‘Other’ because of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion and political affiliation become sites where power brands subjects, turning them into social objects: invisible, subversive, libidinal, and violent.” Aldama, “Borders, Violence and the Struggle,” 28.

under almost constant leadership contestation. Between 1910 and 1920 four different major armies—commanded separately or joined in various alliances or coalitions depending on the time period—fought for control of the country. The protracted and systemic violence that characterized this decade of civil war never produced a cohesive revolutionary ideology.<sup>37</sup> By 1920 fighting continued sporadically but the violent phase of the Revolution had passed.<sup>38</sup>

The Revolution significantly impacted the northern borderlands, changing the way the borderline functioned and its economic ties to the United States. Population displacement, raiding, banditry, and arms and ammunitions smuggling occurred along the border as clashes between revolutionary armies took place within border cities, often spilling military conflict into the United States.<sup>39</sup> Policing of the borderline, while underway before 1910, began in earnest for both governments during the Revolution.<sup>40</sup>

The relationships built during frontier expansion and the economic investment of the *Porfiriato* continued to tie the United States and northern Mexico together throughout

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<sup>37</sup> Alan Knight's research shows that the Mexican Revolution was "popular, rural, and agrarian in character, and heavily dependent on peasant participation. The revolution was not, least of all in terms of its basic origins and popular manifestations, a nationalist, or anti-American or anti-imperialist revolution." Knight, "The United States and the Mexican Peasantry," 27.

<sup>38</sup> This is by no means a detailed explanation of the Mexican Revolution. For the purposes of this paper, however, no further detail is required as the revolution is not, in fact, under discussion. For further explanation of the causes, consequences and chronology of the revolutionary movement, reference Alan Knight's *The Mexican Revolution v.1: Porfirians, Liberals and Peasants* and *v.2: Counter-revolution and Reconstruction* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) and Frederic Katz's *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* is specifically important to a discussion of the borderlands during the revolution as it is focused on many of the events which occurred in the northern states of Sonora and Chihuahua.

<sup>39</sup> The city of El Paso-Juarez became a zone of mass mobilization and armed conflict a number of times over the course of the revolution. Martinez, *Border People*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> State control slowly increased within the region, consolidating and enforcing state agencies along both sides of the border. Quarantine of "every body entering the United States from Mexico" began in January, 1917. Stern, "Buildings, Boundaries and Blood," 42. Stern writes that migrants wishing to cross the border underwent medical examinations, psychological profiling and were subjected to interrogation regarding "self and citizenship." *Ibid.*, 46. Tight control of immigration across the US-Mexican border increased in 1929, when gaining entry visas to the U.S. became more difficult and forced repatriation of Mexicans living within the United States occurred. Heyman, *Life and Labour on the Border*, 9.

the Revolution. As such, correspondence between American citizens, business owners, journalists and government officials such as consular officers and ambassadors continually provided information regarding the revolution to the United States Department of State. Concern over American investments and citizens caught within a foreign war created a situation where vast amounts of information regarding events in Mexico passed to the U.S. government, creating the body of documentation analyzed here.<sup>41</sup>

American citizens, business owners and government officials across the country often expressed outrage at the treatment of women in Northern Mexico.<sup>42</sup> Newspapers ran stories reporting “indiscriminate massacres”<sup>43</sup> of women and children and individual

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<sup>41</sup> While the United States directly intervened in the Mexican Revolution three times, countless examples of indirect involvement or attempted interference occurred in order to implement a government beneficial to American economy and industry. Knight, “The United States and the Mexican Peasantry,” 33. The fate of American citizens and businesses dominate written correspondence from the 1910s. Documentation or mention of sexual assault are often made within discussions focused on economics, business or resources.

<sup>42</sup> Violence against women during the Mexican Revolution cannot be analyzed according to modern standards or definitions of rape as none of the documents are first hand accounts or testimonies. They are written predominantly by upper-class white men, all of which are American. What is important here is that these men mentioned the acts as sexual assault or rape, whether fitting within a specific definition of violence or not. Even when not graphically described by the men reporting the events, something about specific rape stories reported during the Mexican Revolution crossed American ethical and moral boundaries concerning the treatment of women. For the time period of 1910-1920 there was no state police force and the judicial system did not function according to any written doctrine. Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 122. Domestic violence in Mexico was viewed as occurring within the realm of patriarchal control, making male violence against women acceptable as long as death did not occur. *Ibid.*, 105, 109. Sexual assault was condoned to an even greater degree than physical assault as it was not viewed as damaging to the victim. *Ibid.*, 120. Sanctions against sexual assault within the Mexican penal code listed possible assaults as *violacion* (rape), *estupro* (statutory rape) or *rapto* (abduction). *Ibid.*, 123. According to the judicial system, women could not engage in sexual intercourse without consenting to it, thus making rape impossible. Sexual assault victims faced pressure from both their families and the judicial system to settle the matter out of court as victims who pushed for conviction faced public humiliation and dishonour. *Ibid.*, 130. I will not analyze my documentation from a legal perspective of rape within the Mexican Revolution, however, as none of the cases under discussion went through the judicial system.

<sup>43</sup> Buckley I, folder 10, doc 113.42[b]: clipping from *The Sun* 11-13-16: “100 massacred by Zapata’s Bandits: Women, Children and Soldiers Dragged from Train and Slain—Only One Man Escaped: Military Escort Allowed to Pass Before Passenger Cars were held up: Ladero, Tex., Nov 12—An indiscriminate massacre of nearly 100 women, children and Carranza soldiers, who were travelling on a train near Contreras, State of Morelos, which was attacked by Zapata followers is reported in Mexico

reports to American officials and businesses graphically described physical violence to American readers.

The Polancos were all stripped of their clothing, and one after another was dragged off his feet and choked and beaten with the flat of swords until in almost a dying condition. Then they were taken to the garden...where they were stood up single file, face to back, and first one and then another shot at them until they were fairly riddled with bullets. Gregorio's wife, driven frantic, broke away from a guard and as they were torturing one of her boys, rushed him and threw herself at [Pancho] Villa's feet and with her arms around the boy's legs, pleaded for his life. Villa put a gun in her face and said: "Get away from here you old hog, or I will kill you." She said: "If you kill my husband and sons, for god's sake do." Then Villa ordered her held until he finished beating the boy, when he ordered her kicked from the spot.<sup>44</sup>

Their words reflected shock and outrage over improper or immoral treatment of women. Politicians and government officials used the possibility of similar violence against American women in order to push for intervention. The *New York Times* ran an editorial on February 24, 1915, expressing concern over the lack of American intervention, citing that Woodrow Wilson's unwillingness to interfere openly indicated his defence of the "right of vicious and disorderly Mexicans to "spill" as much as they please of the blood of their peaceful fellow-citizens and law-abiding foreigners" through "murder and torture, rape and robbery" and "the death of women by outrage."<sup>45</sup> The fate of virtuous women became an argument for intervention, representing both actual violence and metaphorically linking the rape of women to the destruction of property and businesses. Grand Knight member J. Leahy asked "Must peace be purchased on the

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City newspapers received here to-day. After the attack on the train the dead lay in piles beside the cars, the papers state. Only 1 person, so far as known, escaped death at the hands of the bandits."

<sup>44</sup> Letter from E.C. Houghton to E.D. Morgan, Esquire, March 29, 1916, Las Cruces, New Mexico, The Corralitos Company, Thomas Wentworth Pierce, I, Box 1:16, Correspondence General, 1916.

<sup>45</sup> *New York Times*, February 24, 1915, Two Ex-Presidents Speak, p. 8. Another article printed on August 11, 1915 entitled Last Appeal of Americans on p.4 of the *New York Times* warned that if the United States did not step in "to open communications, supply food and stop the killing of men, outraging of women and destruction of property, there [would] be still graver complications for the world to settle in Mexico."

crushed form of pure inoffensive women?”<sup>46</sup> Others argued that violence against women in Mexico indicated that the Revolution itself stood merely as a cover for chaos with Mexican men taking up arms only to justify their own violent behaviour: “the wholesale violation of women and girls throughout the country is indescribable... The so-called revolution has become simply a cloak for unrestrained graft, pillage, rapine and destruction, with no hope of relief.”<sup>47</sup> Discourse created around specific instances of sexual violence is different, however, as ideals of traditional gender behaviour and race contributed heavily to the reportage of rape and violence against women.

Traditional stereotypical depictions of Mexican gender are *machismo* and *marianismo*.<sup>48</sup> *Machismo* designates a vision of the hyper-masculine man, often associated with physical violence, drinking, womanizing, arrogance, recklessness, abandonment of responsibilities and “attempting to control women.”<sup>49</sup> *Machismo* denotes a stereotype of male power, often violent in nature. *Machismo* tied men to the public sphere through public displays of “natural” manliness and control. *Marianismo*, in duality

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<sup>46</sup> Letter from Jos. Leahy, Grand Knight to George Chamberlain, U.S. Senate, December 8, 1914, *United States Department of State, Records of the Department of State Relating to internal Affairs of Mexico, 1910-1929*, 812 series (Washington: The National Archives Microfilm Publications), 812.404/1, roll 143.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from The American Society of Mexico to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, May 22, 1915, 812.48/2464, roll 157.

<sup>48</sup> Gender roles within Mexico are often presented as continuous and unchanging. This misrepresentation of gender ignores significant developments within Mexican society, conflating tradition and culture with current society in a way that presents only strict stereotypes of Mexican men and women. It is important to note that while gender stereotypes are based on traditional roles, these are essentialized representations that exist through certain characteristics or actions but do not exist in ideal form. Vila, “Gender and the Over-lapping of Region,” 91; Matthew Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City* 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2007), 3. Essentialized views of masculinity allow American representations of Mexican masculinity focused on violence to dominate and signify Mexico as barbarous and backward. Gender stereotypes problematize movement towards equality as cultural constructions work to “naturalize gender and to reassert proper gender roles as the basis of social order and well-being.” Steve Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 297.

