

VOCES CON ECO: CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS OF THE CIUDAD JUÁREZ
FEMICIDES

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the nearly 600 known girls and women who have lost their lives to misogynist oppression along the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border and to the countless who have yet to be found. May you not be forgotten.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis provides an interdisciplinary and comparative analysis of the role of the female investigative characters in four cultural productions that center on the femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico: *Bordertown* (2007), directed by Gregory Nava; *El Traspatio* (2009), directed by Carlos Carrera; *Señorita Extraviada* (2001), directed by Lourdes Portillo and *Desert Blood* (2005), written by Alicia Gaspar de Alba. The author offers a history of the factual findings and investigations of the murders in Juárez as a means of introduction to the material that serves as the backbone of each work. This thesis presents an original and unprecedented analysis in its comparison of the female investigative characters in works surrounding the Juárez femicides. It argues that the female investigative characters in these works experience a renewal of their gender, sexual and cultural identities that enables them to identify with the femicide victims. Additionally, they overcome the patriarchal and misogynist mindsets of the border culture of Juárez and extend their independent investigations to collective efforts with

activists and families of femicide victims. The author of this thesis provides a thorough explanation of the patriarchal and machismo mentalities that shape the border society of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, as well as real-life and fictionalized accounts of people who have overcome those social barriers to contend on behalf of the dignity of the female members of that society.

INTRODUCTION

PRIMARY ANALYSIS

In this thesis, I analyze the individual and collaborative roles of the female investigative characters in two feature films, one documentary and one novel that center on the femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico: *Bordertown* (2007), directed by Gregory Nava; *El Traspatio* (2009), directed by Carlos Carrera; *Señorita Extraviada* (2001), directed by Lourdes Portillo and *Desert Blood* (2005), written by Alicia Gaspar de Alba. These cultural productions provide both fictionalized and authentic accounts of the Juárez femicides, the torture and murder of women and girls that has knowingly plagued this U.S.-Mexico border town since the early 1990s. Within each of the four works on which I focus my study, the female investigators identify with the femicide victims and their families via a renewed awareness of their identities as women with a Mexican heritage, and they couple their investigations with male and female activists in an endeavor to seek justice on behalf of those devastated by misogynist crime along the border. Before studying these specific works, however, I find it necessary to provide context of the various forms of art that have been created to increase public awareness of the Juárez femicides and the activist purpose that they fulfill.

CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS: LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTIVISM

The Juárez femicides have caused an increase in activism, most notably on the part of individuals who think creatively and utilize their skills and talents to make the world aware of the injustice that is taking place. There is a growing movement of artists, writers and media specialists who educate the public in the Juárez murders by means of cultural productions such as songs, poems, novels, plays, art and photography. Jessica Choquette argues in her Master's thesis on media framing in the Juárez killings that the Juárez media "voyeurize" the findings, making their information absolutely futile since it does not depict the truth. According to Choquette, only the media can accurately and effectively educate the public because they reach a multigenerational demographic (Choquette). The arts have been known to draw diverse audiences worldwide, which is why they serve as a pivotal tool in making as many people as possible aware of social injustice. Art exhibitions have been hosted throughout the United States, such as the project "400 Women," in which two hundred artists each displayed a portrait of one of the Juárez victims (Berenice). Theatrical coordinator Christina Marín tells of her experience in producing a play on the Juárez femicides. She claims that through theatrical adaptation of actual occurrences, she "reached into the audience and brought these atrocities to light" (Marín). She received quite an uproar from some audience members due to the explicit and haunting rape scenes. However, Marín continued showing the production for the sake of the victims because she, as she words it, "had to make an attempt to give them back their voices" (Marín). Steven S. Volk and Marian E. Schlotterbeck examine a song by Chicano band Los Tigres del Norte, a novel by Mexican author Carlos Fuentes and photojournalism by Ciudad Juárez native Julián Cardona

(Volk 125). Though these works emphasize different aspects of the Juárez femicides, they all agree that the crimes root from the patriarchal machismo system that dominates the culture and that the killings must be stopped (Volk 125). Whereas Cardona's photos depict mainly the lives of maquiladora workers, Fuentes' *La frontera de cristal* covers the entire border city aspect, from the factories to erotic night life to the rundown colonias. The Mexican rock music of Los Tigres del Norte touches on a wider range of Juárez society, as does Fuentes' work (Volk 132-142). Novelists have assumed one of the most noted attempts to creatively enlighten the public on the murders. Roberto Bolaño transformed facts of the Juárez femicides into a fictional account related in his novel *2666* (2004). Though the exact names and details given cannot be verified when compared with actual records, they are based on real findings. Thus, Bolaño finds a way to make the reader aware of the happenings in Juárez while not presenting an exhaustive list of reported findings. In her book *Las hijas de Juárez: un auténtico relato de asesinatos en serie al sur de la frontera* (2007), Teresa Rodríguez, with the help of Diana Montané and Lisa Pulitzer, weaves together journalistic accounts of victims' testimonies with a narrative style that disguises the book as a work of fiction. Relating stories gathered in personal interviews and research conducted in Ciudad Juárez, the authors provide actual accounts of victims, victims' families and groups linked to the crimes, starting in 1993 and ending in 2007 (Messmer par. 5). Such authors have innovatively employed their skills so as to draw a diverse audience to the facts surrounding the murders. Education by means of the arts has also made its way into the film industry. Among the feature films and documentaries produced on the Juárez femicides is *The*

Virgin of Juárez, which tells the fictional account of a female reporter who becomes an advocate for a survivor of an attempted femicide while investigating the murders in Juárez (*The Virgin of Juárez*). This film stands out from other productions by emphasizing the religious customs of the indigenous people who migrate to the city from the southern regions of Mexico. Pretentious attitudes toward such beliefs have often caused people to disregard the testimony of indigenous victims as “illogical” and “fanatical” (Mata par. 4) All of these cultural productions have paved the way for artistic cries for justice to be heard in varying realms of influence. They, as well as other forms of social expression, have allowed the public to experience the plight of the victims by imagining, hearing, feeling and seeing the brutal acts played out before them.

FOCUS OF ANALYSIS: THREE FILMS AND A NOVEL

The forthcoming analysis of this thesis centers on *Bordertown*, *El Traspatio*, *Señorita Extraviada* and *Desert Blood*. Each of these works sheds light into the Juárez femicides from a specific angle, presenting different theories through which to tell the same story. When viewed as a collection of efforts to educate the public on the Juárez murders, the positions taken by each work join with the others to form one complete message: the killings are real and must be stopped.

Bordertown portrays the maquiladoras as the main perpetrator in the Juárez femicides. The film centers on Lauren, an American female reporter with a Mexican heritage who is sent on assignment to investigate the murders in Juárez. During her investigation, she takes under her wing Eva, a teenage girl who has survived a brutal

attack in the desert. Though Lauren's investigation covers other cases of femicide in the city, the mystery involving those other cases becomes wrapped up in her search for those guilty in the rape and attempted murder of Eva. In other words, the film tells the general story of the countless femicide victims through the account of one character. Employing a base storyline and symbolic characters, *Bordertown* successfully portrays NAFTA, the maquiladoras and economic-political ties as the culprits behind the Juárez murders.

El Traspasio follows the same storyline pattern of a female investigator endeavoring to solve the great mystery of who is killing the women of Juárez. This film takes a slightly different turn than *Bordertown*, portraying the female investigative voice as a Mexican detective who follows the cases of multiple victims instead of focusing on one victim's experience. In the film, Blanca Bravo is a female detective who encounters extreme gender-based tension with her fellow police officials. Through her experience, bribery, the lack of equipment and an overall apathetic attitude are exposed within the male sector of the police department of Juárez, coinciding with evidence found concerning the Juárez authorities. The film also allows the viewer a deep look into the status that the government holds with economic investors. The film blames mainly the corrupt authorities and government for allowing the crimes to occur in order to maintain peace and personal gain.

Señorita Extraviada offers a view of the Juárez femicides entirely distinct from the view of the other films in that its content is completely real. As a documentary, its images, footage and interviews leave little room for cinematic interpretation. The people who lend their voices to the film are actual individuals affected by the crimes, not actors

endeavoring to identify with those suffering in Ciudad Juárez. Director Lourdes Portillo brilliantly connects the viewers to the victims by showing photo upon photo of femicide victims and newspaper headings describing their disappearance and murder. Her interviews with government officials, activists, abuse victims and family members of murdered women elucidate the situation by revealing what these people have endured. As Debbie Nathan affirms in her article “Missing the Story,” Portillo “naturally presents the crisis from their point of view” (Nathan). Portillo’s haunting interview with a woman held captive and abused by the police, as well as the account of a desperate father finding no support from the authorities regarding his daughter’s death, expose the manipulation by the authorities discussed by scholars and experts in the study of these killings.

Desert Blood adapts a bit more all-inclusive approach to its representation of the murders, providing a clever explanation of the various “whodunit” theories through a plot of mystery and suspense. In this novel, we see it all – rapists, abusive maquiladora management, the Egyptian chemist, snuff pornographers, corrupt authorities and Satanists. Yet, author Gaspar de Alba portrays the maquiladora industry, Border Control authorities and snuff filmmakers as the leading agents in the crimes against the women of Juárez. In her novel, Ivon, a native of the El Paso-Juárez border, returns to her hometown to adopt a baby. The murder of the baby and his mother launches Ivon into an unforeseen investigation of the Juárez murders which heightens after her own sister disappears. Utilizing her experience in research as an academic, Ivon teams up with other activists to determine the motives behind the murders and to find both the perpetrators and her sister. Gaspar de Alba acutely defends major theories surrounding the findings and the

responsibility of those involved through a gripping plot that captures the readers' attention and engages them with devastating details that reflect real life in modern-day Ciudad Juárez.

REASONS FOR THIS TOPIC: A PERSONAL BESEECH

The element of activism influenced my selection of this topic for my thesis. The written word is one of the most effective tools available, as it remains throughout time (Havenner par. 3). Therefore, I found my thesis to be an ideal platform from which to raise awareness of the Juárez femicides. I chose to research the Juárez femicides for the same reason that justifies the use of a female investigator in these works: personal identification with the victims. Though I am neither Mexican nor the targeted “poor, brown female” of the murders in Ciudad Juárez (Gaspar de Alba, “Poor Brown Female” 63), as a woman I stand as a target to misogynist terror. I identify with the women of Juárez as a potential target of macho oppression. As Lauren states in *Bordertown*, “It could be me in one of those graves” (*Bordertown*). Therefore, I found it necessary to raise my own voice on behalf of the femicide victims and to educate the public within my reach on the murders. The second component surrounding my choice lies in the analysis itself. Though scholars and writers have conducted reviews and analyses of works about the Juárez femicides, none have delivered a comparison of the role of each female investigator in *Bordertown*, *El Traspatio*, *Señorita Extraviada* and *Desert Blood*. Thus, my analysis of the role of the female investigator in each of these works distinguishes this thesis from the works of other scholars who have written about the Juárez femicides.

Both a comparison of these four works and a study of the role of their female investigators provide an insightful view into the way in which cultural artists utilize their media as a means of counteracting the violent corruption that characterizes contemporary Juárez and of empowering the victimized female. I join with the author and directors of these works in bringing this issue to light and in encouraging the readers to join in the effort to end the murders by first familiarizing themselves and others with the reality of the femicides along the United States-Mexico border. Thus, each female investigator represents the audience members in her identification with the victims as she rediscover her cultural and gender identity and in her collaboration with men and women to aid those who have been harmed and to end the femicides in Ciudad Juárez, an act with global ramifications.

Bordertown, El Traspatio, Señorita Extraviada and *Desert Blood* form part of a collective body of art that enlightens and educates audiences who may never learn of the Juárez femicides through any other form of media. The aspect of these four works that distinguishes them from most other cultural productions lies in the role of the female investigators. I must note that I refer to the primary characters in these works as the female investigators or the female detectives. These terms refer to their role in the investigations and not to a professional vocation. In fact, only one of the female investigators that I analyze in this thesis fulfills such a position of official law enforcement. The other three are a reporter, a documentary producer and a Ph.D. candidate. However, though they are not involved in crime investigations vocationally, they still fulfill the role of the female investigator within their respective works. In each

story, the main female characters pursue and carry out the investigations, both with and without aid from local police. Additionally, their role is extremely comparable to that of the female detective character in popular crime fiction. Therefore, I will refer to each such character in the following analysis as the female investigator or as the female detective of each work. Within the works, the female investigators fulfill both an introspective role and a collaborative role in which they experience a return to their sexual, gender and cultural identities as women with a Mexican heritage along the border and ally with other women and men in an effort to collectively investigate the femicides and to aid the victims' friends and families. In order to understand the femicidal acts and the overall society of Juárez, though, we must possess a thorough comprehension of the femicide findings in the city. In the following chapter, I explain the history of the femicides in Ciudad Juárez and a description of the city's contemporary society that my four works of analysis reference.

CHAPTER 1

One Male Ego, One Female Body, the Perfect Crime:

An Overview of Femicide and the Ciudad Juárez Murders

DEFINING FEMICIDE

Gender-based Homicide: Femicide Defined

In the opening scene of her novel *Desert Blood*, Alicia Gaspar de Alba depicts a scenario in which a young woman is dragged behind a moving vehicle by a rope tied around her neck, is beaten, has her stomach sliced open and is left to die (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 1-2). This scene presents an explicit portrayal of femicide, a distinct classification of murder prevalent in places such as Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the focus of the works which I analyze in this thesis. The fact that the murder victim is a woman does not define the act as femicide. One component distinguishes femicide from homicide: gender (Russell, “Defining Femicide”). The perpetrator is seeking to realize the embodiment of his misogynist attitude toward women by forcing his victim into pure submission to his authoritarian desire. This gender-based crime is defined by scholars as *femicide*. Diana E. H. Russell introduced this term into its modern usage in 1976 and in 2001 introduced a final explanation of these crimes in her book *Femicide in Global Perspective*, which remains the definition of femicide acknowledged by most scholars today: “the killing of females by males because they are female” (Russell, “Defining

Femicide”). The manifestation of femicide cannot be reduced to one solitary form. The age of the victim and the murder method used may vary, but the fact that a female has been murdered because of her gender remains the common denominator of all such incidents. Femicide cases are usually grouped into one of two categories, depending on the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator: intimate relational context (also called “intimate partner femicide”) and stranger relational context (also called “non-intimate femicide”) (Mouzos 2-3). Intimate partner femicides are committed by husbands or boyfriends of the victims, as where stranger femicides are committed by individuals with whom the victims have no relationship (Russell, “Defining Femicide”). Ana Carcedo and Montserrat Sagot propose a third category: femicide by association. This refers to cases in which a woman is killed “in the line of fire” while coming to the aid of another woman whom a man is trying to kill (Morales Trujillo 131). Most scholars utilize the first two categories, including the third as a form of stranger-related femicide. A common form of intimate-partner femicide presents itself under the guise “honour killing.” Lyn Welchman and Sarah Hossain elucidate this concept, explaining that “honour killings,” or “crimes of honour,” practiced primarily in the Middle East and in South Asia, are those “where the publicly articulated ‘justification’ is attributed to a social order claimed to require the preservation of a concept of ‘honour’ vested in male (family and/or conjugal) control over women and specifically women’s sexual conduct, actual, suspected or potential” (Welchman). In these patriarchal orders, violations of a family’s honor, which is “defined in terms of women’s assigned sexual and familial roles as dictated by traditional family ideology,” include a woman having sexual relations out

of marriage, committing adultery, refusing to marry, falling in love with a man of whom the family does not approve, and even being raped, in addition to any non-sexual act that defies male authority (Welchman). These sexist crimes perpetrated against women take varying forms, yet they share in common the role of gender as the central reason for the loss of a female's life.

Femicide or Feminicide?

In this thesis, I am using the term *femicide* to refer to the misogynist murder of women. Scholars most commonly choose between the terms “femicide” and “feminicide,” known in Spanish as *femicidio* and *feminicidio*. When it comes to defining such murders of women that are taking place throughout the world as well as in Ciudad Juárez, I prefer the term “femicide” because, as Russell notes, the two roots *femi-* and *-cide* specify the murder of females (Russell, “The Origin and Importance”). Russell extends her definition beyond the Latin etymology to include the context of these crimes: a misogynist attack. Whether a female is killed off as an infant, murdered by a male relative striving to defend his family name or killed by a domineering husband, she loses her life at the hand of gender-related hostility. She is a girl or a woman who has been killed for that very reason. This is precisely what is happening in the Chihuahuan desert. Though both terms, “femicide” and “feminicide,” refer to the gender-based murder of females, both are not limited to this specific crime. According to Marcela Lagarde, *feminicidio* is the state of weakened or stolen rights of women. It is this state of oppression of the female that breeds violence against women (Espósito). According to

this definition, “feminicide,” which is the most accurate and common translation for *feminicidio*, coincides with femicide. It creates the perfect environment in which these murders can take place. Lagarde further explains her distinction of feminicide, saying that it pervades every society through a general oppressive attitude toward women that debilitates them to some extent. It is a control exerted by individuals, institutions or society as a whole that leaves women feeling fearful or hurt. Most noteworthy of all, it is a state of being that in many societies goes unnoticed (Lagarde, “Identidad de género” 8). Rosa-Linda Fregoso confirms the dichotomized nature of feminicide, split between the public and the private sectors. Regarding the linguistic construction of the term feminicide, she claims, “the extra “IN” inextricably links INdividual and INstitutional forms of violence, symbolically representing how we conceptualize violence structurally and beyond a singular cause-and-effect model” (Fregoso, “Coming to Grips with Femicide”). According to Fregoso, this explanation of feminicide differs from the implications of femicide in that it offers a fuller understanding of the “complexity of gender-based violence” that femicide fails to present (Fregoso, “Coming to Grips with Femicide”). Both Lagarde and Fregoso prove that feminicide has acquired a meaning that applies to corporate and private harm to women’s rights as well as to their bodies. Though the term is applied by many to the cases of gender-based murder of women, such as that which is occurring in Ciudad Juárez, it also carries a broader connotation that highlights the societal mentalities, protocol and behaviors that have oppressed females in countless ways, including the brutal taking of their lives.