<sup>49</sup> Cymene Howe, “Gender, Sexuality, and Revolution: Making Histories and Cultural Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-2001,” in *Gender, Sexuality and Power in Latin America Since Independence*. Eds. William French and Katherine Bliss (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 232.

with machismo, is the traditional role of women as *las mujeres abnegadas* (self-sacrificing women). Proper behaviour for women included submissiveness, support and acceptance of patriarchal decisions and above all, sexual purity. Maintaining virginity until marriage, fidelity to her husband, becoming a self-sacrificing mother and a chaste widow fulfilled the expected pattern of sexual behaviour and female honour.<sup>50</sup> The protection provided by the home and male relatives often only applied to those women deemed “decent” or worthy of honour, allowing young virgins, honest wives, chaste widows or nuns the rights to a protective stance based on “moral” sexual behaviour.<sup>51</sup>

The protection of honour is a significant part of both masculinity and femininity within Mexico. Systems of frontier expansion shaped traditional gender roles in the north, introducing Spanish traditions and customs into an area heavily impacted by racial interaction and warfare, connecting gender to ethnicity.<sup>52</sup> The protection of “civilized” women from “barbaric” men further reinforced the connection between female virginity and male honour as frontier women became “symbols not only of sexual but also of

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<sup>50</sup> Sonya Lipsett-Rivera, “A Slap in the Face of Honour: Social Transgression and Women in Late-Colonial Mexico,” in *The Faces of Honour: Sex, Shame and Violence in Colonial Latin America*. Eds. Lyman Johnson and Sonya Lipsett-Rivera (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 179.

<sup>51</sup> Silvia Marina Arrom, *The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857* (Stanford: The University of Stanford Press, 1985), 64.

<sup>52</sup> Colonial concerns over degeneration and racial mixing contributed to the construction of gender identities within Mexico as racial purity or “white-ness” and “civilization” became connected to proper behaviour and traditional gender roles. Alonso, *Thread of Blood*, 7. This system of engendered racial domination is integral to the colonial era. Sarah Carter demonstrates this in her work on the colonization of Canada: “White women were defined as pure, submissive, pious, and domestic, with delicate constitutions. Black women were without any of these qualities; they could not be pure, virtuous, or frail; rather, they were strong and licentious...agents of either the salvation or the ruin of elite men.” Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 13.

ethnic purity.”<sup>53</sup> The permeability of the female bodily margins rooted female vulnerability, powerlessness and shame in sexual intercourse. Maintaining feminine honour required the strict regulation and closure of the female body, achieved through abstinence and enclosure within the home.<sup>54</sup> The Porfirian era reinforced these stereotyped gender roles as government and societal concerns over moral degeneracy increased the promotion of traditional gender roles and the cult of domesticity within the Mexican north. The vision of the mother continued to be contrasted with that of the prostitute, creating a female dichotomy of sexual purity, submission and docility on one side and illegality, immorality, sexuality and female autonomy on the other.<sup>55</sup> Ideas regarding proper gender behaviour influenced American discourse from the revolution as authors focused on sexual purity, honour and race when reporting cases of sexual assault and rape.

The reportage of rape and sexual assault against women in Mexico during the revolution was first and foremost premised on their sexual purity preceding the attack. Women who conformed to the traditional ideals of pure, innocent virgin or dutiful mother were often the focus of any discussion of rape. The American consular officer in Mexico City revealed his shock over the murder of a family friend, who he described as a “lovely

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<sup>53</sup> Alonso, *Thread of Blood*, 96. Class standing added to the racial subordination of indigenous peoples within the gendered hierarchy. Steve Stern, 15. Marriages between rapist and victim (when unwed and a virgin) were often the outcome of legal battles and family action against rapists. Through marriage, a rape victim could cover up the loss of her virginity, therefore keeping her honour. The loss of honour linked to rape stood as a major deterrent to reportage of the event. Lipsett-Rivera, “Slap in the Face of Honour,” 194.

<sup>54</sup> Alonso, *Thread of Blood*, 86-87.

<sup>55</sup> William French discusses this relationship in Chihuahua through the image of the mother as a guardian angel, representing “stability, virtue, and progress” while the prostitute “embodied luxury, idleness, immorality and criminality.” *A Peaceful and Working People*, 106. The oppositional relationship that developed out of these two images of female gender roles fostered and reinforced public expectations of female relegation to the domestic sphere.



Mexican girl.”<sup>56</sup> As the rapes of “honest maids” continued across the country,<sup>57</sup> the fear of sexual violence and its links to shame and humiliation surface as reports and testimonies focus on the importance of sexual purity—at all costs. An article written by Theodore Roosevelt and published in the *New York Times* included excerpts from testimonies given by priests concerning events in northern Mexico. The article included the story of an innocent and pious young girl who “asks her pastor whether she is permitted to commit suicide in order to avoid the outrages to which so many hundreds of Mexican women, so many scores of nuns, have been exposed in the last few months.”<sup>58</sup>

Indeed, one of the most controversial subjects to American government officials—which a large segment of the discourse addresses—was the rape of nuns. Nuns represented the epitome of female virtue: a vow of lifelong celibacy. The “violation” of nuns was an oft-repeated concern for church and government officials while the Department of State investigated rumours of sexual assault on nuns in northern Mexico.

Letters, telegrams and dispatches regarding the rape of nuns received wider distribution and more criticism from American citizens than any other example of violence against women.<sup>59</sup> Claims regarding the violation of nuns met with denunciations from religious organizations and official disclaimers from Catholic representatives denying the validity of testimonies. Rumours of sexually assaulted nuns became another argument for American intervention: “Religious women, whose lives have been

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<sup>56</sup> Parker to Secretary of State William Bryan Jennings, September 29, 1915, Mexico City, 812.48/2911, roll 158.

<sup>57</sup> Private and Confidential Letter from Mexican Archbishop to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, March 12, 1915, 812.404/97, roll 144.

<sup>58</sup> *New York Times*, December 6, 1914, Our Responsibility in Mexico by Theodore Roosevelt, p.SM1.

<sup>59</sup> Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan to Brazilian Minister, January 26, 1915, 812.404/41, roll 144.

consecrated to the practice of every form of Christian charity were subjected to what is worse than death, to the brutal lust of an inhuman soldiery.”<sup>60</sup>

Attacks on nuns repeatedly asserted that the rapes themselves occurred in the north, connecting many reported sexual assaults to the borderlands zone. Attributed most often to Pancho Villa’s army, witnesses stated that nuns fled from further sexual victimization either north to the United States or south to Mexico City.<sup>61</sup> In one example, the American Consul in Chihuahua reported the abduction and holding of a “young and handsome” nun by Rodolfo Fierro, “notorious as a ruthless murderer, who is Villa’s most intimate friend and inseparable companion.”<sup>62</sup> The image of the pious nun is juxtaposed with that of the evil and murderous villain, creating a pattern that associates Mexican soldiers with “savagery.”<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, the author notes that while he has no direct evidence that the kidnapping and rape of this nun took place, persistent rumours regarding the rape of nuns seemed to imply that it did, as “it is herein noted with the remark that similar acts affecting persons other than nuns have recently occurred, and

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<sup>60</sup> Letter from the American Federation of Catholic Societies to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, September 29, 1914, 812.404/13, roll 43. Theodore Roosevelt also used the rape of nuns and other worthy women to attack Woodrow Wilson’s non-interventionist policies, *New York Times*, December 6, 1914, Our Responsibility in Mexico, p.SM1.

<sup>61</sup> F.C. Kelley, President of the Catholic Church Extension Society to Robert Lansing and Secretary of State, December 15, 1915, Extract from the sworn statement of Sister Elisa Maria del Salvador, 812.404/110, p. 5, 7, roll 144; American Consul Fletcher, Chihuahua, Mexico to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, January 26, 1915, p.6, 812.404/52, roll 144; Consular Silliman, Mexico City to Secretary of State, November 7, 1914, 812.48/1923, roll 156.

<sup>62</sup> 812.404/52, p.6, roll 144.

<sup>63</sup> 812.404/97, roll 144.

under present conditions the story does not appear particularly remarkable or extraordinary.”<sup>64</sup>

Reports regarding women deemed “unworthy” or “indecent” describe events but do not seem to express concern over their experiences. Violence against prostitutes was not seen as worthy of investigation. In May 1920, Colonel Garcia “shot repeatedly and immediately killed a prostitute” because she declared “Viva el General Esperanza” in his presence. While General Esperanza wanted to shoot Garcia, other military officers within the area held Garcia in prison for a day and then released him.<sup>65</sup> The point at issue within this report was the reason for the homicide, not the homicide itself: General Esperanza reacted angrily over the lack of loyalty by Garcia, not the shooting of a prostitute.

Similarly, reports about *soldaderas* often reveal no interest in or outright disgust over the behaviour of women within the revolutionary armies. With the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution many women pushed for greater equality within Mexican society, gaining independence or autonomy through participation within revolutionary movements. Each of the revolutionary armies contained an informal contingent of camp-followers, referred to as *soldaderas*. While public imagery often equates *soldaderas* to either romantic figures caught within the Revolution because of adoration, love and loyalty or as women of loose morals taking advantage of the situation through

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<sup>64</sup> 812.404/52, p.6, roll 144. Many of the witnesses declared that they met or talked to pregnant nuns. As is exemplified by Letter to L.J. Canova about Sister Margaret Semple, February 2, 1915, 812.404/114, roll 144 and *New York Times*, December 6, 1914, Our Responsibility in Mexico by Theodore Roosevelt, p.SM1 it was always assumed that nuns would not have had consensual sex, therefore the pregnancies resulted from rape. Dropping charges of rape in either the United States or Mexico often required no more than to insinuate that a woman had sexual relationships prior to the attack. Pamela Scully, “Rape, Race and Colonial Structure: The Sexual Politics of Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony, South America,” in *The American Historical Review* 100(2) (April 1995), 345. As such, chaste nuns represented the ultimate victim as their sexual purity was taken as fact while their pregnancy proved their attacks occurred.

<sup>65</sup> Lloyd Burlingham, Consul in Salina Cruz, Mexico to Secretary of State, June 29, 1910, p.1, 812.108/8, roll 106.

prostitution, contemporary research shows that few *soldaderas* joined the revolutionary movement for these reasons. They joined instead because their men had joined or because they were abducted and raped by soldiers, forcing them to choose between returning home in dishonour, remaining with one's captor or finding work within the army system.<sup>66</sup> Women cooked, cleaned, foraged for food, nursed the sick and wounded, gave birth, spied, ran arms and armaments across the border and joined in full combat.<sup>67</sup> The patriarchal system which existed before the 1910s continued to function throughout the revolution, creating a situation where men's expectations of domestic service and obedience followed them into battle as women's roles generally conformed to domestic work and the support of their men.

Many letters to the Department of State condemned *soldaderas* as immoral, degenerate and reflective of all the wrongs at work within Mexico. Judgments passed on the *soldaderas* assumed that their participation within the revolution rested on their own decisions, ignoring the fact that "many were abducted and kidnapped by individual soldiers or forced by federal press gangs...many women with the Villistas were not willing."<sup>68</sup> Female association with a revolutionary army or its camp contingent marked a

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<sup>66</sup> Carlos Monsivais, "Foreword: When Gender Can't be Seen Amidst the Symbols: Women and the Mexican Revolution," in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*. Eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan and Gabriela Cano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 8; Many women followed their men into military service because remaining unprotected within their homes would most likely lead to abduction and rape by soldiers or sexual advances by community members. Katherine Bliss, *Compromised Positions: Prostitution, Public Health, and Gender Politics in Revolutionary Mexico City* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2001), 73.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Salas, "The Soldadera in the Mexican Revolution: War and Men's Illusions," in *Women of the Mexican Countryside, 1850-1990*. Eds. Heather Fowler-Salamini and Mary Kay Vaughan (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1994), 96-97.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 95. On April 20, 1914, the American Consulate in Progreso Mexico reported both voluntary and forced recruitment of women into the *soldaderas* unit of Victoriano Huerta. When the niece of a former Governor of Yucatan, Oligario Molina, voluntarily left home with a Federal army General: "it aroused great local scandal and the proletariat apparently believe...that this is only the first attempt of the Huerta army to take women away from their homes to supply prostitutes to the troops." American Consulate in Progreso, Mexico, April 20, 1914 to Secretary of State, 812.48/1238, roll 154.

woman's body as "free" and "open" to all, without acknowledgement of many women's coerced involvement.

The acceptance and military use of women within the Mexican Revolution distressed many foreign witnesses. Reports to the Department of State often focused on the absolute immorality and "un-cleanliness" of the women involved in the revolution or with revolutionary soldiers. Filled with moral outrage, telegrams often discussed sexual relationships between soldiers and *soldaderas* and the foraging activities of the camp-followers, equating *soldaderas* to prostitutes and thieves:

It is a mass of human bodies; women...bathe themselves in view of all...The most shameless troops with their women and horses took possession of the beautiful garden of the nuns. The women camp-followers afterwards entered the sleeping apartments of the sisters and stole the clothes of the sisters and their pupils. They dressed themselves up in these or sold the finest clothes and furniture for a pittance and destroyed what they could not use or sell...On the floor below were lodged troops and on that above the officers and some shameless women...There is plenty of liberty in Mexico for the association of prostitutes.<sup>69</sup>

Disgust and distress over the sexual "impropriety" of the *soldaderas* often accompanied descriptions of their behaviour within churches and convents, juxtaposing images of sinful and degenerate camp-followers with pious nuns. The aforementioned report deals with the looting of a convent and catholic school, while the *New York Times* ran information stating that "churches and houses were sacked and confiscated and the soldiers and their women indulged in orgies before and around the alters."<sup>70</sup> Only one sympathetic document regarding *soldaderas* exists within this sample, associating camp-followers with rape. The testimony, included in a Red Cross report, stated that "there was not a girl of the lower class of the age of ten years and upward, who had not been violated

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<sup>69</sup> Report from Captain Roque Sandobal enclosed in letter to William Jennings Bryan, 812.404/22, roll 143.

<sup>70</sup> *New York Times*, December 6, 1914, Our Responsibility in Mexico by Theodore Roosevelt, p.SM1.

by the soldiers.”<sup>71</sup> While contemporary research—such as the work of Elizabeth Salas—demonstrates the fallacy of characterizing *soldaderas* as prostitutes, American discourse produced within the period represents *soldaderas* in only two ways: as rape victims or prostitutes.

Along with proper gender roles and conformity to proper “womanhood,” race and racial beliefs played an important role in the reportage and descriptions found in revolutionary rape discourses. In the cases of the aforementioned nuns, virtue ultimately trumped race as their attachment to the church was taken as evidence of their propriety and sexual innocence. American authors did not differentiate their ethnicities. For non-cloistered women, however, their “Mexican” race designated them as immoral or indecent in comparison to American or European women, whether they were of Spanish, *mestiza* or indigenous decent. American authors designated all women living in northern Mexico simply as “Mexican” unless they held American or European citizenship.

Discourses of rape are often racialized as “classic rape” discourse and “rape scares” extolled the importance of protecting the virtue of white women from non-white men.<sup>72</sup> While white women required protection, women of indigenous or African decent were seen as perpetually available. Dichotomous perceptions of the “desexualized” white woman versus the “primitive sexual slave” justified sexual assault on non-white

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<sup>71</sup> Letter from C.A. Devol in Fort Sam Houston, Texas to Dr. Edward Devine in New York, June 26, 1915, enclosed with letter to Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan and L.J. Canova from Mabel Boardman, Acting Chairman of the Red Cross, July 3, 1915, 812.48/2609, roll 157.

<sup>72</sup> Sherene Razack, “What is to be Gained by Looking White People in the Eye? Culture, Race and Gender in Cases of Sexual Violence,” in *Signs* 19(4), *Feminism and the Law* (Summer, 1994), 899; Carter, *Capturing Women*, 15; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Mind that Burns in Each Body: Women, Rape and Racial Violence,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*. Eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 334.

women.<sup>73</sup> As such, the race of a woman became the deciding factor in whether or not she had truly suffered rape and the level of outrage associated with her experience as her race distinguished her character as either “good” or “bad.”<sup>74</sup> Racial judgments regarding both the victims and perpetrators of rapes reflect American beliefs regarding acceptable sexual relationships. Specific references to the race of rapists indicated a focus on indigenous groups such as the Yaquis<sup>75</sup> but most reports focused on the race of the victims.

Reports of the abduction of Mexican women often expressed sympathy but also displayed an American assumption that Mexican women accepted the situation. The opposite is true of reports regarding white women. An article published in *The Sun* on August 8, 1915, included part of an interview with a Mexican refugee living in San Antonio, Texas. After the abduction of his two sisters by one of Villa’s captains, the man in question joined the Federal army in order to save his wife and children from the same fate. Included within the same article, however, is an interview with an Englishman who was “driven out of Mexico on the eve of his marriage to a beautiful girl of Dutch parentage. He has never heard from his fiancée and she is said to have died from shock

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<sup>73</sup> Laura Edwards, “Sexual Violence, Gender Reconstruction and the Extension of Patriarchy in Granville County, North Carolina,” in *North Carolina Historical Review* 68(3) (July, 1991), 237. Dowd Hall, “The Mind that Burns in Each Body,” 333. Lower class white women were often treated the same way as non-white women within both the community and legal system when attempting to prosecute a rapist. Edwards, “Sexual Violence,” 249; Carter, *Capturing Women*, 187. White women were designated as sexually pure and virtuous while all “other” races were automatically deemed deviant, inextricably tying female sexuality to race. Scully, “Rape, Race and Colonial Structure,” 358.

<sup>74</sup> Edwards, “Sexual Violence,” 243.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from American Consul E.M. Lawton in Nogales, Mexico to Secretary of State: Viewpoint of Mexican Army Officers in Sonora on European War and Sidelights on Yaqui Situation, based on the testimony of Harold S. Gay, a Hawaiian-American businessman of talks with General Arnulfo Gomez, Chief of Staff to Calles, *United States Department of State Records of the Department of State Relating to Political Relations Between the United States and Mexico, 1910-1929*, 711 series (Washington: The National Archives Microfilm Publications, 1960), 711.12/65, roll 2; Frederick Simpich, American Consul, Nogales, Mexico to Secretary of State, November 25, 1913, 812.48/885.

sustained by the horrible sights she witnessed during an orgy of bandits.”<sup>76</sup> The ultimate fate of the Mexican women is not included, but as the women survived the initial attack it is assumed they survived their abductions. The European woman, on the other hand, died from the shock of merely seeing “immoral” behaviour, proving her higher level of purity and moral superiority over non-white women. As the “the epitome of Victorian sexual sentimentalism,”<sup>77</sup> any besmirching of a white woman’s honour could result in death due to her vulnerability and purity.

The discourse pertaining to the rape of Mrs. Correll and the murder of her husband clearly demonstrates concern with both proper female roles and racial hierarchies. Mrs. Correll exemplifies the virtuous victim, while her attackers are designated as barbarous, both through their actions and their race. A letter from a neighbour describing the attack on the Corrells begins with the murder of John Correll, reporting that the group of men perpetrating the rape and murder were all Mexican and known within the area. Most interesting, however, is the insinuation that this attack occurred because of the race of the victim: “The men who raped Mrs. Correll did not do it to satisfy their lust particularly as there were other younger women of their own people more easily available. They wanted to rape her so that they could boast that they had raped an American woman.”<sup>78</sup> Mrs. Correll’s victimization is explained by her nationality and that of the perpetrators, ignoring the sexual component of rape. It also implies that

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<sup>76</sup> Buckley I, folder 9 document 123.4[b][1]part 1: clipping from *The Sun* 8-19-15: Once Wealthy Mexicans are now Poor Refugees: Even the Peons who earned Good Wages in the Mines are Starving in U.S. Bordertowns by Raymond G. Carroll.

<sup>77</sup> Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*, 42.

<sup>78</sup> Letter to Hon. N.J. Gould in Washington DC from the office of Jon I. Newell, July 30, 1919, Buckley II, Other Correspondence, Assorted, 1919, folder 12.



young Mexican women were always sexually available to the advances of Mexican men, regardless of the situation.