I consider femicide to be an extreme physical manifestation of feminicide and the appropriate term for referencing the murders of the Juárez women. I agree with Lagarde and Fregoso that feminicide, as they understand the term, has found its ways into the society of Juárez. The apathy and criminal involvement of the Juárez authorities and government, as well as the unwillingness of the factory owners and business corporations to protect the rights of their female employees, creates such a political and institutionalized stance against females as that described by those who use the term *feminicide*. The overall machismo, misogynist environment of the city has led to a deadly attack against the female gender, evident in the mistreatment of female factory workers, domestic violence, male resentment toward working women and the lack of attention paid to the role of the female gender in the rape and murder of the *Juarenses* women and girls. This concept is somewhat all-inclusive, ranging from mass attitudes of disrespect toward women to the ravishment and mutilation of female bodies left to rot in the sands of the surrounding desert. While the gender-motivated murders of girls and women in Juárez and in any other location around the world is a type of feminicide, I find *femicide* to be a much more precise term reserved particularly for these killings. Though Ciudad Juárez stands out as a focus point for misogynist crime in Latin America due to its proximity to the United States, the issue of femicide only thickens the further south one goes into Central America and South America.

Femicide in Latin America

As is the case with feminicide, femicide is recognized as a worldwide phenomenon, present in many countries where women are devalued and exploited in the name of masculine pride. Yet, the forms of femicide occurring in Ciudad Juárez are prevalent in other Latin American countries such as Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Colombia and Perú (Morales Trujillo 127). The most devastating femicides in all of Latin America have taken place in Guatemala, which was rated as one of the top three countries for the highest number of femicides from 2004 to 2009 (“Femicide: a Global Problem”). This murderous trend began during the 30-year war between the nation’s army and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit that ended in 1996. In times of fighting, soldiers would ransack villages, killing the men and taking the women as slaves to be raped, beaten and burned, all of which occurred with permission from the commanding officers (Morales Trujillo 134). Today the torture and murder of females persists in Guatemala, classifying as “generalized violence that exists in Guatemala with the training in a culture of violence that has its roots in forms of repression that were used during the war” (Morales Trujillo 134). Between 2000 and 2006, nearly three thousand female corpses were found, most mutilated (Morales Trujillo 127), and over two thousand more victims by 2008 (“Guatemala Human Rights Commission”). These killings are always associated with organized crime, gang activity, the drug cartel and domestic violence (Morales Trujillo 134). A great majority of the victims are Mayan women who are viewed as potential breeders of guerrillas due to their past relations with guerrilla bands (Caissie). Yet, regardless of their ethnicity or cultural affiliation, most victims are housewives, students and domestic violence victims between the ages of 13

and 30 who are gang raped, mutilated, killed and left to rot in public squares (Melville). In addition to being a hot spot for femicide, Guatemala is also a transitional location and destination for trafficked women and children used for sexual pleasure (Caissie). As is the case in most Latin American countries, Guatemala operates as a patriarchal society in which men hold the power. Guatemalan men often murder their wives who wish to go to school or to work because they want their women to remain at home and fulfill domestic duties (Melville). Women attending educational and vocational workshops face the risk of abuse and death by their husbands, who fear that their wives will learn of their rights and will leave home (Melville). As one travels north, he or she might expect to find less brutality closer to the United States. Unfortunately, this is not so. It is along the United States-Mexico border where the torture of Latin American women has drawn the most attention. The murders that are taking place in Ciudad Juárez, on which my thesis is centered, mirror those occurring in Guatemala. In fact, the scene repeats itself: mutilated female corpses, mostly of teenagers or young adults, left in public places (Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán, “Feminicidio” 3). As in Guatemala, many of the murders can be traced back to drug cartels and gang activity (*En el borde*). Though the same crimes target women throughout Latin America, the victims of Juárez gain special attention since the city’s adjacency to the United States-Mexico border poses a threat to both countries.

II. CIUDAD JUÁREZ FINDINGS

Blood, Sand and Trash

The murder of women and girls because they are female is not characteristic solely of any one country or region. It creeps into every society, both developed and underdeveloped alike, and claims the lives of their females. This series of murders has turned the women of Latin America into victims: victims of hate, victims of fear, victims of massacre. Though their cries have been muted, some can be heard. They can be heard in political dialogue and terms such as globalization, immigration, free trade and business, especially in Ciudad Juárez, where geographic location, along with economic and political ties, identifies the city as a catalyst into world trade, promising international relations and the chance for a better life. Though experts agree that femicide was taking place long before the early nineties in Ciudad Juárez, the first documented victim was found in 1993. Michael Newton identifies her as Alma Chavira Farel in his book *Ciudad Juárez: the Serial Killer's Playground* (Newton 1). This first victim marked the beginning of a chaotic phenomenon known as the Juárez femicides. Since 1993, more than six hundred female cadavers have been discovered in Ciudad Juárez, mostly in the desert region that surrounds the city (Valdez, "Decapitated Body"). This is the average that researchers use, though the exact number is impossible to determine. In her essay on the maquiladora victims, Elvia R. Arriola lowers that amount, saying that there have been an "estimated three hundred to four hundred unsolved murders" (Arriola 26). However, since, as Arriola supports in her essay, over three hundred females were murdered in Juárez between 1994 and 2000 (Arriola 26), one can only imagine that from 1993 to 2013 that number has well surpassed even Diana Washington Valdez's estimate of six hundred made in 2009, especially since the majority of these murders are, as Arriola claims,

unsolved. What must be kept in mind when considering statistics on the number of bodies found is the fact that these are documented findings. They do not match the number of missing women in Juárez, which exceeded four thousand in 2010 (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 74). Yet, regardless of the number of victims, too many innocent girls and women have met the same unwelcomed and undeserved fate. Most victims, between the ages of 10 and 30 (Newton 3), have been found half-buried in or carelessly strewn atop the desert floor. Many were strangled, mutilated, raped (both by penile penetration and with inanimate objects), scorched, stabbed, beaten and had their necks broken (Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán "Feminicidio" 3). Some have been found with their hands bound by their own shoe laces and their shoes placed to side of their bodies. Most are either half-naked or completely stripped of their clothing (González Rodríguez 15, 18). Certain victims have had their right breast dismembered and their left nipple torn or bitten off, often accompanied by bite marks on the breasts (Newton 11). Not all of the victims were killed and left in the desert. In her article "Missing the Story," Debbie Nathan emphasizes the cases of women and girls found in homes of friends and family, cases that appear to be domestic yet are still driven by dissension toward the female. Two teenage girls who were found shot in the head in the home of the older girl's boyfriend had been raped and tattooed with knife marks. The sheer horror of the attack caused the younger girl to suffer four heart attacks (Nathan). Other corpses have been found in public places such as near shopping centers, at busy downtown intersections and in the football field of a major oil company, PEMEX (Varsho). Yet, a shocking amount of these findings have occurred in the desert region of the state of Ciudad Juárez, namely Lomas

de Poleo, a colonia, or, shantytown community in the desert region called Anapra, and Lote Bravo, a semi-desert region to the south of Ciudad Juárez, by the local airport (González Rodríguez 15). Other locations include Zacate Blanco and Granjas Sante Elena (González Rodríguez 38, 39). Besides bodily decomposition and torture wounds, the victims share other physical aspects in common: most are young poor skinny girls with dark features and long hair (*Señorita Extraviada*).

Who are these women? Why are they subjected to this brutality? In an effort to dismiss the urgency of the murder cases and to ease the fear of the people, local authorities have accused the victims of being prostitutes (Gaspar de Alba, “Poor Brown Female” 67). In some way, this serves as proper justification for the murder, appealing to one’s judgmental notion that prostitutes deserve to be murdered as recompense for their evil ways. This generalized identification is simply not true. A study conducted by several researchers on the Juárez murders from 1993 to 1998 found that only ten percent of the identified victims were prostitutes. The others were store employees, bar tenders, students, housewives and factory workers (Cabrera 4). This last category, the maquiladora workers, which accounted for one-third of the victims of this study (Cabrera 4), includes hundreds of the victims thus far of the murders in Ciudad Juárez (Arriola 26). Several theories have circulated concerning the culprits and their motives. Let us look at the most prevalently supported theories, namely the maquiladora industry, police and government officials, drug cartels and gang activity.

NAFTA, the Maquiladoras and the Pursuit of Happiness

There are at least seven leading theories on who is culpable for the Juárez murders: the maquiladora industry, local authorities, drug cartels, satanic cults, snuff pornographers, an Egyptian chemist and local gangs. The first theory, which faults the maquiladora industry, points to international corporate activity in the city. Though foreign companies had been outsourcing their labor production to Juárez for years, the 1993 signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the United States and Canada paved the way for an explosion of industrialization and the presence of factories, known as maquiladoras (Arriola 26). In 2006, there were already 330 maquiladoras in Juárez and 75 percent of them belonged to United States corporations (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 65). Though this industry has expanded beyond the U.S.-Mexico border into less populated regions of Mexico, Juárez claims ownership of the majority of maquiladora workers in the entire country (Cravey 48). Six years following the initiation of NAFTA, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO- Border Committee of Women Workers) published a report of personal testimonies of female maquiladora workers called "Six Years of NAFTA: A View from Inside the Maquiladoras." This report illuminates maquiladora operations and the industry's disconcerting treatment of its employees. According to the report, the maquiladora industry plummeted into a frenzy of production increase following the implementation of NAFTA. The factories began forcing workers to single-handedly complete tasks formerly assigned to teams of three or four people. Though fewer workers were now required to complete the same amount of work, they were not compensated for their extra effort. In fact, they were now expected to increase their output for less pay. The writers of the

reports state that since the signing of NAFTA, “we have clearly perceived how the companies are defying the human limits of the workers” (Comité Fronterizo de Obreras). Plant administration also manipulates employees into working overtime with no extra pay (Comité Fronterizo de Obreras). The factories in Juárez establish their own rules, completely disregarding legislation designed to control factory operations. For example, the Fair Labor Standards Act requires that all employees working more than 40 hours per week must be paid an overtime rate of at least one and a half times greater than their normal pay (“Wage and Hour Division”). Any required amount of time on company property classifies as working hours (“Wage and Hour Division”), which places most maquiladoras in direct breach of the Fair Labor Standards Act since they force their employees to remain in the factory during their unpaid lunch break (Comité Fronterizo de Obreras). Unlike factories located in the U.S., which abide by this regulation, the U.S.-owned assembly plants in Juárez operate 45-50 hours per week. In addition to unpaid overtime, they often subject their employees to working seven days per week (Arriola 36-37). Yet, it is not simply the extra hours that exert stress on the workers; it is the machine-like pace at which they are forced to work. When setting a high production quota, the factories also establish a coinciding pace at which the assembly lines must move in order to meet that quota. This process not only discriminates against older employees, who suffer loss of employment and injuries due to not being able to keep up with production. It also presents a difficult situation for younger and stronger workers, who feel equally stressed, fatigued and hopeless (“Wage and Hour Division”). One can easily detect in this maquiladora reality the dehumanization of the workers. They have

become a mere extension of the machines that they are operating, or rather, the machines that have begun to operate them. Though these working conditions inflict extreme amounts of stress and pressure on the workers, the situation grows much worse as one looks more closely into the lives of the maquiladora workers. Countless employees have developed chronic health problems, due either to excruciating stress, work-related accidents and trauma or inefficient medical care provided by the factories (“Wage and Hour Division”). In her essay on the direct relation between the maquiladoras and gender violence, Elvia Arriola exposes the following examples of maquiladora-induced physical harm: a worker who nearly lost her feet due to an infection caused by toxic dust particles coming from the seat belts she was manufacturing; a woman who developed a bladder infection because she was denied regular use of the bathroom; a man who was permanently crippled by a motor that fell from the assembly line and crushed his leg; multiple women who endured miscarriages because they were exposed to toxic fumes (Arriola 35). Workers have also suffered from back pain, asthma, allergic reactions and carpal tunnel syndrome. If they leave the assembly line to use the rest room, they are punished and fined for abusing bathroom privileges (Arriola 35). The maquiladora industry has acquired an averse profile in the realm of human rights research and women’s studies due to its heinous treatment of its employees.

It is not the maltreatment of employees that automatically poses the maquiladora industry as a credible suspect in the Juárez femicides. Rather, it is their disregard for the safety of their employees and their abuse of female personnel that make them enablers of the crimes. This holds particularly true in light of the fact that a great number of the

femicide victims are maquiladora workers (Cabrera 4). Though this systemic abuse extends to all workers, it is the female workers who are targeted as the most afflicted victims. Women comprise the majority of the maquiladora workers in Juárez, averaging 60 percent in 2006 (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 65) and nearly 100 percent in many factories since. They are preferred due to their stereotypical submissive and docile demeanor (González Rodríguez 33), their unlikeliness to complain and their small agile hands. Factory owners also view women, particularly young women, as the least likely to form unions (Arriola 31). It is vital when considering these facts to remember that the maquiladora industry does not ignorantly clothe itself in incompetency. Instead, it employs strategic coercion so as to disempower its employees and create a robotic workforce that serves management's every desire until that workforce burns out and is replaced by fresh reinforcements. Since women comprise the majority of maquiladora staff in Juárez (Arriola 31), administration can easily control the workplace environment. Floor supervisors have been known to manipulate female workers with sexual harassment and to bribe them with the promise of a secured future in the maquiladora in exchange for sexual favors (Cravey 1). Maquiladora management even performs pregnancy tests on candidates and new hires to ensure that they are not pregnant and therefore disabled. Female workers also have to show their supervisors their bloody pads and tampons each month as proof of menstruation (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 64). The fact that women make up the primary maquiladora workforce categorizes them as the main victims of the industry. It is they who suffer nearly impossible production speeds, abuse, sexual harassment and invasions of privacy. Furthermore, they are the ones who utilize

the factories' transportation system, which consists of buses that drop the women off in dimly lit, unpopulated, dangerous locations miles away from their homes (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 65). The fact that the shuttle schedules force women to travel on foot for miles to and from home late at night and in the dark hours of the morning is reason enough to find fault in this system. However, as is the case with any aspect of the maquiladora industry, it gets much worse. Most of the bus drivers never undergo background checks for criminal records or drug tests when hired by the companies. Indeed, many have been highly suspected and charged for the murder of maquiladora women (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 65). In none of the scenarios previously described has any one member of the factory management directly murdered a woman and left her to rot in the desert. Nonetheless, maquiladora management has first-handedly degraded the female staff, making them completely vulnerable to other forms of abuse and exploitation. Fully aware of the crimes that have been perpetrated against their employees, the maquiladoras have done nothing to ensure safety for their female staff. Not all members of management have necessarily taken part in planning and executing the kidnapping, rape and torture of their workers. However, they certainly play a direct role by abusing their employees, thus increasing their vulnerability, and by handing these workers over to their killers through forcing them to traverse fatally jeopardizing distances in order to get to work. Even after becoming aware of the murders and of the fact that many of the victims are factory workers, the maquiladora industry continues on its path toward mass production and undeserved profit, doing nothing to prevent more of their employees from facing that same, possibly

inevitable, death. Though the portrayal of the corporate industries' roles in these crimes may be convoluted with legal procedure and varying definitions, one cannot deny their culpability. Elvia Arriola defends this position, describing the murders as “an extreme manifestation of the systemic patterns of abuse, harassment and violence against women who work in the maquiladoras.” She claims that the “absence of regulations to benefit workers...perpetuates the degradation of maquiladora workers and creates environments hostile to working women’s lives...” (Arriola 28). In many cases, these femicidal crimes serve as an elongation of the hatred and violence that coils around the women in the factories. The maquiladora industry has turned its women into fair game, with no system of protection or accountability. However, it has not received its just punishment, and the probability of that happening looks bleak. As activist Judith Galarza claims in her interview with filmmaker Lourdes Portillo, “A la maquila no se le toca” (*The maquiladoras go untouched*) (*Señorita Extraviada*). They will remain untouched as long as corporate leaders and local authorities refuse to investigate the matter and hold the maquiladoras accountable for their involvement.

The Juárez Authorities: Bad Cop, Bad Cop

When studying the Juárez murders, one must ask why the people have allowed these crimes, as well as foreign corporate abuse, to escalate to the extent that they have. It is the people who need to take a stand to effect change, yet the voice of the people will not be heard so long as those in power silence them with fear and a sense of helplessness. Those in power ignore the cry for justice because they place a higher value on their

reputation and personal gain. When a body is found slung amongst trash along the outskirts of the desert, the first to be notified are the police. This process makes complete sense since police by trade possess the skills to carry out an investigation and the authority to convict guilty suspects. However, local authorities in Juárez have acquired an unreliable and reprobated image in the eyes of the people because those guilty of the crimes repeatedly go unpunished. In the first place, the police view missing person reports with little urgency. In *En el borde* (2010), a documentary directed by Steve Hise that elucidates the Juárez murders and the social and economic context surrounding them, the normal procedures of the police are brought to light. When a girl is reported missing, the police wait 72 hours before instigating a search. As the documentary explains, that 72-hour period immediately following a disappearance is crucial since many kidnapped women and girls are kept alive for five or six days before meeting their gruesome death (*En el borde*). The police pay no mind to disappearances of girls because “No es un delito desaparecer” (*It is not a crime to disappear*) (*En el borde*). When bodies are found, the authorities release themselves from any responsibility to investigate by scapegoating prostitutes. Both the police and government officials have, without evidence, identified victims as prostitutes, claiming that they work in the maquiladoras during the week and prostitute on the weekends, all unbeknownst to their families (*Señorita Extraviada*).

Alicia Gaspar de Alba examines this stance in her article “Poor Brown Female,” in which she elucidates the prejudice-enforced reputation of these victims as “maqui-locas” whose identity is dichotomized between the good girl and the bad girl. According to the prevailing mindset of Juárez society, these “maqui-locas” are girls who, in pursuit of

independence, have given themselves to sexual pleasure and have even fallen into prostitution (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 81, 82). By using this argument in an effort to avoid pressure to investigate these murders of alleged prostitutes, the authorities appeal to the judgmental notion characteristic of sexist, patriarchal societies that such morally debased women deserve to be raped, beaten and left for dead. In fact, it may even satisfy their hatred, appearing as the only way to rid society of these seemingly contagious sluts. As Steven S. Volk and Marian E. Schlotterbeck conclude regarding such victims, "Portraying the victims as women who deceived their families by becoming prostitutes, Mexican authorities have both dismissed their deaths and made them responsible for their own murders" (Volk 131). Even when the authorities do decide to carry out an investigation, their efforts are completely futile. They possess neither proper equipment nor adequate skills for gathering and processing evidence. Candice Skrapec, a professor of criminology and an expert in serial murder research, describes her analysis of Juárez's police department. During a trip to the city in 1999, Skrapec found within the local police department a detrimental lack of training and equipment. She reports that they owned one crime lab van for the entire city which, at the time, boasted a population of 1.5 million citizens. Labeling the morgue as one from the "Dark Ages," Skrapec admits that morgue officials had to send out DNA evidence to be processed due to a lack of equipment. What horrified her most was the fact that the police had not been sufficiently trained to identify, process and store evidence, which is the most fundamental procedure in making a case (Skrapec 245). Other researchers have found incomplete

autopsy files in the morgue's records, which makes it understandable that police officials in Juárez have been charged with incompetence and negligence (*En el borde*).

Though the authorities' apparent inability to conduct investigations, coupled with their unwillingness to find the perpetrators, places the victims' families at a loss, it is their corrupt behavior that serves as their most tragic flaw. The Ciudad Juárez police department, along with the government, has acquired a notorious reputation for accepting bribes from those involved in the murders, as is the case throughout Mexico. An averaged ten percent of the Mexican drug cartels' gross yearly income is spent toward bribing police and government officials (*En el borde*). Greed for more money only plunges these authorities into a downhill spiral of manipulating evidence and effacing the tracks of the killers. Robert K. Ressler, a United States Federal Bureau of Investigation specialist who was summoned to Ciudad Juárez in the mid-1990s to analyze the crimes, concluded that the longer it took to identify the victim, the less likely it would be to trace and find the killer (González Rodríguez 14, 62). Though the disfiguring acts of torture play a great part in covering up the perpetrator's trail, the compliance of the police carries the killer's act through to perfection. As *En el borde* affirms, the local communities have no means of holding the government accountable (*En el borde*), which allows such perversion of the legal system to grow. According to a United Nations Report, the government promised change in a 40-point proposal. Of course, neither government officials nor the local authorities were able to carry the plan through to fruition ("Report on Mexico"). One scheme of the Juárez police department has been to blame a person or group for the crimes, falsifying the attestation of "witnesses" by forcing people to confirm the

culpability of that individual or party. This act can be understood best by the testimony of Susana Domínguez, a young woman who was detained by the police for eight days. During that time, they tried to coerce her into testifying against Los Rebeldes, a gang arrested in a police raid of a local nightclub, by pulling her hair and pushing her against the wall with a gun to her head (González Rodríguez 23). Lourdes Portillo captures in her documentary *Señorita Extraviada* the similar account of a woman named María, who was also detained and tortured by the police. In addition to sexually assaulting her, they forced her to look at photographs of past victims and threatened her, saying, “Do you want to end up like this?” (González Rodríguez 23). The emotional trauma from María’s captivity in the hands of the Juárez police overwhelms her as she tearfully struggles to share her experience. The experience terrified María into silence that lasted for years until her husband encouraged her to tell the whole story (*Señorita Extraviada*). Yet, she, like Susana, had no one to accuse. In fact, Susana has since claimed that Los Rebeldes, as far as she is aware, are not guilty (González Rodríguez 23). Susana’s and María’s cases serve as literal manifestations of the authorities’ and the government’s stance. These ruling authorities are pinning the people of Ciudad Juárez against a wall, threatening their safety and success with every unfulfilled investigation, every accepted bribe and every act of brute force. Though the maquiladoras and the police have played a significant role in the continuation of these crimes, the question remains of who specifically is killing the women of Juárez. The answer cannot be condensed into one individual or group. The last of the most common theories studied here focus on specific groups and individuals, such as the drug cartels, sex offenders and gangs.

Drugs, Cults and All That Snuff

As shown in the reports of police corruption and bribery, the Mexican drug cartel has been linked to the murders on various occasions. The drug trade has become a major source of revenue for many of the Mexican people. Mexico used to function as a major producer and exporter of corn. Since the employment of NAFTA, Mexico began to import corn from the United States at a price 33 percent below their own market costs (*En el borde*). Naturally, this became the most economic option from a consumer's point of view. However, it also destroyed the state's future as an agricultural producer. The opening of the border for free trade brought with it the opportunity for a new export product: narcotics. Positioned directly as the bridge between the United States and Mexico (González Rodríguez 28), Ciudad Juárez now sits as the "distribution center for drug transport into the U.S." (*En el borde*). Yet, these *narcotraficantes*, narcotics traffickers, do not simply go about their business without bothering anyone outside the cartel. Given the highly criminal and dangerous nature of the drug trade, the traffickers directly associate with organized crime. They are not bands of delinquents searching for ways to have some fun by randomly robbing a gas station or by gang raping on a whim some girl who happens to pass by while they are getting drunk. On the contrary, these drug gangs operate as a network, strategically marking their successes. Indeed, these traffickers use the bodies to send a message "in a language we don't understand" (*En el borde*). In her research for the Congressional Research Service, Latin American Affairs analyst June Beittel found that seven primary drug trafficking organizations control the

Mexican state and that many have dispersed into what may now be twelve to twenty groups (Beittel 11). Described as “an intrinsic feature of the trade in illicit drugs,” violence has widely spread across the country, most prominently in the northern border region (Beittel 5, 30). The majority of drug cartel-related deaths have occurred in Ciudad Juárez (Beittel 3), particularly under the Juárez/Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Organization that operates the drug trade in the city. While deaths have always resulted from drug activity in the region, thousands have occurred since the beginning of the rivalry between the Carrillo Fuentes cartel and the Sinaloa cartel in 2008 (Beittel 12). According to Beittel, the cartel’s major crimes have taken the form of “mass killings, the use of torture and dismemberment” (Beittel 1). Some of the drug cartel activity has branched off into peculiar forms of violence. Among the signs of torture found on the victims’ bodies, people have in certain cases discovered satanic markings, such as an inverted “V” on the corpses’ backsides (*Señorita Extraviada*). Many drug organization members and police officers have been known to associate with a cultic criminal brotherhood known as “la Santa Muerte,” *Holy Death*, which combines ancient Catholic traditions of sainthood, indigenous voodoo practices and New Age beliefs. It is not uncommon for this group to honor their belief system by carrying out human sacrifices known as “narcobrujería sacrificial,” *sacrificial narco-witchcraft* (González Rodríguez 72-73). Related to satanic findings is the issue of snuff pornography, in which certain members of the drug cartel have been involved. Snuff pornography, also called snuff films, refers to filmed pornography that ends in the murder of the victim, usually in the form of mutilation and dismemberment (González Rodríguez 77; Russell, “Defining Femicide”). Another odd

case related to the Juárez femicides worth mentioning is *Richy's Diary*, a collection of cryptic letters published under miscellaneous categories of local newspapers. When decoded, these letters revealed plans for the kidnapping, rape and execution of girls and women. His letters were often addressed to a specific person, sadly resulting in the suicide of one young woman who was overcome with fear after receiving “Richy’s” death threats. Juárez police officials arrested a suspect in 2003 but had no solid evidence with which to convict him (Valdez 165). Alicia Gaspar de Alba incorporates this theory into the plot of her mystery novel *Desert Blood*, which is one of the four works that I will later analyze in this thesis. The main character, Ivon, who assumes the role of an investigator of the Juárez femicides in the novel, discovers that the victim whose death instigated her investigation received a death threat from *Richy's Diary* (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 56-58). This discovery becomes pivotal in Ivon’s investigation as the main culprits depicted in the novel turn out to be snuff pornographers who advertise their productions in *Richy's Diary* (286). We will see in the forthcoming analysis how works of fiction utilize such theories to provide a credible base for their storylines. When considered together, these theories form a clearer view of how and why the women of Juárez are disappearing.

It’s All about Chemistry: Sharif and Los Rebeldes

Another theory, which was maintained throughout the 1990s and has been referenced in the vast majority of scholarly accounts of the murders, is that of Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif. In 1995, Juárez authorities arrested 49-year-old Sharif for allegedly raping

and cutting a 19-year-old woman whom he met in a bar (González Rodríguez 16). Sharif was an Egyptian chemist who had spent twenty years working in the United States before migrating to Mexico. His move to Mexico should be more accurately defined as fleeing since he had a legal record with fourteen charges for rape in the U.S. (González Rodríguez 16). After moving around a bit in the U.S., he settled in West Palm Beach Florida, where he was hired by Cercoa Inc. and promoted to his own division due to his dazzling skills as a chemist and engineer. When arrested on two occasions for raping and beating a woman, Sharif's company provided him with a defense attorney who reduced his convictions to one period of probation and one sentence of 45 days (Newton ch.4). A 23-year-old woman who came to Sharif's home to interview for a housemaid position claims that he raped and beat her, then threatened to bury her in his back yard, as he claimed that he had done to other women (Newton 4). Following the five years he served in jail for rape, in 1989 Sharif obtained a job with Benchmark Research and Technology in Texas and was applauded by the U.S. Department of Energy for his superior advancements in the industry. This new company relocated Sharif to Ciudad Juárez to work in one of the maquiladoras, where he was accused by yet another young woman for raping and beating her and threatening to dump her corpse in Lote Bravo (Newton 4). Sharif appeared to be the perfect serial killer, except for his common mistake of keeping his rape victims alive to testify to what he had done. When arrested in Juárez in 1995, he was granted a public press hearing, in which he delivered a long monotonous defense interlaced with profane outbursts (González Rodríguez 20-22). One could purport that Sharif enjoyed his stay in Juárez's local jail, as he resided in a special room stocked with

household luxuries such as a refrigerator, a double bed, a private bathroom, a fax machine and a cell phone (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 69). This discovery led the public and the authorities to believe that Sharif was masterminding many of the femicides from his cell, cooperating with two primary gangs: Los Rebeldes and Los Choferes. Los Rebeldes were a group arrested by the police in 1996 at a local night club and accused of acting on behalf of Sharif. The accusation forced upon them, and to which they confessed, was that they would rape and kill women then bring Sharif the victims' underwear and a newspaper clipping confirming the murder, all for a compensation of \$1,200 (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 68). Los Rebeldes, after confessing to all of the police department's allegations, later claimed that the police coerced them into confessing by means of torture (Valdez 143). Members of the gang said that the police beat them, burned their bodies, including abdominal and genital regions (Thompson 57), and held their heads in urine-filled toilets (Valdez 143). Their defense attorney was shot by the police months after the court proceedings (Thompson 6). Los Choferes were claimed to have operated under a similar mandate from the Egyptian. These men were a group of maquiladora bus drivers who were accused of getting high and raping women to death. In 1999, a woman named Nancy accused Los Choferes of gang raping her, which resulted in the arrest of the gang leader, nicknamed "El Tolteca" and "Dracula," and of other members of the group who all confessed to drug addiction and the rape and murder of women (Gaspar de Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 68-69). Yet, though the members of these gangs have committed themselves to a radical lifestyle of violence, the overall sexist attitude of the Juárez community aids their abuse of girls and women.

Patriarchy and the Disposability of the Female

In order to sufficiently understand the Juárez femicides, one must study them from an economic and social standpoint. The establishment of free trade, the maquiladora industry and the activity of the drug cartels provide us with a fundamental basis for comprehending the economic influences of these crimes. In order to envisage the social context of these crimes, one must ask why Juárez's society has reached the point where such crimes can occur at all let alone go unpunished in so many cases. For there to be such an incredible lack of accountability on the part of the government and the authorities, the people play a role in allowing that deficiency to exist. Though countless citizens of Juárez have taken a stand in opposition to the proliferation of the murders, enough people lay silent. Some do so in fear; however, the most severe silence comes from the people who do not care. Those dominating this control group are men. Juárez society, as is the case throughout Mexico and the rest of Latin America, is patriarchal. In this case, patriarchy refers not simply to the role of the father in the household, but rather to the domineering role of men over women in general, where sexism and misogyny have no bounds (Fregoso, "Coming to Grips with Femicide"). Author and journalist Sergio González Rodríguez illuminates this concept. According to González Rodríguez's study, patriarchy is an ideology that portrays the woman as a natural sinner who must be punished, as one who needs the protection of a man due to her inherent lack of power. She is viewed as a sexual object that must submit to man and achieve her rightful identity as a pure woman, obtainable as a wife and mother (González Rodríguez 34). According

to machismo thought, the working woman has independently broken free from that restricting hold and no longer needs male protection. She contradicts that fantasy of total power over the female. Therefore, men have classified such independent females as dirty women who love sex (González Rodríguez 34), expressing the notion that sexual pleasure is prohibited for women. In the sexual sense, this same attitude permeates patriarchal societies such as those in nations where female genital mutilation is practiced or in many Middle Eastern cultures in which male members of the family take pride in controlling their females' sexual expression (Welchman). This ideology can even be seen in the actual killings, the most extreme realization of the murderers' desire to "voyeurize" and "conquer" women (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 134). As González Rodríguez claims, the murdered women are portrayed as less than human and are denied their own subjective experience (González Rodríguez 36). Debbie Nathan exposes the fatality of the macho attitude, providing as an example the case in which a young man murdered his girlfriend because her going out with another suitor threatened his manhood (Nathan). These men place their own identity in their ability to control women. Perhaps it is not the women who are to be deemed dependent upon men for survival but rather the other way around. Lagarde is correct to claim that femicide is alive and well in Ciudad Juárez (Lagarde, "Del femicidio" 216-217). It is a city where women are despised for being the household bread-winners, are taken advantage of by their employers and local law enforcement and are exploited by their own people. If the people, more specifically the men, will not fight for these women, then they are considered fair game by anyone looking to exploit them for personal pleasure.

This devaluing of females lessens their worth in the eyes of society, turning them into discardable accessories. Melissa W. Wright discusses the disposability of working “Third World Women,” focusing on the working women of Mexico as part of her main study. She describes human disposability as “someone who eventually evolves into a living state of worthlessness” (Wright 2). Note that Wright’s use of the term “evolves” implies that the victim of human disposability was not born into that condition. These women are not inherently worthless. Rather, by the process of degradation and misuse, they are broken down into that apparent state. Wright explicates this “wasting process,” saying that the companies overuse their female workers to the extent that these women lose any hint of mental or physical competence. By the end of this process, it costs the manufacturers the same amount, if not less, to replace the wasted workers with fresh reinforcements (Wright 2). Using Wright’s words, “over time, this woman turns into a form of industrial waste, at which point she is discarded and replaced” (Wright 2). However, this disposability is paradoxically paired with the value of a woman’s work. Her part in this deterioration process turns her into a mechanical puppet that produces an invaluable amount of goods while her personal value disappears (Wright 2). Alicia Gaspar de Alba applies this concept of disposability to the female maquiladora workers in Juárez. Classifying these workers collectively as the “poor brown female,” she refers to her novel *Desert Blood*, in which the maquiladora workers are portrayed as “expendable as pennies in the hungry slot machine of transnational capitalism” (Gaspar de Alba, “Poor Brown Female” 63). She quotes Wright’s notion on the wasting process of the maquiladora workers, claiming that almost anyone who comes to Juárez uses up

these women then throws them away: the global market (Gaspar de Alba, “Poor Brown Female” 64-66), sex offenders (76), drug addicts, murderers (76-78) and power-thirsty men (82). This theory coincides perfectly with the image of maquiladora workers on the assembly line. Like machines, they are operated by a higher power at a pace that they cannot control until they have used up all of their capabilities and give out. They have become part of the assembly line machines and must exert beyond reasonable limits until that part can be replaced. What happens to the profitless broken part that has been removed? It is chopped up and dumped into a pile of trash in the desert.