The Correll case became the perfect example for Americans arguing for intervention into the Revolution. The *New York Times* ran an article on August 3, 1919 that argued that the murder of John Correll and the rape of his wife stood for “hundreds of rapes and murders of Americans,” metaphorically linking the rape of women to the destruction of American businesses and oil companies in Northern Mexico.<sup>79</sup> While attempting to compile a comprehensive list of assaults against American peoples and properties during the Revolution, Boaz Long reported the attack as perpetrated by Mexican “bandits.”<sup>80</sup> All official reports regarding the Correll attack continued to represent the event as an attack on all Americans, as a warning of possible future actions.

Unofficial reports, never made public, present a different story. In her own personal testimony, Mrs. Correll told American officials that the group of men who raped her was led by a German.<sup>81</sup> Never released to the public, this is the only official document mentioning this testimony. The assault continued to be reported as an attack on Americans by Mexicans, exemplifying Mexican lawlessness and immorality. Mrs. Correll’s assertion that the murder and rape had been led by a white man did not conform to the representations given to the attack and events within Mexico as a whole by the American government and press.

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<sup>79</sup> *New York Times*, August 3, 1919, Propaganda and the Mexican Problem by Wallace Thompson, Formerly American Vice Consul at Monterey, Mexico, p.47.

<sup>80</sup> Further Report Compiled by Boaz Long for the Department of State, December 7, 1919, Draft, 711.12/228 ½, roll 3.

<sup>81</sup> Exhibit No. 1: A List of Americans Killed in Mexico Since 1911: submitted by Boaz Long with Memorandum 711.12/228½, 711.12/229½, roll 3.

The language used by various authors to depict or describe rape during this time period is fairly standardized, lacking in descriptive detail and direct testimony. Variations and differing usages of the words “violation” and “outrage” appear repetitively. These words are never defined with further description or explanation of events, although they are often accompanied by the term “assault.”<sup>82</sup> Ravishing or ravishment associated with female violation continued to suggest sexual assault without actual description.<sup>83</sup> More descriptive phrases such as “carnal appetites”<sup>84</sup>, “the brutal lust of an inhuman soldiery”<sup>85</sup> and “victims of the passions of the revolutionary soldiers”<sup>86</sup> supply a more visual image while refraining from actual explanations of events. The terminology used to discuss the abduction of women in the revolution continues this vague and non-descriptive pattern, employing verbs such as “stolen”<sup>87</sup>, “seizure”<sup>88</sup> and “taken away”<sup>89</sup>; equating women to property. In each of these examples, the verbs associated with the forcible kidnapping of

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<sup>82</sup> 812.404/41, roll 144; Private and Confidential letter from Mexican Archbishop to Secretary of State, hand delivered by Monseigneur Russell, March 12, 1915, p.2, 812.404/97, roll 144; April 22, 1915, letter to J. P. Tumulty, Secretary to the President, testimony of Catarina Stecker, signed Dec 6 1915, 812.404/113, roll144; 812.404/114, roll 144; Feb 1, 1916, letter from Jas. Brown Potter to William Bryan Jennings, 812.404/115, roll144; Feb 25, 1915 Secretary of State Memorandum from Division of Latin American Affairs, 812.404/128, roll 144; Jan. 22, 1915 Silliman to Secretary of State, 812.404/41, roll 144; Bryan to James Maher and House of Representatives, Jan 21, 1915, 812.404/30, roll144; 812.48/2609, roll 157; 812.48/2464, roll 157; Silliman (Mexico City) to Secretary of State, Nov 7, 1914, 812.48/1923, roll 156; *New York Times*, Aug 11, 1915, Last Appeal of Americans, p.4.

<sup>83</sup> “ravishing.” 812.48/885; Vic and Consul-Deputy in Guatemala City, Guatemala, May 5, 1914 to Secretary of State; Refugees from Mexico via Guatemala: “the woman in deplorable condition, having been repeatedly ravished by outlaws.” 812.48/1403, roll 155; James Maher to Bryan, Jan 12, 1915: “in reference to shooting of Catholic Priests and the ravishing of Nuns by Mexican Soldiers.” 812.404/30; “a girl was forcibly violated by one of the soldiers,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1914, Our Responsibility in Mexico by Theodore Roosevelt, p.SM1.

<sup>84</sup> From William Canada to Secretary of State, Veracruz, May 13, 1915: Decree of Governor of Veracruz on Self-Protection and Punishment of Criminal Offences in Rural Districts, C. Aguilar: 812.0441/4, roll 105.

<sup>85</sup> 812.404/13, roll143

<sup>86</sup> *New York Times*, Dec 6, 1914, Our Responsibility in Mexico by Theodore Roosevelt, p.SM1.

<sup>87</sup> 711.12/65, roll 2.

<sup>88</sup> From William P. Blocker to Secretary of State, June 1, 1921, Piedra Negras, Coahuila, 812.00B/13, roll 90.

<sup>89</sup> Buckley I, folder 9, doc 123.4[b][1] part 1: clipping from *The Sun* 8-19-15: Once Wealthy Mexicans are now Poor Refugees: Even the Peons who earned Good Wages in the Mines are Starving in U.S. Border Towns by Raymond G. Carroll.

women often link the loss of women to the loss of property or valuables. One document in fact discusses the “occupation” of a beautiful young nun by her captor<sup>90</sup>, strengthening the tie between female abduction and property theft or ownership.

The loss of honour and virtue is a central theme in rape discourse. The phrase “suffering indignities”<sup>91</sup> ties the loss of female dignity and honour to the victim’s rape as the expected code of female sexual purity is not maintained. Rape was also expressed as “an attack upon her honour”<sup>92</sup> or as an assault on “their vow of chastity.”<sup>93</sup> The word rape itself is noticeably absent from the reports and information being sent to the US Department of State from any region of Mexico. Rape is used often by journalists reporting to the US public or by American politicians regarding the positive aspects of active intervention but the word “rape” is used for its shock value, not in association with specific examples.<sup>94</sup> When used in reports from Mexico of sexual violence, the word “rape” is always either associated with American women or gang rapes. The attack and rape of Mrs. Correll is repeatedly referred to as a rape.<sup>95</sup> Her story conforms to both of the aforementioned requirements for the use of the term, as an American woman gang raped by a group of supposedly Mexican men. The only other document that actually used the word “rape” discussed the gang rapes of three young Mexican girls. Lloyd

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<sup>90</sup> [p. 6]. 812.404/52, roll 144.

<sup>91</sup> 812.48/1650, roll 155.

<sup>92</sup> Translation of a communication from Monsiegnur Antonio J. Paredes, Vicar General of Mexico to John R. Silliman, Special Representative of the Department of State, City of Mexico, Jan 22, 1915: enclosed with telegram from Silliman to department of state, 812.404/58, roll 144.

<sup>93</sup> 812.404/110, p.5, roll 144.

<sup>94</sup> *New York Times*, Feb 24, 1915, Two Ex-Presidents Speak, p.8; 812.48/432, roll 153. In both of these examples the word rape is associated with possible reasons for direct American intervention into the revolution. It is also implied within both documents that the rapes to be concerned about happened to American citizens, thus also conforming to concerns over race and rape within the Revolution.

<sup>95</sup> *New York Times*, Aug 3, 1919, Propaganda and the Mexican Problem by Wallace Thompson, Formerly American Vice Consul at Monterey, Mexico, p.47; Letter to Hon. N.J. Gould in Washington DC. From Office of Jon I. Newell, July 30, 1919, File: Buckley II, Other Correspondence, Assorted, 1919, folder 12; p.10-13, 711.12/228½, roll 3.

Burlingham, Consular Officer in Salina Cruz, reported that at the end of June, 1920 “a girl was seized and abused by about twenty soldiers, one after another, in the small park opposite the American Consulate. Two other cases of rape committed by soldiers are said to have recently occurred in this port.”<sup>96</sup> Continuous reference to rapists as revolutionary soldiers connects them to the revolutionary movement, presenting the revolution itself as unlawful and barbarous to an American audience. The terminology used to describe rapists “others” them in comparison to American authors: Mexican men stand for brutal, carnal, violent, primitive and illegal chaos while the white authors represent the civilization of the United States.

While the Mexican government changed hands a number of times in the 1910s, American authors writing home blamed the Mexican government for not taking action against violence against women. Discussions of the Correll case often pointed to a lack of governmental response to catch those responsible. The focus on the lack of a governmental or judicial response to attacks insinuates that the government is ultimately to blame for the violence, while also assuming that the government had the capacity to function during the revolutionary war in the same way it did during peace-time. Americans repeatedly expressed beliefs regarding the inability or unwillingness of the Mexican government to stop the violence, attributing many of the attacks to the army. Lloyd Burlingham, American Consul in Salina Cruz, wrote on June 29, 1920: “I am satisfied that no Mexican government, no matter how admirable its motives, can bring peace and order to this country...With an army continually violating the laws it should enforce, and committing a large proportion of the crimes of the country, no real

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<sup>96</sup> Lloyd Burlingham, Consul in Salina Cruz, Mexico to Secretary of State, June 29, 1920, p.2, 812.108/8, roll 106.

government is possible.”<sup>97</sup> American authors saw the Mexican government as emphasizing and increasing violence because of its lack of judicial response: “The almost unbelievable procedure of persecuting the innocent victim instead of prosecuting the criminals is indicative of the farcical methods adopted by Mexican tribunals and authorities.”<sup>98</sup>

### **The *Femicides* of Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua City<sup>99</sup>**

Throughout the Revolution, accounts of bandit armies swarming the country, wreaking havoc at every turn, spread to the American public. The association of Mexico with violence, laziness and untrustworthy-ness grew out of using these characteristics to explain the violence of the revolutionary movement. These national-ethnic characteristics have been perpetuated, creating a “sediment of reusable stereotypes”<sup>100</sup> associating Mexican-ness with barbarity, illegality, chaos and violence.

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<sup>97</sup> 812.108/8, roll 106.

<sup>98</sup> 711.12/228½, roll 3.

<sup>99</sup> The *femicides* in Chihuahua are often joined by sexual torture and mutilation, making it unnecessary to choose a specific definition of rape or sexual violence as official statements and investigations already mark the acts of violence as sexual in nature. Many of the victims were raped, as evidenced by vaginal and/or anal tearing. Sexual mutilation includes removal of breasts and nipples with either edged weapons or the teeth of the attacker, cutting, and signs of battery. It is evident in a number of the cases that victims were abused and tortured for weeks after their initial abduction. Contemporary law in Mexico prohibits rape—including spousal or marital rape—but it is still rarely taken to court. United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2007* (Washington: The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour), 9, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt.htm>. Sexual violence against women in Mexico has historically gone largely ignored unless accompanied with murder or extreme physical violence. This elevation of physical violence over sexual violence has not disappeared. The *femicides* of Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua City are first and foremost reported as murders, even though over one third of the victims suffered sexual assault, torture and sexual mutilation before being killed.

<sup>100</sup> Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 13.

Over time, academically oriented studies developed a culture of poverty thesis, portraying Mexican poverty as a familial cycle.<sup>101</sup> Poverty became a culture in and of itself, with community members doing nothing to break out of the cycle. American anthropologies presented violence as a cornerstone of Mexican life within this culture of poverty, whether within the home or the community. Both private and public violence became linked to American ideas of poverty. Violence was seen to permeate all aspects of life within Mexico, integral to gender roles and relationships between the sexes.<sup>102</sup> Domestic violence is in fact widespread and pervasive throughout Mexican society. The supposedly inherent “normalcy” of everyday violence included in anthropological works has furthered divisive American views of Mexico according to both modernity and race. Ethnicity became intertwined with both the production of and subjugation involved in violent acts. The culture of poverty thesis took further hold as the lack of modernity within Mexico was seen to be a repetitive trait between generations. While contemporary authors no longer subscribe to the culture of poverty thesis, it continues to influence thought on poverty and violence in Mexico. Just as Mexican poverty seemed to be perpetuating itself, so too is the violence and lack of modernity ascribed to the country today.

Pablo Vila argues that the “emplotment” of *Mexico as poverty* allows Americans, Mexicans and Mexican Americans living within the borderlands to construct a tautology of identity that hides or distorts the intricacies of social positioning within the border

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<sup>101</sup> Oscar Lewis, *Five Families* (New York: Basic Books, 1959). Poverty became synonymous with Mexico in the American mindset as authors such as Oscar Lewis began anthropological studies of urban areas.

<sup>102</sup> Ruth Behar’s *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story* 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003) is an anthropology that shows the “normalcy” of violence within both public and private life.

zone.<sup>103</sup> This emplotment creates a discourse that perpetuates national and ethnic discrimination by attributing poverty to Mexico, negating its existence within the United States and “therefore removed from [American] daily experience.”<sup>104</sup> Through the representation of Mexico as poor, violent, and wild, America presents itself as the modern and lawful opposite to Mexican chaos. Discussions of interpersonal violence in Mexico follow this pattern of identification as well, placing violence on the Mexican side of the border and negating violence against women as an American problem. This links the idea of a “culture of violence” with the already existent “culture of poverty” at work within discourse regarding Mexico.

Throughout the documentation regarding rape in the Revolution, U.S. authors link sexual violence to the Mexican “race” through language and racial stereotypes of Mexicans. Repetitive language suggests that the abduction and rape of any woman by a Mexican male is an expected action because of the “Mexican-ness” of both the rapist and the victim. This racial stereotype transitions to a cultural stereotype in documentation regarding present day Chihuahua where the “culture” of the Mexican government is blamed for the current situation.

Beginning in 1993 and continuing into the present, the *feminicides* of Ciudad Juarez spread to the City of Chihuahua in 2003. With unofficial numbers currently close to 500, the Chihuahuan *feminicides* are marked by poor and improper investigations, police negligence, and corruption. Victims have been blamed for their own murders with police and government officials tying their deaths to “loose morals” and “deviance.” A

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<sup>103</sup> Vila, “Narrative Identities,” 156. “The ‘all poverty is Mexican’ discourse on the American side of the border functions as a narrative plot around which many border inhabitants construct their ‘coherent’ identities. The primacy of this narrative theme determines how events are processed.” Ibid., 157.

<sup>104</sup> Vila, “Constructing Social Identities,” 1999, 84.

vast majority of the victims display similar personal characteristics and their murders are strikingly similar: kidnapped directly off the streets; tortured, raped and murdered before being dumped in desert graves, the majority of *feminicide* victims are between 10 years old and their late 20s. The women are generally petite with long, dark hair and dark skin.<sup>105</sup> Many of the women being targeted are also employees within the *maquiladora* sector. Amnesty International argues that “the physical and mental suffering of the victims indicates a form of violence based entirely on their domination and humiliation as young women.”<sup>106</sup> The term *feminicide* designates the murders as targeted hate crimes against women, perpetrated specifically because the victims are women. Amnesty International and the United Nations continue to express condemnation for the treatment of women in Mexico but the situation is not improving. Neither the Mexican government nor the *maquiladora* industry seems intent on protecting women.<sup>107</sup> My analysis of the United States Department of State human rights reports from 1999 to 2007 focuses on the way the *femicides* are discussed within these documents.

As diplomatic summaries of human rights abuses and the Mexican governmental response to these infringements over the course of one year, the Department of State *Country Reports on Human Rights* are posted publicly and focus on issues of government

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<sup>105</sup> Cynthia Bejarano, “Las Super Madres de Latino America: Transforming Motherhood and Houseskirts by Challenging Violence in Juarez, Mexico, Argentina and El Salvador,” in *Violence and the Body: Race, Gender and the State*. Ed. Arturo Aldama (Bloomington: Indiana University), 406. Diana Washington Valdez, *The Killing Fields, Harvest of Women: The Truth About Mexico’s Blood Border Legacy* (Burbank: Peace at the Border, 2006), 27.

<sup>106</sup> Amnesty International, “Intolerable Killings: Mexico: 10 Years of Abductions and Murder of Women in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua,” (August 2003), 12, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR41/026/2003/en/dom-AMR410262003en.pdf>. Amnesty International reports that victims suffered various types of violence, including rape, biting, beating, stabbing and mutilation. Over 70 percent of the *feminicide* victims died from strangulation or injuries inflicted during torture.

<sup>107</sup> For greater detail and information regarding the Ciudad Juarez *femicides*, reference Washington Valdez, Amnesty International’s “Intolerable Killings” and the UN’s “Ending the Brutal Cycle and Scapegoats of Juarez.”



responsibility in human rights infringements. As such, the language used within the reports themselves does not directly reveal information regarding the American view of events. Information regarding the *femicides* is included in sections discussing the justice system, government impunity, torture and women. The reports draw data from evidence compiled by NGO's, specifically the United Nations and Amnesty International, or media reports from both Mexico and the United States.

From 1999 to 2007 all of the reports state that while the Mexican government worked towards human rights standards, police and military forces throughout the country were characterized by widespread corruption and a lack of respect for human rights abuses.<sup>108</sup> While violence against women is noted as one of the continuing human rights problems facing Mexico, explicit reference to the Ciudad Juarez murders as a major human rights issue is not made within the introduction of a report until 2005 and specific detail of the murders is omitted.<sup>109</sup>

The continuous use of the term “culture”—never defined within the reports—works to present the problems associated with the *feminicides* as emblematic of Mexican society and cultural tradition. Repetitive reference to a “a deeply entrenched culture of impunity and corruption”<sup>110</sup> associates governmental corruption and human rights abuses with Mexican culture at large. The Mexican government, justice systems, security forces and elite citizens are repeatedly associated with corruption and impunity throughout the eight Human Rights reports that are publicly available. Comments such as “the wealthy and powerful generally benefit from impunity”<sup>111</sup> and rampant “corruption, inefficiency

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<sup>108</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports*, 1999-2007, 1.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 2005, 1.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 2006, 1. The phrase “culture of impunity” is also included on p. 1 of the 1999 and 2005 reports.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 1999, 8.

and a disregard for the law”<sup>112</sup> suggest that these levels of Mexican society are not promoting change or fighting violence within their country. These associations of violence to culture create an image of an ahistoric and unchanging Mexico, stuck within its chaotic past by asserting that all levels of society condone and promote violence. Lack of detail regarding these events remains a consistent characteristic of these reports as vague and generalized statements such as “There were numerous allegations of the use of excessive force and the violation of international humanitarian law”<sup>113</sup> make broad and sweeping accusations without further explanation. The US Department of State does not provide detailed accounts of the murders themselves or specific investigations. The focus stays on corruption, negligence, arrests and the use of torture by the police force to extract confessions.<sup>114</sup>

While there is no doubt that corruption, impunity and negligence have characterized the Chihuahua *feminicides*, the repeated association of these things with “culture” ultimately links them to Mexican society at large. Just as discourse created during the revolution assumed that being Mexican had something to do with incidents of

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 2000, 8.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 2000, 10.