CONCLUSION

In considering this overview of the Ciudad Juárez murders, we must understand that femicide, though a global crime, occurs in a specific, unique manner in this border city. While the theories regarding culpability vary, they all target groups and individuals who have not received proper processing by the authorities or legal retribution in cases of known fault. The forthcoming analysis centers on cultural productions that emphasize a variety of the theories described in this chapter. *Bordertown* portrays the maquiladora industry as the primary villain, whereas *El Traspasio* represents the cooperation of the police department and the drug cartels. *Señorita Extraviada* focuses on the apathy and involvement of government authorities, and *Desert Blood* presents as its primary culprits the maquiladora industry and snuff pornographers. Nonetheless, all works mutually blame impunity and misogyny as the foundations of the proliferation of the killings. Therefore, it is vital to understand the details and history of the Juárez murders so as to

cognize the happenings in the works and the existent context that surrounds them. In the following analysis, I apply the theories presented in this chapter by revealing how the directors and the novelist utilize them to represent the actual happenings and to enhance the investigations within their works with credibility and validity. We will see the factual findings come to life in the fictionalized accounts and in the documentary, as well.

Additionally, I explain the societal mindsets briefly touched upon in this chapter, such as the patriarchal and machismo paradigm of Ciudad Juárez, illustrating how they influence the systemic misogynist violence present both in modern-day Juárez and in the four works of analysis. Yet, my application of and reference to these theories serves to foster the focus of my analysis: the role of the female investigator in *Bordertown*, *El Traspatio*, *Señorita Extraviada* and *Desert Blood*. In the following chapters, I explore how the female investigative characters of these works relate to the victims and join with other activists in seeking justice on behalf of the murdered women of Juárez. Before studying the female investigators' collective efforts, one must first examine the individual role that they assume. I review in the next chapter the process that each female undergoes that compels her to fight on the victims' behalf.

CHAPTER 2

Gender and Cultural Identity:

A Study of the Introspective Role of the Female Investigator

in *Bordertown* and *Desert Blood*

THE FEMALE INTROSPECTIVE VOICE

The forthcoming analysis compares the female investigators of *Bordertown* and *Desert Blood*. Though these female investigators may vary in style, detail and situation, I argue in this chapter that they share in common two characteristics that make them essential to these works: a rebirth of their sense of identity as a woman, and a return to their Mexican cultural roots. Each female investigator assumes both an individual, introspective role that ties her personal identity to her investigation and a collaborative role that empowers her investigation with the collective efforts of like-minded men and women. The analysis of this chapter focuses on the introspective role of these two female investigators, comparing them with each other, with the female investigators of *El Traspatio* and *Señorita Extraviada* and with their female detective predecessors in the world of crime fiction. The female investigative characters of *El Traspatio* and *Señorita Extraviada* also experience an introspective return to their cultural, gender and sexual identity, but not to the same extent as the first two investigators. As such, I mention their experiences as a means of comparison with the other two works but maintain *Bordertown*

and *Desert Blood* as the primary works of analysis regarding the female investigators' introspective role. In both works, the female investigators' sense of identity grows and heightens their dedication to their respective cases. Their identity is primarily two-fold: female and Mexican. As each detective character faces the physical manifestation of racial and misogynist hatred toward the predominately indigenous women of Ciudad Juárez, each finds that she must acknowledge those same components of her own identity and the threat that they pose to her safety and influence as a voice of justice. The theme of a female detective searching for her identity is not uncommon, particularly in patriarchal societies where macho male opposition demands that a woman's identity be restricted to domestic or sexual roles (Klein 150, 156). In the following sections, I examine how the gender, sexual and ethnic identity of the female investigator deepens her involvement in the investigation and unifies her with the victims. Specifically, each female investigator's renewed experience of her identity as a woman and as Mexican enables her to identify with the femicide victims and to triumph over the powers that victimize her along with the rest of the women of Ciudad Juárez.

RETURN TO WOMANHOOD

Lauren

In *Bordertown*, Lauren progressively realizes that she too is a victim of misogyny, a revelation that deepens through her relationship with the victim of a failed femicidal attack. Lauren's transformation from an uninvolved party to the only person wholeheartedly dedicated to the investigation is more striking than that of the female

investigators in *El Traspatio*, *Señorita Extraviada* and *Desert Blood*. Her ability to sympathize with the victims and to offer herself entirely to the investigation also depends on the relationship that she forges with a girl named Eva who survived an attack and crawled out of her grave. The film foreshadows their relationship and connection when introducing Lauren near the beginning. Lauren appears on the scene immediately following Eva's attack. Lauren is viewing photos of recent femicide victims while on a flight to Juárez. This scene sequence interlaces shots of Lauren's face, of Eva limping home from her grave and of Lauren crying as a young girl (*Bordertown*). The significance of this sequence lies in the fact that the film connects not only the female investigator and the victim but also their moments of distress. This strategy enables the mind of the viewer to associate these two female characters with one another because the viewer has mentally recorded the images of the two characters together. Lauren begins the investigation as a loner whose primary objective is to solve the mystery and write a compelling story so as to earn a promotion. When asked by Eva how many children she has, Lauren justifies the fact that she is unmarried and without children with her career. She proceeds to describe a career as "a kind of work that you want more than anything, and you give up everything to get it. And, then when you get it, you realize that it's not that great and you have no life" (*Bordertown*). In this sense, Lauren serves as the typical hardboiled female detective character utilized by authors of the 1970s and 1980s, a loner detached from romance and domesticity (Mizejewski 142; Walton 20). Her loneliness is reinforced by hidden tension with her former lover and work partner, Alfonso Diaz, who has married and now has a family. When Lauren contacts Diaz for the first time in years,

she calls him from her hotel room in Juárez. The camera angle provides a full shot of her bed and the surrounding room before closing in on her face. The piles of case materials such as papers, photos and books spread all over the bed indicate her marriage to her work, for they occupy the place where a lover once lay or where a potential lover could lie. The nervous manner in which Lauren stands up and fidgets when talking with Diaz on the phone suggests that he is the one whom her work has replaced (*Bordertown*).

Thus, the film introduces Lauren as an investigator so consumed with her investigations that they become her life. However, her growing relationship with Eva throughout the movie shifts her focus from the story to the wellbeing of all victims and to seeing justice fulfilled. During an undercover assignment in a maquiladora, her relationship with Eva broadens to include other victims. When Lauren recounts her experience of being kidnapped and assaulted by the same factory bus driver who assisted in Eva's rape, the movie interlaces flashbacks of Eva's attack and of Lauren's. The audience sees Eva's frightened face as the man advances toward her then Lauren mirroring that very reaction as the same man approaches her. The sequence shows Eva struggling with the assailant, then Lauren defending herself against him. Lauren's speech perfectly describes the significance of this sequence when she confirms Eva's experience by confessing, "I felt like I was living her story" (*Bordertown*). The connection between Lauren and Eva has strengthened throughout the story, culminating in this reflective image of the two characters representing one individual: the Mexican woman. In fact, prior to the kidnapping scene in the storyline, they share a physically and emotionally bonding moment. After seeing her rapist at a party, Eva panics and runs out onto the lawn back at

the home of an activist lawyer where Lauren is hiding her. Lauren catches Eva as she collapses to the ground and holds her. In this shot, Lauren embraces Eva from behind, allowing Eva to lean back against her shoulder. Lauren attempts to console Eva, with tears running down her face as Eva weeps in her arms. The camera faces them, showing their distraught faces side by side. The way in which Eva drops into Lauren's arms in a cradled position adds a maternal aspect to the image of Lauren in this shot. This scene nearly identically parallels an emotionally transparent scene between female detective Blanca and a victim she encounters in *El Traspatio*. After noticing a woman being raped in a car while patrolling the desert, Blanca chases after the vehicle. When the attackers dump the girl out of the moving vehicle, Blanca forfeits her chase to rescue the girl. Blanca covers the young woman's naked blood-drenched lower body with her jacket and wraps her arms around her, saying, "There, there now" (*El Traspatio*). In this shot, Blanca is kneeling on the ground, positioned slightly to the side of the girl so that the girl can lean into Blanca's chest as she holds her. With this position, Blanca acts as a human shield to the part of the girl that is exposed and injured. The embrace that Lauren and Eva share in *Bordertown* greatly resembles this pose. Like Blanca, Lauren appears helpless and deeply sorrowed by the pain of the woman in her arms. Correspondingly, Eva's behavior mimics that of the rape victim in *El Traspatio* who can do nothing but wail painfully. Also in likeness to the shot in *El Traspatio*, the scene in *Bordertown* positions the female investigator and the victim on equal ground. The eye-level shot remains level with their faces, positioned neither above nor below them. Though Eva eventually drops lower into Lauren's arms, she begins with her head resting on Lauren's shoulder, beside

Lauren's head. This shot communicates parallelism between the two characters. *El Traspatio* presents this scene with the same front angle of both characters' faces and the same levelness of their bodies to each other. In slight contrast to the angle of this scene in *Bordertown*, in *El Traspatio* the camera moves from a position level with their faces to a high-angle shot, hovering above them. This stylistic shot once again implies inferiority or a defenseless state of the characters. And by experiencing first-hand the fear and horror forced upon Eva in the kidnapping, Lauren comes in contact with victims who have met a fate much graver than that of Eva. Though Lauren escapes from the bus driver and calls the police before Eva's rapist can attack her from the shadows of the junkyard where the bus has stopped, Lauren falls into a pit full of decaying corpses, most of which are female. At the end of the film, Lauren connects her experience with Eva to her encounter with these women. She admits to her employer, "...when I met Eva, I saw myself...I could be one of the women in those factories. It could be me in one of those graves" (*Bordertown*). Bonding with Eva has allowed Lauren to return to her identity as a Mexican woman and not simply as a reporter. As such, she realizes that there is no distinction between her and any other woman walking the streets of Juárez.

Though several events and lines communicate this bond between these two women, the similarities between the scenes of Eva's rape and Lauren's sexual encounter solidify their identification with one another, particularly in terms of their sexuality. Eva's rape in the opening scenes presents the crime that sets in motion the investigation that Lauren soon pursues. After a factory bus driver takes Eva into the desert and tries to assault her, she escapes through the bus doors, where she is met by the primary attacker

to whom the driver serves as an accomplice. In this scene, Eva is completely debilitated, lying on her back with the rapist on top of her and his accomplice holding her shoulders down. Since Eva cannot move, the rapist acts as the only participating agent, copulating then beating her beyond recognition. When Lauren escapes both the bus driver and the rapist while kidnapped during her undercover assignment, it appears that she has escaped the same carnal fate as Eva. On the contrary, Lauren later undergoes a sexual encounter that mirrors the degradation, objectification and disempowerment present in Eva's attack.¹ After going to dinner with Marco, a wealthy maquiladora owner, in order to find out the name of Eva's attacker, Lauren succumbs to his charm and goes home with him. Contrary to Eva in her rape, Lauren welcomes this sexual act. In the bedroom, Lauren mimics the behavior of the sexually empowered Hollywood action heroine of the early 2000s (Mizejewski 141-143) and initiates the encounter by pulling Marco to her. Marco playfully lifts his hands in a motion of surrender then engages. At this point, their positions of power switch as Marco becomes the aggressor and Lauren, the recipient of his actions. Instead of moving to the bed where they would have mutual freedom of movement, Marco briskly plops Lauren on top of a dresser and proceeds to have his way with her. In this shot, the camera moves behind Marco, exposing a portion of the back of his head and the entirety of Lauren's face. As his body moves upon hers, her face

¹ Lauren's sexual encounter demonstrates her representation of a typical female investigative character of contemporary crime fiction. During the appearance of this genre, the female investigator would often find herself in a sexual encounter with suspects and known perpetrators of the crime that she was investigating (Mizejewski 123). However, Lauren distinguishes herself from such characters in her triumph over her sexual partner in the end. Instead of losing her job, a common fate of female investigators given over to lust (Mizejewski 132), Lauren continues her investigation of the murders on a permanent basis.

contorts as though she is in pain. Marco does not look at her during this act, in the same way that Eva's rapist does not look at her face mid-rape (*Bordertown*). Though Marco has not pinned Lauren to the ground as Eva's rapist does to her, placing Lauren on the dresser and leaning her against the wall where he holds all power of motion in the standing position grants him the same advantage of power that Eva's rapist assumes on top of her. I must note that I do not argue that Marco is raping Lauren in this scene, for their encounter is consensual sex. Rather, I am noting the way in which the film portrays masculine violence and control as an existing element of the traditional, patriarchal mindset that underlies the perpetration of the femicides in Ciudad Juárez and which threatens the success of Lauren's investigation. Eva's rapist and Marco share in common the aggressive, controlling role in these sexual acts and display the male sexual dominance that characterizes the misogynist attacks and murders in Juárez. Furthermore, the fact that Lauren's sexual surrender occurs with the maquiladora owner is extremely significant since the film portrays the maquiladora industry as the main culprit in the murders within the story. Additionally, Eva's rapist is a friend of Marco's family and performs his attack on Eva with a bus driver from Marco's factory. This association forms a triangular connection, with the maquiladora power on top and Lauren and Eva at the bottom corners. Both women, who have bonded by this point in the film, become victimized by the same power: maquiladora wealth. This connection emphasizes their unity in sharing an equal weakened social status as women in a patriarchal society driven by hyper masculinity. As the story progresses, Lauren and Eva look to each other for support and grow to admire one another, fulfilling Susan Baker Sotelo's claim that the

crime fiction investigator needs a role model with whom he or she can identify (Sotelo 127). In copying each other's bravery, they overcome their fears and strengthen in their fight for justice. Lauren's exposure to the same misogynist powers that Eva faces enables her to understand the struggle of Eva and the other victimized women of Juárez. This understanding stems not from simply witnessing such cruelty and male domination but by experiencing it first hand, as she does during her undercover assignment and during her sexual encounter with Marco. Thus, this relationship and identification with Eva causes Lauren to realize that in Ciudad Juárez she is not regarded by the majority of the population according to her profession, success or personality; rather, her female gender and the sexual roles that the patriarchal tradition assigns to it become the primary components of her identity.

Ivon

Like Lauren, Ivon experiences a renewed sense of the gender facet of her identity through a kinship with femicide victims. Between *Desert Blood*, *Bordertown*, *El Traspatio* and *Señorita Extraviada*, Ivon's investigation of the Juárez murders stands as the most complex in that it encapsulates three investigations: that of the Juárez murders in general, the death of one particular maquiladora worker and the disappearance of Ivon's sister. Ivon is a Ph.D. candidate who returns to her hometown El Paso to adopt a baby. At the beginning of the novel, Ivon appears to be the most ignorant out of all of the investigators in this analysis, as she does not learn about the murders until reading about them in a magazine en route to El Paso. When the mother of the child Ivon is to adopt

turns up dead, along with baby she was carrying, Ivon is determined to find the culprit, against the advice of her friends and family. As she witnesses the autopsy of “the mother of her child,” Ivon turns her attention to the baby. After hearing that it had been a boy and listening to the doctor describe his physical features, Ivon names him in her head, “Samuel Santiago,” and hears his voice calling out to her “I’m starting to feel kinda lonely” (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 51-53). In this moment, Ivon acknowledges the baby as an individual and as her son, unlike the biological mother, who had been told to think of him as a “bag of water and bones” (2). Ivon decides to pursue an investigation as to what happened to the girl and her baby after bonding with the deceased baby as her own (55). Though this is not the investigation that Ivon ends up pursuing throughout the rest of the story, it solidifies her interest in the Juárez murders from an emotional and personal perspective. The academic responsibilities of Ivon’s life do motivate her to abandon her consideration of adopting another child in an attempt to focus her research of the murders on a new chapter for her dissertation. However, Ivon abandons even her research when her younger sister Irene disappears.

Ivon experiences a resurfacing of her identity as a woman who grew up along the border, which allows her to relate to the victims in terms of gender oppression. According to Gaspar de Alba in a personal interview, the victims for whom Ivon is searching are women who have been scorned by society; therefore, “in essence, she’s looking for herself” (Gaspar de Alba, “Personal Interview”). Ivon is a lesbian who sports a butch style of haircut and dress. In fact, her mother comments on how much Ivon resembles her father after not seeing her for two years (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 60). Ivon does not

grow more feminine in her appearance as the story progresses, but the fact that her butch nature and sexuality do not hide her from the degradation of men becomes more apparent. For example, Ivon resorts to the concept of male strength and security when she feels threatened towards the beginning of the story. Having left the door open to the house where she is staying, Ivon feels unsafe upon hearing the voice of a man at the entryway. She calls out for the stranger to wait until her husband comes out and rushes for the phone (28). This act is unexpected since Ivon is accustomed to fending for herself and appears to assume more of a masculine role in her relationship with her wife, who dons a more feminine style. She must succumb to the opinion “as long as you’re with a man you’ll be safe” by allowing her cousin William to escort her throughout Juárez while she searches for her sister (177, 184). To further infuriate her, a male cop later feels her breasts while arresting her under false charges, reminding Ivon of when she once exempted herself from an arrest in Juárez by performing a sexual favor for a male police officer (213). Her status as a target for macho abasement has not changed. Therefore, she realizes that she cannot rashly defend her dignity and pride as she might in the case of sexual harassment in Los Angeles, where she currently resides. Instead, she must expect such treatment from a majority of the men along the border and respond to it in a manner that appeases such men.