<sup>114</sup> The 1999 report focuses on the case of Abdel Tarif Sharif. Arrested and convicted for one murder, Sharif received a sentence of 30 years in prison. While initially arguing that the state authorities were progressing in their investigations, the report goes on to state that Sharif was the only person convicted in connection to the *feminicides*, leaving 184 cases unsolved. Police incompetence and a lack of resources are stated as contributing factors to the low conviction rate and the regular use of torture by police and officials to obtain information demonstrated corruption and complicity to crime throughout the country. Ibid., 1999, 5-6. The 2001 report discusses four bus drivers, arrested and tortured into confessing to murdering women for Sharif while he was imprisoned, perpetuating the official stance presented in 1999 of blaming Sharif for all of the murders. The 2003 report spends significant time discussing the arrest, torture and subsequent confessions of Cynthia Kriecker and her husband Ulises Perzabal for the murder of 16-year-old Viviana Rayas in Chihuahua City. 2003, 7. It is noted in 2004 that inquests into allegations of torture met with direct interference by Chihuahuan authorities who blocked the PGR from performing medical and psychological exams but further detail is not provided. Garcia Uribe, held in custody for the cotton-field murders of November, 2001, was released on July 14, 2005 due to a lack of evidence and a positive finding of the use of torture to extract a confession. Ibid., 2005, 3.

sexual violence, links between corruption and culture in the case of contemporary Mexican society indicates to an American audience that the murders are *a Mexican event*, reflective of Mexican society as a whole instead of as the actions of a specific group of people. Sherene Razack argues that the attribution of violence to culture instead of exemplifying male domination perpetuates hierarchies of racial dominance, denying both racial and gender issues. Razack names this process of hiding issues of ethnic and gender domination behind a cultural argument as “culturalization,” creating an argument of cultural inferiority that exists along with overt arguments of biological racism. The “culturalization of rape” further subordinates non-white women, as culture is used to explain away the harm and significance of rape.<sup>115</sup> Referring to sexual violence as a cultural force or as an action stemming from structural and institutional violence removes responsibility for the individual choice to commit rape and silences protests against victimization. Using this cultural argument to rationalize rapes committed by non-white men against non-white women perpetuates racial stereotypes by marking both the perpetrator and victim as culturally inferior.<sup>116</sup> Women are further marginalized by arguments that rationalize and legitimate violence committed against them by men.

Initial references to the murders in the 1999 report connect the disappeared and murdered women to the *maquiladora* industry by stating that “Most of the victims were young women working in the in-bond export processing (*maquila*) sector.”<sup>117</sup> The connection between the victims and their workplaces is mentioned only in the 1999 and

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<sup>115</sup> Razack, “What is to be Gained,” 899.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 903.

<sup>117</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports*, 4.

2003 reports<sup>118</sup> and *maquiladora* responsibility for the women is not suggested. While Amnesty International explicitly states that the *maquiladora* industry should be held responsible for the safety of female workers in order to decrease violence against women in Ciudad Juarez, the Department of State reports do not suggest that the industry is in any way responsible for its workers.<sup>119</sup> The failure of the US government reports to link the murders directly to the *maquiladora* industry parallels the absence of a link to NAFTA and the border zone itself. This absence seems to imply an unwillingness on the part of the American government to associate the *feminicides* with a free trade zone and factory system that is economically beneficial to both the United States and American business owners, even though the Mexican women employed within these factories seem to be specifically targeted by the murderers.

While the Department of State reports present the murders in conjunction with information on human rights violations that occur along the border, such as human trafficking and child prostitution, the only suggested connection between the *feminicides* and the border zone appeared in 2006. The Unit of the Special Prosecutor for the Attention to Crimes Relating to the Homicides of Women in the Municipality of Juarez, Chihuahua concluded that 31.5 percent of the murders demonstrated connection to the social violence and issues associated with the border; notably drug dependency, drug trafficking, high rates of crime, gang violence, and prostitution.<sup>120</sup> A connection between the *feminicides* and the border zone or the *maquiladora* industry is not made in any of the

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<sup>118</sup> “A number of the missing or killed women were employed in ‘maquiladoras’ or assembly plants.” Ibid., 2003, 22.

<sup>119</sup> Amnesty International, “Intolerable Killings,” 33.

<sup>120</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports*, 2006, 11. From January 1 to August 31, 2000, 27 murders “with presumed or proven drug connections occurred in Ciudad Juarez, with numerous armed attacks taking place in public spaces throughout the city.” Ibid., 2000, 2.

other reports, even though references are made to narcotics related violence occurring along the borderline. In fact, the reports fail to link the violence in Ciudad Juarez or Chihuahua City to what other parts of the reports describe as the “general lawlessness”<sup>121</sup> of the narcotics business of the Mexican north. Every report discusses either the increasing rate or persistence of border violence related to narcotics trafficking, but this violence is never linked to the increased levels of violence against women in the area.

Contemporary gender roles continue to reflect historical gender roles in Mexico as concepts of *hombres* and *machos* continue to exist alongside *las mujeres abnegadas* and women continue to be subordinated within all levels of Mexican society.<sup>122</sup> Within Mexico, *machismo* represents the country’s historic past, constituting both “symbolic capital” and “national patrimony”, making it part of the “political economy of cultural values in Mexico.”<sup>123</sup> It is an image projected by both Mexicans and foreigners as a typical cultural value, a cultural mode of behaviour. The violent Mexican male dominating the submissive Mexican female becomes the visual image representative of Mexican gender relations. In the imagination of the United States, *machismo* alone designates Mexican masculinity.

Gender violence is repetitively described as widespread throughout the country in the human rights reports. Discussing gender and domestic violence for the country as a

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 2005, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Men dominate Mexican politics and civil services, receiving wages well above those given to women. Domestic abuse, sexual assault and family abandonment by men also all indicate that the sexual double standard associated with *machismo* and *marianismo* are still at work. Gutmann, *The Meanings of Macho*, 8-9.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 27. Both Gutmann and Jennifer Hirsch discuss changes to concepts and characteristics of Mexican masculinity, particularly the increased role of men within the home and in child rearing. Both assert that the combination of education, the feminist movement, increased need for dual incomes and changes to the notions of respect and honour have changed the roles that men choose to take part in within the domestic sphere, increasing women’s autonomy and participation in decision-making while significantly changing societal expectations of what it means to be a man.

whole in conjunction with the Chihuahua murders downplays the visible differences of the Chihuahua murders and suggests that the *feminicides* are merely an outgrowth of a violent national culture and patriarchal hierarchies instead of comprising a very specific situation. Statistically, what is happening in Ciudad Juarez and Chihuahua City is different than violence against women in other areas of the country. While domestic abuse is the fourth leading cause of death of women within Mexico as a whole, the College of the North American Border and the Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women in Ciudad Juarez found that of the 442 murders they analyzed, “28.5 percent were committed by a close male friend, boyfriend or spouse; 33.9 percent involved sexual violence, entailing kidnap, torture, mutilation and rape.”<sup>124</sup> Domestic violence accounts for almost a third of the Juarez murders, but not the majority. These statistics in and of themselves suggest that while domestic violence is a large factor in a number of murders, it is not the dominant form of abuse at work in relation to the *feminicides*.

The murders are never named as *feminicides* by the American government but they are referred to as “gender-based.” The Department of State reports began using the term “gender-based violence” in 2004, but made no effort to define the term. The only inference regarding the reasons for naming the violence in Ciudad Juarez as “gender-

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<sup>124</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports*, 2006, 11.

based” comes from the biological sex of the victims. Unlike Amnesty International, no analysis is applied to individual cases to exemplify how women are targeted.<sup>125</sup>

The US human rights reports state that “violence and discrimination against women, indigenous people, religious minorities, homosexuals, and individuals with HIV and AIDS persisted,”<sup>126</sup> lumping violence against women into a system of violence perpetrated against every individual outside the upper echelons of the patriarchal power system. The murders are often addressed along with other problems facing women in Mexico, such as domestic abuse and sexual assault, and women’s rights are repeatedly shown to be uneven. All eight reports state that domestic and sexual violence are widespread and consistently underreported, noting that programs aimed at countering pervasive—and normalized—domestic violence attempted to fight the view of “domestic violence as a private act,” linking it instead to the public sphere.<sup>127</sup> The “normalization” of domestic violence as a private act—and therefore outside the proper influence and

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<sup>125</sup> Amnesty International argues that the murders represent a specific pattern of gender-based violence because of a number of similarities in the cases of sexual murder. First and foremost, the victims are young, poor females. Almost 47 percent of victims fell between the ages of 13 and 22, two thirds working within the *maquiladora* sector, domestic work or attending school. Second, the murdered women demonstrate “a form of gender-based violence and sexual torture that goes beyond the act of rape recorded in over half of the cases involving sexual violence” evidenced through specific modes of torture: gagging, biting, bondage, mutilation, stabbing, beatings, strangulation and repeated rape during prolonged captivity. Amnesty International concluded that the mode of murder also indicated gender-based violence. In cases without sexual violence and in cases of domestic dispute, half of the murders involved firearms. In cases involving rape and sexual murder, however, statistics show that over 70 percent of the victims were strangled or beaten to death. These modes of murder exemplify direct interpersonal violence. Murderers were directly involved in killing their victims, requiring physical energy, exertion and a will to complete the violence. “Intolerable Killings,” 34.

<sup>126</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports*, 2001, 2

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 1999, 18. This statement is included in almost all of the reports, along with further information indicating beliefs that sexual and domestic violence were condoned within society at large. For example, attempted revisions to the State Penal Code of Chihuahua in August of 2001 “cut the minimum sentence of 4 years to 1 year if the offender could prove that the victim had provoked the attack.” 2001, p.30. In a state where women are being sexually tortured—including repeated rape and sexual mutilation—before being murdered and left in the desert, changes to the legal code placed blame directly on the victims themselves. Women were responsible for their own deaths, and attackers could argue this legally. Within a month the revisions were overturned by Chihuahua state legislators under pressure from human rights activists and the federal government.

range of the government or justice system—is noted within almost all of the Human Rights reports.

In one of the most insightful comments included in the Department of State reports, U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions, Asma Jahangir, states that “the limited progress in solving these murders was due to the fact that most of the victims were poor, young women.”<sup>128</sup> This statement is not examined further by the report. Instead of focusing on the potential reasons for government negligence and impunity regarding these murders—namely the connection between government response and the social positioning of the victims themselves—the Department of State reports focus on Mexican governmental response to public pressure and the implementation of changes. The aforementioned statement is followed in the reports with “However, police incompetence, prosecutorial ineptitude, and lack of investigative resources also hampered the investigation”<sup>129</sup> diminishing the important emphasis made by the UN that these women are purposely ignored by investigative authorities because of their gender and social position.

Terse statements regarding the *feminicides*, such as “the murders and rapes continued during the year”<sup>130</sup> fail to acknowledge the level of violence at work. Explicit examples are provided to demonstrate “a definite pattern of rape and sexual assault

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 1999, 5.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 2000, 6

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 2000, 18. The 2007 report, by far the least informative of all the reports regarding the *feminicides*, merely stated that “gender based violence in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, continued with 19 killings of women” before repeating that government efforts made no visible change to the violent treatment of women. 2007, 9.



against women”<sup>131</sup> within both the security forces and society at large. The Department of State reports refrain from linking this behaviour with the Ciudad Juarez murders, however, instead using them to exemplify reasons for citizen distrust of the police force. The 2005 and 2006 reports make the most effort to discuss the depth and scope of violence against women in Mexico, noting in their introductions the seriousness of societal violence against women.<sup>132</sup> It can be inferred from this statement that Mexican society is at fault for supporting, condoning and perpetuating violence against women by teaching violent behaviour.

The US State Department Human Rights reports make no attempt to hypothesize the reasons behind the murders. They also fail to adequately demonstrate known information regarding the murders, such as detailing how women are targeted for attack and the forms of violence inflicted on victims. The 2005 report presents a statement by UN Commissioner Yakin Erturk, that “impunity for sexual violence against women in the country was extensive” and cultural specificity is used to perpetrate and rationalize violence against indigenous women in Mexico, explaining away their experiences through arguments that present indigenous women as culturally inferior and inherently violent.<sup>133</sup> Again, this statement is not further expanded upon by the Department of State

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 2000, 6. The involvement of security forces in cases of sexual assault is exemplified in the 2001 report as two Ciudad Juarez officers were arrested and convicted of rape in December of 2000 and in July of 2000 “Chihuahua state judicial police arrested three soldiers for raping and beating a tourist.” 2001, 9. This is significantly more detailed than accounts of the *feminicides* as the only detail included in the reports regarding *feminicide* victims discusses “Airis Estrella Enriquez Pando, a seven-year-old girl who was raped and killed in May” of 2005, P.9. Four men were tried and sentenced for her murder in December of 2006. 2006, 10.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 2005, 2; I am not attempting to argue that violence against women is not a problem or that the Mexican government is not responsible in any way for the continued and prevalent assumptions regarding female inferiority and the justification of male violence towards women. The way in which these things are presented by the US Department of State, however—namely vague and generalized statements that indicate that all parts of Mexican society condone this violence—reflects an historic vision of Mexico as unlawful and chaotic.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 2005, 8.

reports. Failure to define “gender-based violence” and locate the violence within the borderlands region creates an image of *femicide* victims as Mexican women from all walks of life instead of representative of a targeted group. A clear majority of victims come from the lower-classes, are often indigenous, and represent a demographic within the borderlands milieu that are repeatedly taken advantage of and used by both governments. The continuous focus on the Mexican government, “widespread violence” and the country as a whole instead of demonstrating the connections between the Chihuahua murders and the specificities of the borderlands region leads the reader to understand the *femicides* as linked to Mexican culture and society in ways that negate the choice implicit and necessary for perpetrators to carry out these murders.

The language employed by the US Department of State within these Human Rights reports reflect negative images and opinions of Mexico and the Mexican government, continuing the noticeable pattern seen in the revolutionary discourse of associating violence against women in Mexico with the country and culture but in very different ways than the aforementioned documentation. The most detail given to events in Ciudad Juarez describes a “string of murders...[where] young women have been kidnapped, raped, strangled and their bodies dumped in the same areas of the desert.”<sup>134</sup> Phrases such as “inadequate,”<sup>135</sup> “a diminishing interest in a human rights agenda,”<sup>136</sup> and “ineffective and unsupportive responses by the authorities”<sup>137</sup> describe governmental and official response to the murders and victim’s families while statements such as “a public

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 2000, 6.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 2000, 18.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 2003, 2.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 2007, 9.

safety and law enforcement crisis”<sup>138</sup> describe the situation itself. Government efforts are characterized by corruption, impunity, negligence and disregard while also marked as lethargic and demonstrative of a “lack of interest.”<sup>139</sup> The use of this terminology does indicate to the reader that the Mexican government and officials have substantial responsibility concerning the lack of progress of the Chihuahua murders. This language also enforces, however, the lack of modernity within Mexico, further reinforcing the chaotic stereotype applied to Mexico.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 2003, 23.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 2002, 21.

## CONCLUSION: NORMALIZING MEXICAN VIOLENCE; OTHERING MEXICAN PEOPLE

The most obvious and overwhelming difference between the Mexican Revolution and the situation in contemporary Ciudad Juarez is the multiplicity of voices now being heard. Documentation from the Mexican Revolution conveys only the perspectives of American government and business owners. The Chihuahua murders, on the other hand, are the focus of both international and local NGO's, intergovernmental agencies, human rights activists, journalists and academics. Most authors dealing with the crisis are either caught up by the grizzly details or use their work to comment on worker's rights, pay and work conditions within the *maquiladoras*.<sup>140</sup> There are also those such as my own work, however, that attempt to understand how these murders are shaping the idea of Mexico—both within Mexico and the North American world.

Human rights groups, such as Amnesty International, assert that the women of Juarez are murdered for being *women*, which is the basis for terming the murders

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<sup>140</sup> Elizabeth Gonzalez, *The "Maquiladora Murders" of Ciudad Juarez: The Truths of Being Employed in a Maquiladora*. Master of Arts Thesis in Latin American and Iberian Studies (Santa Barbara: University of California, Sept. 2005), 37. Elizabeth Gonzalez' thesis connects increasing violence along the border with changes to traditional gender roles and patriarchy caused by increased globalization and female independence. The displacement of men within the labour system and the increased independence women gain through economic control of their earnings challenge traditional masculinity and male authority. Ibid., 12. Gonzalez determines that sexual violence, rape and murder are used as means to restore patriarchal control. Ibid., 49. The author also hypothesizes that the U.S. government is deliberately withholding aid in investigating the situation because of the economic advantages of NAFTA and the employment of women within the *maquiladoras*. Ibid., 10. Betzabe Avila Lopez and Lorena Orihuela Bobadilla write that the murders further negative stereotypes of women throughout Mexico, with each murder contributing to the devaluation of female life: "constatando una complicidad que ha continuando con la desvalorización de la vida de una mujer, de la vida humana." Betzabe Avila Lopez and Lorena Orihuela Bobadilla, "Significaciones imaginarias en torno a los asesinatos de mujeres en Ciudad Juárez," in *El Cotidiano* 19(121) (Sept-Oct 2003), 33. The article discusses multiple hypotheses about the murders themselves, as well as the indifference and impunity with which government officials have been treating the murders.

*feminicides*. Domestic violence rates do point towards this conclusion, with the highest levels of domestic violence in Mexico occurring in Ciudad Juarez. Beatings, stabbings and rapes committed by male partners or kin have increased within the timeframe of the *feminicides*.<sup>141</sup> The Secretary General of Amnesty International Irene Khan, informed President Fox in 2003 that the international human rights community viewed the *feminicides* as “emblematic of the violence against women and structural problems that undermine human rights protection in Mexico, particularly within the criminal justice system.”<sup>142</sup> Findings indicated both gender and racial discrimination in the treatment of the victims and their families by state authorities.<sup>143</sup> The failure to properly investigate the murders, insufficient effort on the part of police officials and “a lack of political will to deal with the situation” led Amnesty International to recommend numerous revisions and reforms to the legal system aimed at the condemnation of abductions and murders and the prevention of further violence.<sup>144</sup> *Intolerable Killings* focuses heavily on gender as integral to understanding these crimes, arguing that discrimination against women in all its forms needs to be addressed by the Mexican nation, the Chihuahuan state and the *maquiladora* industry. The majority of these recommendations have not been adopted.

With the end of the Revolution and the start of Prohibition in the United States, American racial and gender ideals marked Mexico as degenerate. A “fear and obsession with the prostitute” developed among the El Paso elite, carrying with it racial and cultural judgments.<sup>145</sup> This reputation has continued. Women working outside the home in Ciudad Juarez risk the stereotype of the “bad woman”—the prostitute—as they struggle

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<sup>141</sup> Nathan, “Work, Sex and Danger,” 30.

<sup>142</sup> AI, “Intolerable Killings,” 1.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>145</sup> Stern, “Buildings, Boundaries and Blood,” 65-66.

for autonomy in the “city of vice.” Female *maquiladora* workers are often equated with prostitutes, because of their employment and their city of residence.<sup>146</sup> The history of the Mexican frontier has added a racial element to this stereotype: those of European ancestry within the zone are viewed as the “proper” women, while those of *mestiza* or indigenous ancestry are labelled more negatively. Due to their social status and their racial heritage, these women are even more susceptible to the label of “prostitute”. Their race and employment mark them as “uncivilized” and without male protection they are easily labelled as “bad” women within a city known for prostitution.<sup>147</sup> The close association between the victims and *maquiladoras* has led scholar Pablo Vila to hypothesize that societal perceptions linking *maquiladora* workers to prostitution is creating a situation where the women are seen as disposable: “a discourse that equates *maquiladora* workers with prostitutes is a fertile terrain to construct narrative plots in which to kill a supposed prostitute does not have the same moral weight as killing a

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<sup>146</sup> Vila, *Border Identifications*, 12. This stereotype is predominant throughout Mexico and also to many immigrants to the border zone. Residents on either side of the border, regardless of where they originated from continue to connect Ciudad Juarez to vice and prostitution, making it difficult for women in Juarez “to construct a positive narrative identity.” *Ibid.*, 122. This is also a stereotype that is connected to the state’s promotion of the *maquiladora* program itself by saying that it would rescue women from prostitution: with its initialization many people believed—and continue to believe—that women went to work in the *maquiladoras* because they were prostitutes. Many people also believe that prostitution rings are run unofficially out of the *maquiladoras* by the workers and managers. Vila, “Gender and the Overlapping of Region,” 77. Rumours regarding “indiscriminate sex, venereal disease, and forced abortions among *maquiladora* workers are periodically reported by the cities’ tabloids” and many people within Ciudad Juarez argue that factory work has increased prostitution within the city. Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, *For We are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico’s Frontier* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 135. Women working within the *maquiladora* sector are also commonly physically assaulted and intimidated by male co-workers. Nathan, “Work, Sex and Danger,” 27.