Ivon’s relational bond with the femicide victims and her defeat of male oppression directly relate to her maternal role in the story, an aspect that differentiates her from Lauren and from the female investigators of *El Traspasado* and *Señorita Extraviada*, as well. The maternal element used to restore the female investigator to a socially

acceptable level of domesticity in detective fiction of the 1980s, the time period characterized by a surge in female detective characters in film, also finds its way into the role of Ivon. Plots of 1980s crime films often employed “domestic props” such as children and families to break down the female detective into succumbing to her purest maternal instincts (Mizejewski 128).² However, instead of using this tool to distance the female investigator from her professional role, Gaspar de Alba utilizes the maternal role as the factor that drives Ivon’s investigation and grants her success over the perpetrators. At the onset of the novel, Ivon’s involvement in the Juárez femicides appears strictly maternal, focused on the son she has dreamed of since hearing a lonely boy call for his father in a bookstore (18). She doubts the wisdom of adopting a Mexican child with her wife while finishing her doctoral dissertation, but, as Ivon admits, “her yearning was stronger than her fear” (13). When Ivon directs all of her energy and research skills on her sister after Irene is kidnapped, it appears that sisterhood has taken precedence over motherhood. On the contrary, these two elements combine into one. First of all, Ivon has a somewhat maternal relationship with Irene. She has always viewed Irene as her little sister but has also treated her as a mother would. Ivon took Irene to school on her first day of kindergarten, has planned for Irene to live with her in Los Angeles and defends Irene against the physical reprimands of their mother. Standing between her mother and Irene during an argument and clenching her mother’s arms in her fists, Ivon orders her mother to cease slapping Irene, a defensive act typical of a mother figure (66-67). When

² This tactic causes the female investigator to falter in the film *Betrayed* (1988) when FBI agent Cathy Weaver temporarily strays from her investigation due to the maternal relationship she has formed with the daughter of her primary suspect (Mizejewski 127-128).

Irene tells Ivon that she missed her during her captivity, Ivon realizes that the voice she had been hearing in her heart, “I’m starting to feel kinda lonely,” which she heard the young boy say in the bookstore and which she attributed to the son she would have, was actually the voice of Irene (303). Yet, the bond that Ivon shares with Irene does not eradicate her need for a child of her own. In the end, she finds that she can enjoy both her relationship with her sister and a relationship with her new son. And it is the fulfillment of Ivon’s original goal to become a parent that allows her to conclude her investigation with total defiance and victory over her macho, profit-seeking foes, despite the pain she has suffered and her inability to prevent the killings from perpetuating. Ivon has come to the conclusion that the murders center on the corporate industry’s aim to rid the border of excess “poor brown females” clustering in from the southern regions of the country and to prevent them from breeding their offspring both in Ciudad Juárez and in the United States. The direct targeting of reproductive organs such as the vagina, the womb and the breasts alert Ivon to the annihilation of female reproduction that lies at the center of most of the attacks (331-333). For this reason, Ivon succeeds against the culprits by becoming a mother and bringing her “brown” son to live in the United States. Through her maternal longing, and especially through her relationship with Irene, Ivon finds her greatest advantage: her ability to identify and relationally bond with the femicide victims of Juárez. As is the case with Lauren in *Bordertown* and Blanca in *El Traspatio*, Ivon identifies with all of the Juárez victims by identifying with a primary victim with whom she has significant contact. Ivon’s greatest capacity to identify with the victims lies within the deep relationship that she shares with her sister. Ivon has always had a strong

bond with her sister, particularly since she is fifteen years older than Irene. Their closeness is apparent in their reunion after two years, as Ivon tightly embraces Irene and playfully teases her (8-9). Irene depends greatly on Ivon for emotional support, expressing how much she has missed Ivon and her excitement about her plan to live with Ivon after graduating from high school. Even as a child, Irene was always attached to Ivon (72, 75). This deep emotional connection proves its strength during their separation after Irene's kidnapping through Ivon's perseverance to find her sister and Irene's determination to survive. While searching for Irene, Ivon feels an intuitive sensation that Irene is alive: "I know she's alive, I can feel it...I have this faith...that she'll do what it takes to stay alive" (168). Irene confirms Ivon's faith in her by deciding to physically defend herself against one of the attackers, thinking of what Ivon would do in that situation (293). The two sisters remain connected in thought and spirit. While Ivon does not share the same emotional connection with the other rape victims and femicide victims as she does with Irene, Ivon's deep familial bond with Irene grants Ivon profound compassion for the other victims and compels her to try to solve the mystery surrounding their deaths. Towards the beginning of the novel, Ivon ponders the similarity in age between Irene and the dead mother of the baby whom Ivon was going to adopt and realizes that the girl "could have been her little sister" (74). Near the conclusion of the story, following her desperate search for and success in finding Irene, Ivon cannot draw her attention away from the other victims. Instead of resting after a night spent in the hospital following Irene's violent rescue, she takes a moment to attempt to figure out the motive behind and solution to the killings, then realizes that it is a mystery too complex

for her to solve. (335). At the end of the novel, with Irene safe at home in recuperation, the decision finalized to adopt a soon-to-be orphaned little boy and her entire family gathering for a reunion, Ivon sympathizes with the femicide victims and their families, feeling that she does not deserve to celebrate while they suffer a much graver fate (341). Ivon's identification with her sister and the other victims, coupled with her maternal objective of adoption, equalizes her with the women of Ciudad Juárez and enables her to empathize with them. Ivon shares with Lauren the ultimate ability to understand and care for the loss of the victims' families through her personal relationship with a victim. At the conclusion of *Bordertown*, Lauren stays in Juárez to work for the local paper and to continue seeking justice on behalf of the murdered women of the city. The film shows Lauren working in her office and comforting a grieving mother at the site of a corpse discovery in the desert. In the final scenes, the shots flash from Eva's smiling face to an image of Lauren as a young girl (*Bordertown*). This parallelism of the images of these two characters reinforces the connection between them. And the interlacing of these images with those of Lauren aiding victims and their families reaffirms the way in which helping Eva has motivated Lauren to identify with and advocate for the other women of Juárez. Thus, both Ivon and Lauren prove to be much more effective in their investigations due to their relationships with one particular victim. In the following section, we will see how both Ivon's and Lauren's identification with the victims in terms of their Mexicanness solidifies their sense of membership within the border community.

CULTURAL IDENTITY

Lauren

When Lauren arrives in Ciudad Juárez, she encounters a collision of cultures. Unlike finding herself in the interior of the Mexico, where Mexican customs and practices take precedence, she finds herself in the country's U.S.-Mexico border culture, where Mexican culture and politics combine and clash with that of the United States. Gloria Anzaldúa describes the border as "una herida abierta [*an open wound*] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" and where we find "the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country - a border culture" (Anzaldúa 25). In her portrayal of this distinct border culture, Anzaldúa grants the most attention to the overwhelming sense of otherness that characterizes both sides of the border. Within this environment, tensions rise among United States Anglo citizens who want to keep Mexicans out of the country and among Mexican citizens who view U.S. - side Mexicans as degenerative Mexicans who have crossed over to the Anglo culture and identity (Anzaldúa 33-35, 40). Furthermore, Anzaldúa elucidates the tensions within the Mexican culture, clarifying that those who have become immersed in the culture of the United States have begun to return to "lo mexicano," a "mexicanismo," a Mexicanness, characterized by the rural mestiza identity that embraces its indigenous roots. The author offers an image of what this culture, her home, means to her through various smells that she associates with her Mexican home and identity: burning wood, cow manure, "homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan," "my brother Carito barbecuing fajitas in the backyard" (83). Such elements of Anzaldúa's childhood home life represent her Mexicanness, the deep Mexican culture that clashes with foreign and more industrialized cultures such as that of

the maquiladora industry along the border. It is, as Anzaldúa purports, an identity that frequently diminishes in many who move to or are born in the United States. In *Bordertown*, Lauren embodies the dichotomized cultural identity whose Mexicanness appears to be lost or hidden beneath her Anglo identity. However, as she forms a relationship with and learns to relate to the victims of the Juárez murders, she acknowledges and embraces her Mexican heritage. Lauren's process of culturally identifying with the victims reveals itself mainly through her physical appearance. When the storyline first introduces Lauren, she looks and speaks like an American with a Hispanic bloodline. She speaks English with a Midwestern accent and struggles in her use of Spanish. Furthermore, her hair is dyed blonde and straightened. Such physical distinction from the people of Juárez becomes apparent once she arrives in the city. After meeting Eva, Lauren offers to escort her out of the local newspaper office in order to hide her from the police. Diaz tells Lauren that she will not be able to blend into the crowds since she is a "blonde American" (*Bordertown*). As the story progresses, Lauren increasingly embraces her Mexican identity, which she had lost sight of. Yet, this renewed connection with her ethnic roots occurs as a result of Lauren's identification with Eva and the other victims. Sotelo explains the importance of shared experience and heritage to one's sense of identity. Speaking of Richard Rodriguez's identification with the portrait of a schoolboy in his autobiography *Hunger of Memory*, she states, "He relates to the scholarship boy because they share a similar history..." (Sotelo 127). The bond between individuals with common experiences and backgrounds serves as a universal theme not restricted to female detective works. In *Bordertown*, the general

struggle to thrive and rise in a male-dominated society, the specific attack by the same culprit and the shared Mexican heritage enable Lauren and Eva to relate to each other.

As Lauren identifies more with the victims as a woman and as Mexican, which enables her to progressively remember and embrace her Mexican heritage, the audience begins to identify Lauren's Mexican cultural heritage and identity. For example, when Lauren enters the maquiladora disguised as a worker, she dyes her hair dark brown and lets the natural wave of her hair show in addition to wearing eye liner, the factory smock and accessories typical of maquiladora workers. By this scene, the audience has learned through flashbacks that Lauren's biological parents were Mexican migrant workers who had been killed in the United States. These flashbacks, depicted in Lauren's dreams, portray young Lauren as a Mexican-looking girl with dark curly hair. After Lauren's under cover assignment, she decides to keep her hair the way it is, resembling the image of her younger self (*Bordertown*). At this point, Lauren carries more of a mestiza appearance, showing her indigenous and Spanish roots through her dark complexion and features. She completely surrenders to her newly discovered identity and responsibility to defend the women of Juárez by the end of the story. After the conclusion of her investigation of Eva's case, Lauren decides to stay in Juárez to run the local newspaper. She has returned to her roots and is no longer running from her past, a result similar to the outcome in Ivon's story, the other female investigator engulfed in cultural tension.

Ivon

Ivon's return to her native border between El Paso and Ciudad Juárez signifies a return to her cultural roots as well as to her identity as a woman in that macho society and appears mostly in her making peace with customs and individuals from her past along that border. Her reconnection with the people and customs of her native land proves to be very difficult due to resistance that appears in two forms: resistance that Ivon displays toward the people, mindsets and customs of the border, and resistance of the people of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso toward Ivon. The first form of resistance occurs because the people view Ivon as an outsider. She has been living in Los Angeles for the past eight years and is ignorant to the surge in femicide that is occurring along the border. One must note that Ivon is not *Juarense*, a term used to describe people from Juárez. She is a Chicana, a woman whose cultural identity combines a deep awareness of her Mexican heritage with dual identification with and participation in United States culture and customs. She shares this identity with Lourdes Portillo, who moved from Mexico to the United States as a teenager. Portillo considers herself a Chicana and fulfills the real life embodiment of the cultural identity search of fictional characters Lauren and Ivon (Portillo, "Biography"). Her first words in *Señorita Extraviada* identify her as an outsider: "Vine a Juárez" (*I came to Juarez*). The second time she speaks, she notes that few people wanted to talk with her about the femicides when she arrived in Juárez (*Señorita Extraviada*). This use of language establishes Portillo as an outsider unfamiliar with the situation in Ciudad Juárez. Therefore, her investigation presented in the film depicts her process of familiarization with the murders, particularly as she serves as the primary expert relaying this information to the audience via presentation, style and

narration. Though Ivon compares to Lauren in this sense, she possesses a more specific type of Chicana identity, a border identity. For this reason, the most accurate term to describe Ivon would be *El Pasoan*, since she was raised along the El Paso side of the border and occupies both worlds. Portillo has also lived along the U.S.-Mexico border and understands that culture; however, she did not spend her entire childhood and teenage life on the border as Ivon did. As Gaspar de Alba emphasized in a personal interview, language serves as the primary indicator of Ivon's otherness to the citizens of Juárez. They view her as a "pocha," a Mexican who speaks Spanish poorly, or at least, like a non-native, a sign of a "degenerative Mexican" (Gaspar de Alba, "Personal Interview"). Irene also experiences this prejudice, particularly among her *Juarenses* friends at the fair. They call her a "pocha," which makes sense to her since she has difficulty understanding their rapid use of Spanish (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 103). The second form of resistance is that of Ivon to the pain and rejection that she associates with her home. As a lesbian, she is considered an outcast by the majority of local society, a reality of the contemporary El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border that Anzaldúa, who was also a lesbian, elucidates. According to Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), this society views homosexuals as "atravesados" (*troublemakers*) who rebel against normality. They are considered, as Anzaldúa was, "más allá de la tradición" (*strayed from tradition*) (Anzaldúa 25, 38). Thus, Ivon struggles to fully accept this border culture as her home due to the lack of a sense of belonging that it has always inflicted upon her. Ivon's greatest opponent is her mother, who does not agree with any of the lifestyle choices Ivon has ever made and who blames Ivon for all of her grief, including the death

of her husband, Ivon's father. When Ivon revisits her mother's home, the tension between them brews and erupts into a hurtful argument. Ivon's mother castigates her most for being a lesbian, calling it an embarrassment and Ivon a womanizer (66, 84). Gaspar de Alba indicated in her interview the importance of incorporating homophobia into Ivon's experience at the border in order to create this tension and resistance for the female investigator (Gaspar de Alba, "Personal Interview"). The strife with Ivon's mother renews within her heart the emotional pain associated with her hometown, the pain that she escaped by moving away. Ivon finds that she must face the abusive wrath and homophobic despise of her mother as well as other pain from her past. The despise encapsulated in her mother represents that of the contemporary patriarchal society of Juárez that Ivon has attempted to escape. While Ivon waits outside her car in a parking lot, she meets a man who judgmentally surveys her attire, which includes a man's flannel shirt that her uncle lent her. This man then stares at Ivon at a distance and laughs with his male friend. Ivon remembers that *Juarenses* men are not accustomed to seeing women dressed in men's clothing and describes lesbians as "every macho's wet dream – to voyeurize or to conquer..." (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 134). Here the novel presents male expectations of the conduct and dress of women in Ciudad Juárez, expectations that control the mindsets of the majority of that border population, including that of Ivon's mother. Gaspar de Alba employs a second character to represent Ivon's past identity as a border native, Raquel, Ivon's former lover. Upon seeing Ivon after eight years, Raquel endeavors to lure her back. She knows that she can find her way into Ivon's heart by triggering Ivon's rage, described as "an emotion she carries like a bodily organ" (Gaspar

de Alba, *Desert Blood* 192). Raquel nearly succeeds when they share an intimate moment after Ivon impulsively punches her for taking Irene to a drug dealer's home (193). This rage that overcomes Ivon in her frustrating encounters with her mother and during her emotionally exhausting search for Irene is an aspect of her former life that she has been overcoming in Los Angeles.³ When first faced with comments and events that trigger her rage, Ivon practices calming strategies that her wife has taught her, signifying the control and growth that Ivon has found in her new life away from the border. However, Ivon's vulnerability to anger increases with the amount of time that she spends back home. She pounds her hand into the steering wheel of her uncle's truck, punches Raquel and advances toward another vehicle with a crowbar poised to strike in a fit of road rage (140, 176, 193). Later in the novel, Raquel draws a very tired and emotionally spent Ivon into a sexual encounter (264-266), thus symbolizing Ivon's return to her identity as a border native and the way in which she must face that culture instead of resisting it. It must be noted that Ivon and Raquel communicate with each other only in Spanish, which Gaspar de Alba grants special emphasis to by reminding the reader of the use of Spanish whenever these two characters meet (70, 135, 187). This use of Spanish coincides with Raquel's role of drawing Ivon back to her past in that Ivon must identify herself with the people along the border by speaking their language. In fact, Ivon begins to translate for individuals such as her cousin William who do not possess a strong command of Spanish (189, 202), thus linguistically accentuating her Mexicanness. In addition to people and

³ Ivon mirrors the detective characters of the traditional hardboiled detective genre, which appeared in the 1920s. Like Ivon, these solitary, cynical detectives had a strong taste for alcohol and tobacco and relied on physical force to overcome their foes (Altnoeder 85; Mizejewski 17).

language, various customs of the U.S.-Mexico border society present themselves as aspects of Ivon's hometown that she has attempted to avoid. Spirituality stands as the most prominent of Mexican traditions portrayed in *Desert Blood* since the majority of border society with a Mexican heritage embraces a spiritual awareness that incorporates many Catholic customs. The other three works demonstrate the presence of this spirituality as well, specifically in Eva's wearing a necklace figurine of the Virgin Mary for protection (*Bordertown*), Blanca's participation in a group prayer at a memorial service (*El Traspatio*) and Portillo's attention to portraits and statues of the Virgin Mary in the homes and neighborhoods of her interviewees (*Señorita Extraviada*). Though Ivon grew up attending church, had her first communion and attended a Catholic school (25), she does not follow the Catholic tradition. She even castigates in her mind families who believe that God will rescue their disappeared girls. She does so with restraint and respect, however, understanding that voicing her opinion would be cruel (167). It is important to note that Ivon does not convert during her investigation; nonetheless, she learns to respect certain spiritual customs. For example, she lights a candle and prays for Irene in a local church and later prays more sincerely for Irene's protection (177, 301). In this sense, spiritual beliefs and rituals serve as another feature of Ivon's Mexican heritage and border culture identity that she cannot ignore, though she chooses not to assimilate into this aspect of that culture.

In addition to understanding that she cannot alter the mindsets of prejudiced members of the *Juarense* society, Ivon accepts the fact that she may never find the pure acceptance along the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border that one would hope to find in his or

her hometown. While analyzing the murders and her own investigation near the end of the novel, Ivon gazes at a scenic view that she loves of the Río Grande and the nearby mountains, “the ambivalence she called home” (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 335). She understands the harsh reality that has gripped this place and, as the narrative voice affirms, “this spot held no more magic for her, now” (335). Thus, the tense struggle involved in seeking acceptance and refuge in this society dissipates as she realizes that neither is to be found. She sees her border town as it is and, knowing that she cannot change it on her own, relinquishes her striving to do so. Most significantly, Ivon learns to accept herself and the fact that she differs from the ideals held by many members in her hometown and within her family. Following this realization that Ivon reaches while overlooking her two cities, she and her wife, who has joined her in El Paso, spend a week with her family. At this point, the audience witnesses the sense of belonging that Ivon is acquiring in her family, in her work and in her life. With the first draft of the final chapter of her dissertation written and having decided to adopt a Mexican boy, participated in preparations for a family reunion and seen her wife bond with her mother, the tension and fear present in Ivon at the beginning of the novel disappear. In fact, the final scene includes many of the components of resistance that Ivon has encountered and incorporates them into her healing and resolution. The scene takes place in Irene’s bedroom the day after her release from the hospital where she stayed for physical care following her traumatic kidnapping and rescue. With spiritual objects such as the Virgin of Guadalupe candles among the pile of gifts surrounding Irene to comfort her, Ivon finds herself in this room with Irene, their cousin Ximena, Ivon’s wife, the child they are going

to adopt, Ivon's mother and Raquel (339-340). Not only has Raquel entered the scene as a conduit of peace and joy by delivering Ivon's soon-to-be son, but her presence also represents healing between Ivon's past and present life, the present symbolized by Ivon's wife. Furthermore, Ivon's mother finally shows acceptance of Ivon and her new family by granting her approval of Ivon's choice to adopt the boy. An expected adherence on Ivon's part to social expectations regarding gender roles also loses control over her, as she has been entrusted with the duty of helping her uncle prepare the meat for the upcoming family reunion (340, 341), a job not commonly undertaken by a woman in such patriarchal societies. The last line of the novel, spoken by Ivon in Spanish, encompasses Ivon's return to her roots as she embraces the merge of her new life with her culture and her family: "¡Qué familia!" (*What a family!*) (341). Thus, at the conclusion of the story, Ivon has faced and progressively come to terms with components of the border culture in which she was raised, both by accepting her lack of conformity to certain customs and expectations and by reconciling with certain individuals of that society. Instead of assuming the identity of a runaway, she is a member of the El Paso-Ciudad Juárez border whose differences no longer hide her from her home and family.

CONCLUSION

The gender and cultural identity that Lauren and Ivon share with the people of Juárez enhances their investigations by granting them insight into the perspectives held by individuals immersed in that society. The female detective characters studied in this chapter come to Juárez as outsiders. However, their ability to relate to the people,

particularly to the women, grants them familiarity with the environment, the people and the customs. Quoting Ricardo F. Vivancos Pérez's references to Gaspar de Alba's concepts and terms regarding Ivon, these characters experience a "rite of passage" from 'cultural schizophrenia' to 'border consciousness'" (Vivancos Pérez 173). As Michael Cohen claims, "A culture viewed from outside is opaque, with interesting surface features. Viewed from inside, culture is transparent" (Cohen 151). In the same way in which the female investigators expose their personal struggles and vulnerability, they also expose that of the cultures that they represent. The audience views firsthand the mindsets, prejudices and values of the *Juarese* society, which are imposed upon and embodied in the female investigators. As Portillo shows in her documentary, this concept proves to be a truth displayed in actual events and represented in fictional works. As my analysis exemplifies, the introspective role of the female detective character has evolved and intensified in various media. Such a role possesses particular importance when related to a process of identification with other characters, as is the case in *Bordertown* and *Desert Blood*. It is this identification with the people of Juárez and the femicide victims that allows the female investigators to realize that they comprise part of that group and are therefore potential victims of the murders. Understanding the individual role and identity of the female investigator in each of these works enables the audience to identify with each female investigator and her victims, as well as to appreciate the collaborative role that she shares with her victims and other activists. I examine this collective participation and identity of the female investigator in the following chapter, exposing the vitality of

the female investigator's sense of identity to her ability to join with others in fighting on the victims' behalf.

CHAPTER 3

Men, Women and Their Relationships:

An Analysis of the Collaborative Efforts between Both Genders in

El Traspatio and *Señorita Extraviada*

DISPOSITION FOR COLLABORATION

Resistance to and Need for a Collective Effort

In this chapter, I analyze the collaborative role of the female investigators in *El Traspatio* and *Señorita Extraviada*. For the purpose of comparison, I include examples of collaboration undertaken by the female detective characters of *Bordertown* and *Desert Blood*. However, I center my analysis of the female investigators' collective role on the female investigators of *El Traspatio* and *Señorita Extraviada* because they display a much more pronounced level of collaboration with other parties. Though the female investigators of all four works serve as the primary investigators of the murders, they do not work alone. Directors Nava, Carrera and Portillo and novelist Gaspar de Alba team up their female detective characters with other individuals so as to strengthen their investigators' effectiveness and fuel their dedication to the investigations. Such collaboration serves as a transforming agent since all of the female investigators analyzed in this thesis are essentially loners. In this way they mirror what Susan Baker Sotelo labels the "loner detective of the hard-boiled tradition" (Sotelo 135). The hard-boiled

detective fiction genre that surfaced in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s presented a darker representation of murder mysteries, featuring a cynical male detective who was often both a workaholic and an alcoholic (Blaser; Sotelo 135). Though the female investigators studied here do not fully fit the description of the traditional hard-boiled detective, they do revive that stereotypical loner disposition. They each arrive in Ciudad Juárez alone and initiate their investigations with little, if any, support from colleagues and friends. In *Bordertown*, upon arriving in Juárez, Lauren invites her former partner in investigative reporting to assist her in the investigation of the murders. He initially refuses to pursue the investigation with her and encourages her to do the same, leaving her to find leads on her own. Though Ivon and Blanca may not receive such blunt refusals for cooperation in *Desert Blood* and *El Traspatio*, they are the only ones persistent in seeking justice at the onset of their quests. Blanca faces male colleagues whose apathy for and scrutiny of her zeal strips her of sufficient aid from within the police department. Ivon begins her inquiry into the murder and mistreatment of the city's women, particularly that of Cecilia, with self-driven determination despite the fact that others around her advise her to let it go. Portillo cannot be as definitively categorized with the other three female detectives in this case, as she does not indicate any overt opposition to her investigation for *Señorita Extraviada* by members within her field or realm of professional influence. However, she instigates her production amidst resistance from the people of Juárez to talk about the murders. Though she receives support from her film crew, activists, victims and their families and friends, Portillo is responsible for and credited as carrying out the investigation on her own. Therefore, I argue that in each

of the four works, the solitary facet of the female detectives' searches soon fades as they join forces with other women and with men in solving the mystery surrounding the murders and in effecting justice on behalf of those scarred by the femicides. In this chapter, I analyze the female investigators' collective participation with men and women in *El Traspatio* and *Señorita Extraviada*, exposing the obstacles that stand in their way and the ways in which they overcome resistance and oppression to continue their investigations with the help of friends. Specifically, the relationships that both female investigators forge allow them to join both with femicide victims and with male and female activists and to overcome misogynist oppression in a collaborative pursuit of justice. I begin with these female investigators' collaborative efforts with other women, which appear in two forms: alliances formed with female victims and alliances formed with women who share the female investigators' interest in helping the victims.

COLLABORATION WITH WOMEN

The Victim-Investigator Team

Blanca

In *El Traspatio*, Blanca forms a similar investigator-victim relationship as Lauren and Eva. Throughout the first half of the film, the victims that Blanca encounters are all deceased. As her investigation builds, the murders and other violence against women in Juárez distress Blanca incrementally until the wellbeing of the victims and potential victims becomes her objective. Midway through the film, Blanca rescues a young woman who has been raped and thrown out of a moving vehicle into the desert. I described in the

previous chapter the scene in which Blanca rescues the girl and consolingly holds her in the desert. Her empathy for and identification with this young woman becomes apparent in this scene and move her to save the girl. In analyzing this scene, I took particular interest in the fact that Blanca allows her body to touch that of the rape victim. This image shows a striking contrast to that of Blanca's male detective partner in a previous scene, in which he is photographing female corpses at a crime scene. Wearing latex gloves and keeping his distance, he does not touch the bodies in any way. Blanca, on the other hand, is not wearing gloves in this scene. When she orders her partner to get closer to the bodies for close-up shots, he hesitantly obeys. Later in the film, while comforting the young woman in the desert, Blanca defies any effort to distance herself from the victim by allowing their skin to touch and the victim's blood to stain Blanca's jacket. This image personifies the concept "my sister's keeper" and resembles the scene in *Desert Blood* in which Ivon cradles Irene after rescuing her from snuff pornographers. Ivon sits behind Irene on the floor of a cemetery and wraps her arms around her sister's naked body, allowing Irene to lean back into her arms (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 303). Both instances convey a deep connection between the female investigator and the victim, a sisterhood in which one looks out for the other. In *El Traspasado*, the victim reciprocates by joining forces with Blanca in pursuing the culprits and aiding other victims. After interviewing this woman following the rescue, Blanca relies on information from the woman's story to pursue her theory that many of the bodies found were of women kidnapped months before and held captive. Blanca arranges for the woman to stay with Sara, a trusted social worker, and the woman accompanies Blanca

and Sara to investigate a site where bodies have allegedly been preserved in the desert. Due to Blanca's efforts to help this victim and to include her in the investigation, the young woman becomes active in fighting on behalf of other victims. In one of the final scenes of the film, the young woman stands with a group of protesters at the grave site of femicide victims, shouting "¡Ni una más!" (*Not one more!*) The frame shows the young woman protesting alongside two other key characters in the film, the social worker and the cousin of one of the victims. However, the shot switches to a close-up of only this young woman's face; the other two are shown merely as part of the crowd (*El Traspatio*). In this way, Blanca's relationship with and caring for the victim allows the victim to find her own voice and to join in the fight against the crime that she has suffered. The investigator-victim relationship portrayed in *El Traspatio* contrasts with that in *Bordertown* in that the storyline does not follow the young woman that Blanca rescues as the storyline of *Bordertown* follows Eva. In *Bordertown*, the film begins with Eva's attack and continues telling her story, interlacing it with that of Lauren. *El Traspatio* also simultaneously follows the perspectives of the female detective and a victim, yet in a different way. The film alternates between the perspective of the detective, Blanca, and that of a young maquiladora worker, Juana. In this way, it incorporates two primary narratives that intersect at the end of the film. Instead of beginning with Juana's attack, as *Bordertown* does with Eva's, the story builds up to her rape and death at the end. Blanca meets Juana for the first time at the end of the movie as she examines Juana's corpse in the desert. In this case, the detective-victim relationship is not shared between the female investigator and the other main female character as it is in *Bordertown*. Rather, the

female investigator reaches out to another victim and includes her in the investigation, forming an emotional bond that enables the detective to grieve for Juana at the end of the film.

Lourdes Portillo

The collaborative efforts between Portillo and the victims that *Señorita Extraviada* presents stand out from those of Blanca in that the victims in this documentary are not fictional characters based on actual people. Rather, they are survivors and fatalities of misogynist attacks. Portillo begins her interviews with the testimony of a woman who survived being raped in the desert and whose daughter was later kidnapped and found dead in the desert. As opposed to simply offering this woman's entire testimony at the beginning and ending her appearance in the film, Portillo interlaces her testimony with the others throughout the film. She appears again in the middle and towards the end of the documentary, supplementing what the other interviewees have testified. The second and final surviving victim introduced in the film is María, who recounts the sexual, physical and emotional abuse that she suffered at the hands of police officers who arrested her after her home had been invaded. The police officials exposed their participation in femicidal attacks as they forced María to look at photographs of tortured female corpses (*Señorita Extraviada*). Though these two women did not suffer the same fate as the women and girls who died as a result of torture, they still live as victims of the same misogynist aggression. Those who lost their lives at the hands of their assailants also appear in the documentary. Portillo incorporates into her visual investigation pictures

and names of femicide victims. While these women did not consensually partner with Portillo as the victims with the female investigators in the other three works in this study, their presence in Portillo's film enhances both its credibility and its call for activism. Since they cannot speak for themselves, Portillo joins with them to tell their stories and to seek justice on their behalf. Within this alliance that Portillo forms with the deceased victims, she grants them great dignity and respect. Portillo admitted in an interview that she intentionally showed no footage or still imagery of tortured bodies because she feared debasing the value of these women to that of a statistic. That is why she chose to show pictures taken of these victims while still living, portraying their personalities and not their deaths (H. Torres 68). In doing so, she has offered a contradictory image of the victims to the corrupt girls that local authorities portray them to be. She allows the audience to view them from the perspective of their family and friends (M. Torres par. 4). Portillo utilizes close-up shots of the victims both shown and interviewed, exposing just their faces, hands or feet, as well as medium close-up shots, framing their chest and face. During the first surviving victim's testimony, the camera shows a close-up of the woman's hands writing on a notepad while the soundtrack plays her voice narrating her testimony (*Señorita Extraviada*). This offers an artistic interplay of the spoken and written word, as the audience both hears and sees the woman's story. The shot of her hands writing her story also grants permanence to her voice. Independent publisher Jennifer Havenner discusses the permanence of the written word. She affirms that our "permanent record, whether through artistic expression in fiction, or through knowledge in non-fiction, is kept on printed books..." and that this is essential to the existence of the

“human race” (Havenner par. 3). The victim interviewed by Portillo is not publishing a book; nonetheless, the act of writing her story acknowledges its eternal merit. Portillo displays a similar shot of the other surviving victim when the camera zooms in on María’s feet. The function of this shot parallels that of the shot of the first interviewee’s hands because it illustrates the story that her voice is recounting. While María tells Portillo that the police officers detaining her ordered her to remove her clothes, the camera shows a close-up shot of María slipping her feet out of her sandals. This image grants the audience a vicarious view of María stripping herself in her holding cell. Thus, these two victims couple their stories with Portillo’s use of film technique to educate the world on the rampant abuse of women in Ciudad Juárez.

Portillo also employs music as a narrative device. Her narrative voice used to guide the investigation is usually accompanied by background music of a choir singing a mournful melody, which coincides with Portillo’s use of slow sweeping movements of the camera and still images. This music serves as an offscreen sound, one whose source is not shown on the screen (Barsam 377). James Monaco emphasizes the “union of sound and image,” indicating that harmony between the two has been a great challenge for filmmakers (Monaco 125). Many filmmakers incorporate music into their works as a means to help tell the story and to create a specific mood or evoke a desired emotion from the audience (Barsam 383). Since Portillo uses her documentary to offer her own interpretation of the murders, I found it essential to pay close attention to the role music plays in her narration. The implementation of music serves to connect Portillo with the femicide victims and their families. Music often plays in the background as an offscreen

sound while victims and families offer their testimonies. However, the scenes that present the viewpoints and interviews of activists and government officials do not incorporate a musical background. Therefore, Portillo utilizes music as a metaphoric means to associate her voice with that of the victims of the Juárez murders. Portillo discusses the power of metaphor in her films in an interview conducted by POV, an organization that covers non-fiction productions. She affirms the use of poetry and metaphor as a characteristic of her culture, describing her filmmaking as a form of art (Portillo, “Interview by POV”). According to Vivancos Pérez, many have criticized Portillo’s artistic expression, claiming that its “exaggerated” use has confused and misled the viewers into faulty conclusions and interpretations of the Juárez murders (Vivancos Pérez 170). However, as Vivancos Pérez argues, Portillo has taken advantage of her artistic freedom to convey the situation. As she asserts in her interview, the documentary genre leaves room for devices such as metaphor and poetry amidst one’s portrayal of the truth (Portillo, “Interview by POV”). The use of music plays a role in the Portillo’s sense of identification with the victims. As is the case with Blanca, Lauren and Ivon, Portillo experiences a progression throughout the film in terms of her identification and bond with the victims. Throughout the film, Portillo’s voice and the voices of her victims produce an emotional effect via the dramatization of music. During most of the film, their musical voices remain distinct in the use of different melodies. However, Portillo begins to combine the music associated with her voice with the testimonies and images of victims and their families. Earlier in the film, directly following Portillo’s narration, images of photos of femicide victims flash across the screen. The mournful choir

becomes louder, as though Portillo's voice has desisted so as to give way to the images of these victims. Halfway through the film, this same melody plays in the background during the testimony of the family members of Sagrario Gonzalez, who disappeared in 1998. This scene marks the first time in the film in which the mournful choir's melody has accompanied a voice other than that of Portillo. Yet this trend only increases as this melody accompanies the testimony of the mother of another victim and live footage of Sagrario's funeral. (*Señorita Extraviada*) The documentary ends with a succession of close-up shots of girls in Juárez, playing the choir's song in the background once more. Portillo uses this motif to connect her story with that of the victims and their families. In this way, her story and theirs, symbolized by melodies, blend into one story. By the end of the documentary, Portillo and the victims have relayed the common story of the murdered women of Ciudad Juárez, banding together into a cohesive unit portrayed by background music. Yet, these women do not comprise the entirety of Portillo's collective force. The second female alliance that the female investigators of *Señorita Extraviada* and *El Traspatio* form is that with other women who also seek justice on behalf of the missing women of Juárez. These two films provide a thorough portrayal of the power of women working together to end misogynist oppression.