<sup>147</sup> Norma Alarcon, “Chicana Feminism: In the Tracks of ‘the’ Native Woman,” in *cultural Studies* 4(3) (1990), 252-253.

female worker or woman in general.”<sup>148</sup> The Ciudad Juarez tourist industry, initially catering to Americans during Prohibition, continues to supply the same entertainment to American soldiers from the El Paso military base. The discourse surrounding the openness of the female body and the equation of either the *soldaderas* of the revolution or the *maquiladora* workers in contemporary Ciudad Juarez to a prostitute creates a situation where women become disposable within the borderlands imagination. This conception then works to justify or legitimate violence within the borderlands community, creating a situation where the class, race, behaviour and employment of a woman may be used to justify her victimization.<sup>149</sup>

Current Department of State reports regarding the murders in Northern Mexico argue that the Mexican government, its structure and the behaviour of its officials are to blame for the situation. Mexican culture and history, traditional gender roles, the Mexican economy, the impact of third wave feminism, basic societal structure and the multiple connections between the United States and Mexico within this zone are never examined in an in-depth way. As such, the cause of the murders seems to be attributed to the “nation” or the “sovereignty” through analyses focused on structural conflict theory<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Vila, *Border Identifications*, 13. This assumption has also impacted investigations into the murders. Early investigations demonstrated racial and class prejudice against the victims as missing persons reports were ignored and “police and the general public dismissed the victims as loose women or prostitutes.” Alexander Dawson, *First World Dreams: Mexico Since 1989* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing; London: Zed Books, 2006), 150.

<sup>149</sup> These assumptions are directly evident in the documentation from the Mexican Revolution but not in the Department of State reports concerning Ciudad Juarez. They explain, however, the ways in which the state of Chihuahua is investigating and reporting the murders. This has in turn impacted the information that the US Department of State has gathered, why they have followed the situation themselves as well as the explanation being given regarding the murders themselves.

<sup>150</sup> Structural Conflict Theory is a sociological theory of violence that argues that all levels of violence are interconnected—state, institutional and interpersonal—and that all examples of interpersonal violence are linked to institutional violence. While individuals choose to act violently, the acceptance or choices of violent behaviour available are due to institutional rules either punishing or ignoring levels of violence. Thus, interpersonal violence follows normative paths institutionalized by structural violence.

instead of to the individual actions of Mexican citizens. This is an exceptionally simplified analysis of violence. While it acknowledges the relationship between societal and political violence, it ignores the reasons and motivations behind violence along with the complex web of societal influences that promote violence without official influence.<sup>151</sup> The Mexican nation is presented as allowing the murders, therefore putting the blame for the situation on the Mexican government instead of individual perpetrators. Arguments based on racial biology have stopped, now replaced by a form of cultural fundamentalism that presents Mexican violence as inherent to Mexican culture instead of as a characteristic of Mexican racial biology. This is fundamentally damaging for two reasons: first, it promotes a form of cultural racism through “otherization” without recognizing that arguments of cultural fundamentalism further reinforce existing power structures and domination; second, it further victimizes victims of violence by denying the harm of their experiences.

Equating violence in Mexico to Mexican culture presents a form of cultural fundamentalism or “racism without race.” Scholars argue that cultural fundamentalism replaced overt biological racism with the end of the colonization era as ideas regarding the “insurmountability of cultural differences” replaced theories of biological

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Peter Iadicola and Anson Shupe, *Violence, Inequality, and Human Freedom* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 17.

<sup>151</sup> Caroline Moser argues that scholars need to “explore the relationships between armed conflict or political violence and other types of violence simultaneously occurring” in order to understand the full implications and reasons for societal violence. Moser, “The Gendered Continuum of Violence and Conflict: An Operational Framework,” in *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*. Eds. Caroline Moser and Fiona Clark (London: Zed Books, 2001), 33. Moser also argues that theoretical understandings of violence are currently limited: “Circumstances relating to the individual, the family, the community, and the broader national context all play a role in violence...It highlights the fact that no single causal level in itself determines violence, but that each, when combined with one or more additional variables, may yield a situation where violence occurs.” *Ibid.*, 39. Compartmentalized understandings of violence “perpetuate fragmented understandings of violence” and limit human rights advancements.



inheritance.<sup>152</sup> This new racism replaces “race” as a visual marker with judgments based on cultural differences. Contemporary Department of State reports use general descriptions such as “widespread” to indicate that corruption and impunity have become ingrained within the political and governing system, and by extension Mexican society as a whole. This argument is associated with a lack of progress against violence in the Mexican Revolution as well, where the government’s inability to stop violence was used to propose an unwillingness to stop it. In the 1910s violence against women was argued as stemming from the racial heritage of perpetrators of the violence and the Mexican governments reactions to it, while current associations place violence against women within the realm of “culture” instead of race. This remains an argument that differentiates Mexicans from Americans. The exclusionary process of cultural fundamentalism defines the legitimate national community while continuing to promote segregation for those who are different<sup>153</sup>, ultimately working to define the national, the citizen and the sovereign in opposition to the alien, the other. With race subsumed under the heading of culture, culture works with class and gender to perpetuate existing power structures as culture

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<sup>152</sup> Etienne Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991), 21. Cultural fundamentalism is the name given this theory by Verena Stolcke and Marisol De la Cadena, while Paul Gilroy refers to the new racism and Balibar calls it both neo-racism and racism without race.

<sup>153</sup> Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*. Classic Edition (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 45. Stolcke states that cultural fundamentalism works to thematize “relations between cultures by reifying cultural boundaries and difference” instead of relying on arguments of national superiority. Stolcke, “Talking Culture,” 12. John Comaroff furthers this idea by arguing that this exclusion is then used to define “we-them” relationships: otherization is both the consequence and the reason for the cultural distinction. “Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice and the Signs of Inequality,” in *Ethnos* 52(3-4) (1987), 309. Balibar argues that “racism without race” uses history and anthropology to legitimate exclusionary policies by inscribing racism into representations and discourse of cultural “otherness.” “Is There a Neo-Racism?” 16-17.

becomes construed as natural and unchanging.<sup>154</sup> The continued representation of the “other” through cultural differences perpetuates closed communities as culture maintains the distance between dominant and subordinated groups. Attributing violence in Mexico to a “culture of violence” or a “culture of poverty” represents Mexicans and Mexican-ness as inherently violent and unable to change. Working directly in opposition to American modernity, cultural fundamentalism along the US-Mexican border perpetuates inequality and ideas of racial and national superiority as human rights abuses within Mexico become “natural” and normalized.

Arguments based on cultural fundamentalism are extremely dangerous for this reason. This attitude is bolstered by the *maquiladora* industry’s refusal to view the murders as linked to factory work. The association of *maquiladora* workers with prostitution, the representation of Ciudad Juarez as a “city of vice” and the assumed connection between “Mexican-ness” and violence combine to blame the victims instead of the perpetrators. The murders are explained away as merely part of the culture of northern Mexico and Ciudad Juarez. This argument lets *maquiladoras* off the hook for creating and maintaining a place of employment where women are targeted for sexual murder without consequence, while subsequently reinforcing a societal attitude marking the women themselves as disposable and increasing the acceptability of their

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<sup>154</sup> De la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizas*, p.27. Stolcke, “Is Sex to Gender as Race is to Ethnicity?” in *Gendered Anthropology*, ed. Teresa del Valle (London: Routledge, 1993), 20. Comaroff argues that attributing “natural” characteristics to ethnicity transforms it into a societal “principle,” continuously perpetuated by various factors. Comaroff, “Of Totemism and Ethnicity,” 313. Balibar also presents the danger of “nature” in association with culture and ethnicity, which can “function as a way of locking individuals and groups a priori into a geneology, into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin.” Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” 22. The naturalization of cultural differences in fact enhances class and gender inequality as they become “construed and legitimized by rooting them in the assumed biological ‘facts’ of race and sex differences.” Stolcke, “Is Sex to Gender,” 30.

victimization. The women become “victims of their own culture” and representative of “Mexican cultural violence, jealous machismo and female sexuality.”<sup>155</sup>

American official discourse within both the Mexican Revolution and contemporary Chihuahua construct an image of violent sexuality, and ultimately sexually violent masculinity, as a symbol of “Mexican-ness” and a culture of violence. As discourse both produces and is produced by societal belief systems; constructs and is constructed by power relations; and demonstrates levels of subjugation between gender, race and class, it can be used to discuss American representations of Mexican culture through violence.<sup>156</sup> American discourses of Mexican violence normalize violence against women by inferring that violence is inherently part of Mexican culture. As the aforementioned case studies demonstrate, these ideas are by no means stable and permanent. Discourses are constantly changing and shaped by the historical specificities of the time of their production.<sup>157</sup> Concern over violence is most dominant within the borderlands of northern Mexico and the southern United States as American society is forced to face its fears of cultural contamination and illegality through cross-cultural mixing, narcotics trafficking, illegal movement and, now, *feminicide*. The otherization of Mexico through arguments based on violence against women within these two time

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<sup>155</sup> Melissa Wright, “The Dialects of Still Life: Murder, Women and Maquiladoras,” in *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands: A Reader*, eds. Denise Segura and Patricia Zavella (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 199-200.

<sup>156</sup> Pablo Vila writes that “the knowledge that circulates in discourse is employed in everyday interactions in relations of submission and domination...each label in our classification system is loaded with ‘information’ about the occupants of that position, information that we take for granted and that shapes our encounters with the Other...We can only know the Other through description and thus through the narratives and classificatory systems that, being part of the battle for meaning, are available within a particular cultural context.” “Narrative Identities,” 152.

<sup>157</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (London: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1989), 5; Discourse analysis becomes “the analysis of a multiple and mobile field of force relations, wherein far-reaching, but never completely stable, effects of domination are produced.” Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 102.

periods works to continue the subordination of Mexico to the United States. Mexico remains trapped within its past, exemplifying violent chaos and lack of modernity to an American audience. This in turn further subordinates women within the borderlands zone as their victimization is—and has historically been—rationalized by either their race or their culture, normalizing their experiences and making it even more difficult to fight against the violence that is currently taking place.

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