The Female Investigators and Women Activists

Blanca

The collaborative bond that Blanca forms with women besides the young woman she rescues commences via one particular female activist. Though Blanca begins her

search with her male partner, she soon meets Sara, a social worker who has identified one of the victims. Both women are independently fighting for justice at the start of the film, but as the story progresses, Blanca and Sara realize how vital they are to each other's efforts, and they team up to pursue leads. Blanca describes their collaborative relationship perfectly when she tells Sara at a memorial service for recent victims, "We've perfected the funeral service. I collect bodies, you bring mourners, they bring crosses" (*El Traspatio*). The slight sarcasm with which Blanca delivers this line in no way strips her comment of its truth. This scene shows the bond already formed between Blanca and Sarah through the body language of these two characters. After Blanca makes this comment, Sara wraps her arm around Blanca's waist, and Blanca responds with the same gesture. Blanca lightly rubs Sara's back, exchanges a smile, then walks to her car (*El Traspatio*). These physical gestures display a level of amicability and mutual care that has developed since their first meeting, during which Sara accusingly scolds Blanca for the police department's ineptitude. In this scene, Blanca responds respectfully yet emotionally distanced from Sara's passion (*El Traspatio*). The ensuing investigation of the mysterious murders of women in Juárez positions these two women on common ground, which they use as a platform for the duration of the movie. After rescuing the rape victim in the desert, Blanca takes her to Sara's house, where the girl finds refuge and aid from both Blanca and Sara. Later, Blanca and Sara go with the girl and two other women to investigate an underground cellar that they suspect has been used to store female cadavers. The image of these five women banding together and risking their safety so that femicide predators may be found out exemplifies the sisterhood that

characterizes female collaboration in these investigations. We will see how this sisterhood reflects a bond that empowers women in real life to band together, a discovery captured in Portillo's documentary.

Lourdes Portillo

The entire structure of *Señorita Extraviada* centers on collaboration between Portillo and other people, particularly with other women. Besides the rape victim and María, Portillo interlaces testimonies of and interviews with female activists such as Judith Galarza, Sully Ponce, former Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Women, sisters and female friends of victims. Through the use of photography, footage and personal interviews, Portillo relates the story through the voices of women. In this way, the documentary mirrors the style of Gaspar de Alba's novel in that it alternates between narrative voices. The participation of these individuals, as well as that of the victims whom Portillo interviews, marks a significant aspect of Portillo's collaborative role as an investigator because it distinguishes her as a mediator. Though she expresses her own questions and conclusions, she presents primarily the findings of research and investigations conducted by other people seeking the truth behind the murders. In granting these individuals a voice by allowing them to share their stories and conclusions and in providing background information to the murders along with personal reactions to such findings, Portillo serves as a facilitator who guides the communication of information and provides clarification for the audience. As opposed to learning the points of view of these women regarding the murders through Portillo's narration, the audience

witnesses first-hand their tones of voice and facial expressions as they speak. Yet, Portillo's facilitative role does not diminish her role as an investigator. By guiding the documentary's investigation and enhancing the testimonies of other individuals with stylistic techniques such as music and variation in shot form, Portillo joins with the women she interviews in a collective investigative effort to analyze and educate the public on the Juárez femicides. Portillo's use of music as a narrative device also accompanies her focus on the role of activists. The music edited into the background during various scenes helps to communicate the collective role of all women in the documentary as well as Portillo's identification with the victims since Portillo assigns a specific melody to each group of interviewees and subjects. During the testimonies of victims and families, a slow high-pitched, suspenseful piano rhythm plays. The music becomes more dramatized during the display of photos of known femicide victims as well as during Portillo's interjecting voice narrations with the employment of a melancholic melody sung by a choir of mournful voices. Both of these melodies cease and give way to silence, which accompanies the testimonies of the women activists. While these women speak, no sound can be heard in the background besides an occasional supplementary question posed by Portillo's offscreen voice. The director does not dramatize the straightforward information offered by these women regarding specific findings, the diminished effort of local authorities and governmental aid in proliferation of the crimes. Instead, she saves that impact for the testimonies of those directly affected by the crimes. As such, Portillo sets these testimonies apart as something sacred, which she reflects in her description of the music as a "requiem" (H. Torres 67). The use of

sound and technique pairs with the varied testimonies of women involved in Portillo's cause to create a unified whole that is composed of distinct elements.

As demonstrated, each of the female investigators must depend on others in seeking resolution. We will see in the next section that such interdependence does not restrict itself to one gender. Though certain men act as the primary force against the female investigators in these works, other men break that misogynist trend and partner with the female investigators in exposing the guilty and protecting the vulnerable. Let us now consider the opposing roles of men in the works and their relationships with the female investigators, either as friends or as foes.

COLLABORATION WITH MEN

Male Opposition

The female investigators' efforts to join forces with women in a type of sisterhood in each work serve as an important active form of identification with and fight for the female victims. However, the female investigators' collaboration with men stands out significantly, due mostly to the rampant opposition that the detective character receives from men in each work. Before exploring the investigators' collaborative efforts with men, it is essential to understand how these relationships differ from their relationships with other men and why these efforts prove to be productive. Though the works are fictional, they represent actual events, causes and environments that surround the murders in Ciudad Juárez. As I discuss in the first chapter, the machismo mentality of Juárez's patriarchal society has enabled the murders to proliferate without much, if any, legal

consequence. The machismo attitude considers men superior to women and allows acts from subtle manipulation to fatal demonstrations of power (Newton ch. 2). Within the patriarchal mindset men dominate women, who are weak and must submit to the authority of men, in which they find their identity. Such subordination occurs within sexual contexts as well, as patriarchal men view women not as equal participants in sexual acts, but as sexual objects to use for personal pleasure (González Rodríguez 34). In her essay “Poor Brown Female,” Gaspar de Alba explores this aspect of the patriarchal mentality. She describes sex as a form of empowerment of the body, as “agency” and “the enactment of desire.” She explains that according to patriarchal values, only men may express and fulfill their sexual desire and that the sexuality of women, which is restrained to the obligatory role of reproduction, must be controlled by men and punished when expressed without male approval (Gaspar de Alba, “Poor Brown Female” 82-83). Gaspar de Alba incorporates this theory into her novel *Desert Blood*. When Ivon is abducted by one of the culprits behind Irene’s kidnapping, she infuriates him by suggesting that his penis is small. The man explosively screams “You want to see how big my cock is, bitch?” and threatens to shove it down her throat (285). The language used in this line indicates the man’s struggle to maintain a sense of power. In response to Ivon’s insinuation of the lack in size of his symbol of sexual dominance, the man aggrandizes the image of his penis by offering to show how “big” it is. Furthermore, he ends the augmented statement about his phallus by calling her “bitch,” thereby debasing her to the status of a dog that must submit to its master. This entire statement conveys the macho power that the kidnapper assumes over Ivon, who cannot pose the same threat to

him due to her lack of a penis. Yet it also demonstrates the effect that Ivon has on his self-image. Such men often associate the size of their phallus with masculine strength and the conquering and securing of women as their personal property. For this reason, insecurity regarding the size or function of one's penis often results in a man's lack of self-esteem (Meza Diaz par. 2-3). This grants insight into the rash reaction of Ivon's kidnapper when she belittles his phallic masculinity. Gaspar de Alba's theory of sex as a means through which to express power holds true for men as well as for women, particularly considering the fact that the penis has historically been deemed a symbol of life and rebirth (Stevens par. 2), creating a greater sexual competition between men and women, the latter of whom possess the power to give birth. Thus, Ivon represents the contemporary female investigative character of crime fiction whose autonomy and power enable her to defy the "patriarchal status quo" (Martella 205). Gaspar de Alba further illuminates the patriarchal mindset of the citizens of Juárez in her explanation of the "Tres Marías Syndrome," which describes the mindset with which members of the patriarchal Chicano and Mexican cultures view women. This paradigm divides women into three categories, based on the three women named Mary who were present at the crucifixion of Jesus: the mother, the virgin and the prostitute. According to this way of thinking, women in *Juarenses* society are viewed either those whose sole purpose is to procreate and care for the family, those who obey their authorities and maintain their innocence by keeping themselves from any type of sexual knowledge, or those who shame their families with promiscuous behavior, which often extends beyond the mere expression of sexual pleasure and into disgraceful acts such as prostitution (Gaspar de

Alba, "Poor Brown Female" 81-82). Within this social construct, the equal treatment of women does not exist, not even in the form of widespread abuse. As Gaspar de Alba explicates, men with this mentality simultaneously regard their mothers with respect and independent sexually autonomous women with deprecation (Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge" 51-52). Nonetheless, all of these women are subjected to male control since the men choose how they wish to treat women based on the specific "María" identity that they assign to those women. Even women who refrain from sexual indulgence must succumb to the criticism and reproach of society. The patriarchal mindset that claims a majority of the Juárez population has dominated other societies around the world for generations. In fact, the hard-boiled detective fiction genre portrayed this attitude in North American and British literature for decades. Until the early 1960s, female characters in crime novels embodied one of two types: the good, dignified woman who faithfully fulfilled domestic roles or the scandalous, sexually appealing woman who customarily became the victim of exploitation and murder. Female characters continued this appearance because it coincided with the expectations of and the appeal to general audiences (Klein 150). Just as contemporary *Juarenses* society has done, North American society categorized women according to their sexual and domestic roles. According to Sonja Altnoeder, women were usually depicted as victims or villains due to the fact that their sexuality was "represented as a site of social disruption and crime" (Altnoeder 84). However, though the mindsets of the general public in Britain and North America began to shift in the 1960s, increasing the power and authority of female characters in crime fiction, the patriarchal mentality of Juárez's population has intensified. Thus, attitudes

once reflected in crime literature currently pervade the U.S.-Mexico border and are reflected in the misogynist crimes that proliferate in Ciudad Juárez.

Yet the origins of this patriarchal judgment serve as justification for the male display of sexual power and not necessarily as the embodiment of that behavior itself. The key aspect of misogynist societies is male control, which appears in a vast variety of ways. Most scholars agree that the term “patriarchy” refers to the general notion of male dominance. Two such scholars, Jo Foord and Nicky Gregson, analyze patriarchy within the home, its sexual context, and in the workplace, its labor-related context (Foord 10). It is the presence of male control in the workplace that represents much of the patriarchal abuse in Ciudad Juárez as well as in other cultures around the world. In Mexican culture, the men typically provide financially for the family while the women stay home to raise the children and keep house (González Rodríguez 34). These gender roles have changed, however, as the influx of foreign factories has created job openings for women and a demand for female personnel. Instead of remaining at home where men can supervise their lives, women now make their own money and have the opportunity to spend it as they choose. Wives can now contribute to the financial needs of their families as their husbands do. Moreover, with maquiladora employment giving preference to female workers, competition has risen between men and women, with many men losing job opportunities to women (Arriola 31). The same situation arose in the United States during the Great Depression, when women began to join the workforce to compensate for the absence of male workers. A shift occurred in the “masculine ideal” as men experienced a loss of economic privilege and became “dependent in many ways that women had been

thought to be” (Sotelo 132). In Ciudad Juárez, similar tensions have accumulated over time and have greatly contributed to the prevalent misogynist attitude in Juárez that exposes itself in the torture and murder of the city’s women. The directors and author of the works analyzed here utilize this aspect of *Juarenses* society as a direct force against the efforts of their female investigators as well as depicting it as a culpable entity in the murders. While it is present in all four works, it plays a more prominent role in *El Traspasado*. This work provides examples of the depiction on the patriarchal order as instructed by Ford and Gregson, with particular emphasis on macho competition in the workplace.

Blanca

The majority of the machismo and patriarchal opposition that challenges Blanca occurs in the workplace, appearing as competition to her success and indifference to her perspective. Like the female maquiladora workers, Blanca is subjected to the scrutiny and regulations established by her male counterparts and authorities. However, the sexist maltreatment of her person does not occur in the form of body shots, monthly proof of menstruation or overt sexual harassment and assault that the female maquiladora workers undergo (Cravey 1; Gaspar de Alba “Poor Brown Female” 64). In contrast to these women, Blanca holds a position of authority that her colleagues must respect, at least on a superficial level. Nonetheless, Blanca’s male coworkers and superiors increasingly regard her and her investigation with contempt as the narrative progresses. Blanca, highly credentialed due to her education at the police academy in Mexico City, is a newcomer to

the Juárez crime department and serves as the leading detective in her investigations. In this sense, she mirrors the female detective characters of Hollywood films in the late 1990s and 2000s who filled positions of power within their fields. These “unsmiling, gun-toting heroines” made the female investigator “respectable and visible” and confidently presented themselves as powerful women detached from romance and domesticity (Mizejewski 135, 142). Blanca stands out in her field as a woman surrounded by male detectives and officers. Though her gender does not distinguish her from her colleagues in terms of work ethic or aptitude, it contributes to her increased dedication to the investigations, an element lacking in her male coworkers. Blanca is partnered with Fierro, a male fellow detective. Fierro works with her and follows her lead in most investigations, yet he does so perfunctorily and without much concern for their cause. Their superior, the Chief of Police, displays the most disdain for Blanca’s role within the department. While berating her for rescuing the rape victim in the desert instead of pursuing the assailants, the Police Chief accuses Blanca’s emotions of overpowering her reasoning. He then claims that women belong in professions such as nursing and not in law enforcement, screaming, “You didn’t think, you felt! That’s why women make good nurses and bad cops” (*El Traspatio*). This man’s thinking reflects the patriarchal opinion that the feminine appeal to emotion and nurturing renders women incompetent in the workforce, at least in professional positions such as law enforcement. He therefore typifies the macho *Juarenses* man and favors Fierro over Blanca. Carrera utilizes camera angle to illustrate this relationship between the three in a later scene. The scene takes place in the Police Chief’s office, where Blanca and Fierro have convened with him to

discuss their findings about an arrested suspect. Throughout most of their conversation, the Chief sits behind his desk and Fierro sits on the other side of the desk, slightly to the right and not directly in front of the Chief. Blanca stands behind the chair next to Fierro. The frame alternates between front shots of the Chief and front shots of Blanca and Fierro as they all discuss the report. When the camera faces Blanca and Fierro, it is often positioned behind the Chief, exposing his back along with the faces of the other two. Thus, we see an hierarchical order displayed, with the Chief seated closest to the camera, Fierro the second closest and closest to the Chief, and Blanca as the furthest from both the camera and the Chief. Furthermore, Blanca is standing behind the chair, which places her in a position unequal to that of the Chief and Fierro, who are sitting and are therefore level to each other. The positioning of the characters in this scene would appear to symbolize the patriarchal order, with Blanca distanced and estranged from the men. However, film scholar Bruce Kawin proposes another interpretation that would establish Blanca in a position of importance. He explains how directors utilize composition, the situating of elements and characters within a frame, to define the significance of certain characters. Composition in depth refers to arranging significant elements in a wide range in relation to the camera. One such composition in depth strategy is called the “v-shape,” which most commonly involves three characters. Within the v-shape configuration, the positions of the characters makes a “v”-like, or triangular, shape, with the most important character at the focal “point of convergence” (Kawin 167-175). In the scene portraying the discussion between the Chief, Blanca and Fierro, the camera angled behind the Chief creates this triangular image with Blanca at the point of convergence. The camera,

positioned slightly to the right of the Chief, shows him forefront and to the left, Fierro to the right and Blanca straight ahead, forming the v-shape between them. This formation dissipates when Blanca moves forward and sits next to Fierro and directly in front of the Police Chief. She now begins conversing with the Chief, who disapproves of the hypothesis that she proposes regarding the Egyptian chemist, a character based on Abdel Sharif Sharif (*El Traspatio*). The Chief glares at her while defending his expertise and insulting her higher education. Blanca no longer stands as an observer of the conversation but as the direct target of the Police Chief's condescension, shown in alternating close-ups between his face and Blanca's. The Chief regains a measure of power over Blanca with his speech and level glare, affronting her instincts once again. It is vital to realize when interpreting such film techniques that a certain angle or shot does not formulaically assume a specific meaning. For example, though the high-angle shot frequently portrays the below subjects as powerless, this is not always the case (Barsam 243). As film experts David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson explain, the meaning assigned to such shots and techniques most often depends on the context and message of the film (Bordwell 196). I interpret the v-shape angle of Blanca and her colleagues and the close-ups of her and the Police Chief to grant Blanca importance from the perspective of the audience and low esteem from the view of the Police Chief due to the patriarchal image that the Chief's character embodies. The film portrays this male character as one who scorns Blanca's position and Blanca as the heroine whose role and solutions go unappreciated. Thus, the framing of this scene appropriately conveys those messages regarding both characters. Within the four works, the female investigative characters

pursue their investigations despite the opposition that society poses to their independence and their goal. In this next section I discuss how each female investigator overcomes this obstacle and partners with men in seeking justice for the murdered women of Juárez.

Collaboration with Men

Each female investigator encounters both men and women who serve as her allies and aid her in her investigation. As is the case with any other aspect of the female detective's role, her partnership with men is more prominent in some of these four works than in the others. Portillo compares to Ivon in that she partners her efforts with those of several men; in contrast, Blanca's collaboration with men correlates to that of Lauren in that both join forces with only one man. For example, in *Señorita Extraviada*, Portillo interviews male victims such as the father and the brother of a teenage girl who was murdered. In doing so, she utilizes their perspectives as evidence of the disregard that local law enforcement holds for the families and the emotional turmoil that the victimized men of Juárez endure. Portillo stated in an interview that she found it difficult to incorporate the first-hand perspective of men into her work because most men in Juárez are not involved in their home life or are too traumatized by the killings to talk about them (Driver). She also includes in the film footage of men displaying posters and signs on behalf of an activist group founded by families of femicide victims in the city (*Señorita Extraviada*). Ivon also joins forces with men in her search for Irene in *Desert Blood*. She gradually allows herself to trust Father Francis, a young priest who works with her cousin Ximena in finding missing girls. Though she doubts his motives at first,

she learns to accept information and advice that he offers regarding leads to follow and precautions to take. The second man that aides Ivon significantly in her search for Irene is Pete McCuts, a local detective assigned to Irene's case. Pete is an inexperienced detective, as this is his first official case. He behaves clumsily at times and doubts the wisdom behind some of his own decisions. However, he proves to be a vital component of Ivon's success in finding Irene and surviving her own kidnapping. Pete follows Ivon into Juárez the day that she accompanies Ximena on a search for dead bodies, though it is his day off and he is not authorized to follow her. After noticing the border control agent, one of Irene's captors, force Ivon into his truck at the border, Pete follows them and calls for backup, though he risks termination from his position by doing so. The border patrol agent takes Ivon to an old factory where he and his accomplices are holding girls for snuff pornography, Irene being among them. It is the arrival of police officers by helicopter and Pete by foot that creates chaos and allows Ivon to escape her kidnapper's hold. Pete releases Ivon from the handcuffs that her kidnapper used to restrain her and relinquishes his gun to her so that she can find and free Irene. At this point, Ivon has done everything possible to locate Irene. Pete must step in during the final step of Ivon's search since her hands are literally tied (287-300). In my study of this novel, I found Pete and Ivon's collaboration in this scene striking because without Pete's perseverance in following and rescuing Ivon, both Ivon and Irene would have suffered the same fate as the women found in the desert. In this case, it was both a man who threatened to kill her and a man who saved her life. Thus, this situation provides a perfect example of the

misogynist power play between genders and the men who defy such mindsets by valuing women with equality in Ciudad Juárez.

As this section elucidates, not all men fall prey to the patriarchal mentality, whether it be in the stories the works tell or in the actual society of Juárez. Gaspar de Alba personifies this truth in the character Joe, Ivon's uncle. Joe is one of the few people on whom Ivon can fully rely and has been her ally and support her entire life. He defends her against her mother's wrath and treats her tenderly, even giving her his shirt to wear after her mother gives her a bloody nose. This act of love touches Ivon, and she has to fight back tears (131-132). Joe also values Ivon for who she is and does not allow her sexuality or past choices to undermine his opinion of her. Moreover, he does not confine her to the restrictions of a patriarchal idea of womanhood. For example, near the end of the novel he asks her to help him prepare the meat for their family reunion, a task commonly reserved for men (341). Gaspar de Alba uses this character to convey her understanding of men and her interpretation of masculinity and gender roles along the border. In a personal interview held with Gaspar de Alba, the author explained that she wanted to avoid the stereotype that lesbian fiction always portrays men as being evil. In her effort to portray "more three-dimensional characters," Gaspar de Alba created male characters who were involved in the pursuit of justice. According to the author, "men have a huge responsibility...to bring attention to [the murders]" because "if men aren't involved in the way Father Francis was deeply involved...nobody's going to listen" (Gaspar de Alba, "Personal Interview"). For this reason, she considered it essential to include characters such as Joe, in an effort to reproduce healthy relationships between

Ivon and men, such as the close relationship that Gaspar de Alba shared with family members such as her grandfather (Gaspar de Alba, “Personal Interview”). *Señorita Extraviada* and *Desert Blood* exemplify the power of collaborative efforts with multiple men that transcend gender and social expectations for the sake of humanity. Yet the use of one male character to represent overall male collaboration proves to be effective, as it parallels the way in which a single victim that most of the female investigators meet embodies all of the victims of femicide in Ciudad Juárez. The best portrayal of this concept occurs in *El Traspatio*, in which Blanca allies with a male character whose influence and support matches that of the multiple male abettors in the other three works.

Blanca

In *El Traspatio*, Blanca finds benevolence in a male radio host who is reporting and discussing findings of the femicides on his daily show throughout the entire story. Director Carrera employs this character as a first-person narrator, thus combining omniscient narration, a third-person perspective of the happenings in the story, and first-person narration, narration by one of the characters in the story (Barsam 140). The film introduces his voice following the opening scene, the finding of a corpse, and returns to this narrator periodically throughout the film. This character’s voice familiarizes the audience with the murders by reporting corpse findings, detailing the lack of police involvement and posing questions regarding the proliferation of the killings. As such, he serves as both an insider and an outsider to the environment of Ciudad Juárez, providing the viewer with key information to enhance their understanding of the crimes and

observing them with as much awe and as many questions as the viewer. It is important to note that this narrative voice does not narrate the story itself as Portillo's voice-over narrates *Señorita Extraviada*. Rather, he narrates the crime-related happenings in the story. Also, his offscreen commentary always ends in his office, showing him speaking into the microphone and transitioning his role from that of a narrator to that of a normal character. He turns out to be a fellow proponent of justice to Blanca, as he reports the crime and corruption taking place, including the termination of Blanca from her position within the Ciudad Juárez police department at the conclusion of the film. The use of voice-over narration is common in detective films, but the role of the male voice-over narrator often serves a different purpose, used an outsider's voyeuristic perspective of the female investigator (Jones 26). The narration of the radio host in *El Traspatio*, on the contrary, coincides with Blanca's investigation and helps to elucidate her struggles within the police department. Blanca's collaboration with this radio host occurs separately throughout most of the movie, as she investigates the crimes and he reports and comments on the findings. They do not meet until near the end, when a defeated Blanca visits him at his home. In this scene, we see the genial attitude shared between these two characters as Blanca shares her thoughts and her new friend listens respectfully and sympathetically before responding. He does not tower over her but stands at a short distance from where she is seated, granting her space, before seating himself in a chair across from her, thus leveling himself as her equal and granting her attention (*El Traspatio*). The last scene of the film shows Blanca driving out of Juárez, listening to the host on the radio. His narration concludes not only Blanca's case but also the story that

the film has told as he specifies what has become of Blanca, her partner and the friends and family of victims of the unsolved murders (*El Traspatio*). Though Blanca does not directly collaborate with this man during the majority of the film, their efforts serve the same cause, and he calls attention to the work that Blanca and her colleagues are attempting to accomplish. Since he shares her passion for justice and follows her specific role in the investigation of the killings, he is the only man to whom she can turn at the end. In truth, he is the only male character in the film who displays genuine care for the missing women and for Blanca. Blanca and Lauren stand out as the only two female investigators out the four works who can rely on only one male ally. As Blanca finds amicable support in the radio host, Lauren receives care and support from Diaz. Though he initially restrains from aiding Lauren in furthering her investigation, he does so because he cares for her. However, he partners with her and becomes a martyr for the cause when a drive-by shooter releases a round of shots into Diaz's office (*Bordertown*). As is the case with Lauren, Blanca cannot depend on most men in Ciudad Juárez. Nonetheless, she, as well as Portillo, succeeds in joining forces with at least one male collaborator to oppose gender prejudice and violence and to restore peace.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have seen how joining with allies enables the female investigators in these works to actively express their bond with the victims and to find a certain degree of resolution or satisfaction in their investigations. I mention the sisterhood that characterizes the relationship and collective efforts between the female investigators,

other female activists and the female victims. This banding together in support for one another, bound by their capacity to relate to each other, reflects an aspect of humanity that has been reproduced in other crime fiction works as well. Sotelo writes that brotherhood is a common theme in Chicano crime fiction such as that of Michael Nava and Manuel Ramos. The male characters in their novels exhibit a relational bond with other men that improves their treatment of one another as well as of members of the opposite gender (Sotelo 130-131). As seen in this chapter, such fellowship transcends gender and allows all to be unified under a common ground of familial love. Just as the women collaborators form a sisterhood, the women and men collaborators form their own type of brotherhood and sisterhood. In likeness to the Spanish translation for both of these terms, *hermandad*, the female characters in these four works forge a gender neutral alliance with men and women who identify with one another, share the same goal and fight for the victims as they would for their own sisters. In fact, Gaspar de Alba supports this point, saying that people would be more effective in helping the victims and their families if they viewed the victims as their sisters (Gaspar de Alba, "Personal Interview"). Her female investigator also expresses this notion in *Desert Blood* (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 214). In fact, Ivon considers herself her "sister's keeper," a position her father conferred on her when Irene was born (164). Though the female investigators rely on their personal growth and identification with the victims for motivation, their effectiveness in bringing their investigations to completion depends on a collaborative effort with other women and men of like mind. Together, these individuals serve as allies, ones who share an amicable affiliation in their fight for a shared cause

(Jenkins 3). Anzaldúa accentuates the need for allies, specifically for alliances between people who stand divided by borders of race, culture and language. She calls for alliances between mestizos, the mixed indigenous and Spanish race that comprises most Mexicans, and whites. She claims that the Anglos, who have dominated the mestizo race and culture for centuries, must acknowledge their abuse, reconcile with and join the efforts of the Mexican people to heal the divide between them (Anzaldúa 107-108). The female investigators studied in this thesis also cross borders to unite with individuals who become their allies in the search for answers and the struggle against systemic oppression along the geographical border between the United States and Mexico. While they form their own coalitions with women, both victims and activists alike, they also cross the gender divide and join with men, rebelling against social expectations regarding male and female relationships, such as the “Tres Marías Syndrome.” Thus, as opposed to romantically aggrandizing the independent hero role of the female investigators, Nava, Carrera, Portillo and Gaspar de Alba incorporate into their detective characters’ investigations the collective effort and the human bond that are necessary for overcoming prejudiced cultural paradigms and systemic violence.

CONCLUSION

SIGNIFICANCE OF GENDER

In concluding this study, I must address the purpose of the role of the female investigator. As discussed in the previous chapter, the collaborative efforts taken between men and women *Bordertown*, *El Traspatio*, *Señorita Extraviada* and *Desert Blood* stands out poignantly and strengthens the efforts of the female investigators. Nava, Carrera, Portillo and Gaspar de Alba do not communicate through their works that all men within their plots and in contemporary Ciudad Juárez are misogynist or evil. On the contrary, these directors and novelist identify the misogynist and patriarchal mentality that plagues contemporary *Juarenses* society, manifested in a large percentage of the male population, as the enemy. Considering the appearance of benevolent male characters within the works who seek justice on behalf of the murder victims, the author and the directors of the three fictional works of this analysis very well could have made the leading detective male. I find it extremely significant that the primary investigative character in all of these works, as well as in additional referenced works of fiction not studied here, is female. In this thesis, I have examined the role of the female investigator and her collective role with other individuals and have demonstrated that the significance of her gender lies within her introspective role: her identification with the victims as a woman. To reiterate

the definition of femicide widely accepted among scholars, it is “the killing of females by males because they are female,” or, the misogynist murder of women (Russell, “Defining Femicide”). Though men in *Juarese* society and in the works analyzed in this thesis possess the capacity for compassion and empathy for the tortured women, they do not stand as potential victims of misogynist crime. The fictional female investigators, however, encounter patriarchal opposition, sometimes directly from the murder culprits, and experience the same degradation, fear and pain inflicted on the women within that society. Thus, these characters also become victims, though not to the same fatal extent as the women and girls whose murders they are investigating. While a male detective character may have suffered disdain for aiding the victims’ families, the purpose for his punishment would have been purely repercussive, a retribution for challenging the macho authorities of the city. The character of the Egyptian in *El Traspatio* could have taken a different approach if questioned by Fierro instead of suggesting that his interrogator be sexually pacified as he told Blanca (*El Traspatio*). In *Bordertown*, no man would have come as close as Lauren to catching Eva’s culprit as she did during her undercover assignment because the rapist and his accomplice simply were not taking men into the desert to rape and kill them. Additionally, the rape victims interviewed in *Señorita Extraviada* most likely would not have felt comfortable sharing the intimate details of their experiences with a male interviewer. The presence of a woman investigator creates in each work a heightened sense of unity and camaraderie between the investigator, the victims and their families. This sisterhood grants the female investigators more productivity and effectiveness in their investigations because their identification and bond

with the victims instills within the female detective characters determination and vigor. After rescuing the girl who had been raped in the desert, Blanca ignores protocol and pursues her investigation more passionately. Following information provided by the girl regarding the detainment of women in certain locations for sexual pleasure and torture, Blanca investigates the underground cellar discovered by a local in the desert (*El Traspatio*). The fact that she joins forces with this girl, Sara and two other women to investigate the cellar indicates that she now heeds the cause and not police orders. Teaming up with these women instead of with her detective partner, particularly amidst rumors of her nearing termination from her position, demonstrates the price that she is willing to pay for the safety and rescue of the women of Ciudad Juárez, women just like the one whom she comforted on the desert floor. She, like the captured and murdered women, is alone and must find her own way to fight. During my interview with Gaspar de Alba, she stated regarding Ivon, “In essence, she’s looking for herself” (Gaspar de Alba, “Personal Interview”). I would extend that statement to each female investigator studied in this thesis, saying that in essence, they are fighting for themselves. The renewed experience of the female investigators’ identity as Mexican women that I have analyzed, which appears in the form of sexual degradation, cultural expectation and a lack of appreciation, reminds the female investigators of their status as Mexican women in contemporary *Juarenses* society. They receive the same behavior extended to the women and girls whose murders they are researching and therefore identify with victims. As such, they serve as the voice of those who cannot speak for themselves. For this reason, the investigative characters in these works must encapsulate this gender aspect.

Yet, the fact that the female investigators are living empowered women indicates that they possess the ability to challenge the powers of corruption, which describes a common effect of the four works, activism.

CALL TO ACTIVISM

The female investigators of the four works studied here ally with men and women in a form of activism on behalf of those exploited by the agents of systemic violence, misogyny and femicide in Juárez. Many crime fiction novels have served an activist purpose in the past. As Martella asserts, the hardboiled detective character often serves as “a social vehicle of change” (Martella 205), confirming Ian Rankin’s notion that, with respect to contemporary issues such as “terrorism or racism,” one is “more likely to find some answers in good crime fiction than in any other form” (Walton 28). For example, crime fiction novelist Raymond Chandler often exposed the failings of capitalism in urban American society (Sotelo 131). Authors and directors of literary and film art utilize elements such as plot and characters to convey social and political messages that they deem worthy of common knowledge and public attention. In this way, the characters, authors and audience become activists for the same cause. Walton and Jones describe the connection that forms between the author and the reader as well as between the reader and the novel itself, making literature a prime source of communication of ideas important to the author, such as social issues (Walton 4). Walton and Jones emphasize the importance of collaboration within the community of detective fiction authors, claiming that the combined efforts of authors to expand the limits of the genre grant their works a

social element (Walton 5). Such authors intend for their activist efforts to be contagious. The social situation and events presented in the works surrounding the Juárez femicides represent actual events that occur in modern-day Ciudad Juárez. Therefore, the call for action that the works convey refers to a specific cause relevant to the viewers and readers. At the end of *Desert Blood*, Ivon realizes that she cannot stop the murders or pacify the societal unrest alone. Therefore, she leaves the city, knowing that someone else must assume responsibility in exposing all facets of the crimes (Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 335). In the same way that the murders implicate various participants, their resolution must also involve the efforts of numerous groups and individuals. As evidence proposed by scholars and the directors and author of the works of analysis show, local authorities are not sufficiently tending to the problem. As a result, artists, songwriters, directors, producers and authors have taken upon their shoulders the duty to educate the public on these crimes and to evoke a response on the part of the general public. Barsam and Kawin explain that the choice of actor to play a specific role carries significant importance (Barsam 291) due to the fact that audience members tend to identify with the actors and with the characters that they portray (Kawin 16). Kawin delves a bit deeper into this connection, claiming that the audience assumes the perspective of the main character (Kawin 16). Therefore, the viewers of the three films discussed here have the opportunity to imagine themselves in the shoes of Blanca, Lauren and Portillo. Readers can do the same with Ivon as well, yet the act of visualizing the character onscreen produces a distinct effect. As the viewers identify with the female investigators, who identify with the victims, the viewers find themselves relating to, empathizing and bonding with the

victims in the stories. Since these victims are characters based on actual people, the viewers and readers ultimately experience a process of identification and connection with the real victims of the Juárez murders. As is the case with the female investigators, audience members are presented with the opportunity to respond on behalf of these women, fueled by indignation because the victims have become very real to them. As Gaspar de Alba states, “If we are hell-bent on finding them...maybe we could help them” (Gaspar de Alba, “Personal Interview”). The people, like the author and directors studied here or the family members seeking justice on behalf of their deceased in *Señorita Extraviada*, must become involved in exposing the issue and confronting the powers involved in order to break down the systems of corruption that control society along the Juárez border.

Activists as Participant Observers

The activist roles that artists, writers, readers and fictional characters assume carry varying levels of identification and interaction with, as well as understanding of, the Juárez femicides. Therefore, it is essential to note that the investigative characters in my analysis take on a very specific investigative function that strengthens their awareness of the murders and their insight into the systemic corruption that fosters these crimes. The female investigators in these four works embody the dual role of an observer of and a participant in the environment of Ciudad Juárez. Anthropologists and ethnographers have produced much discourse on the concept of a participant observer, describing the role necessary for many anthropologists and sociologists to play in order to thoroughly

observe a foreign context, whether that be cultural, social or professional. Renato Rosaldo, one of the most noted experts in the field due to his advances in anthropology and Chicano Studies, explains the dual participatory and observational role of a social analyst, contrasting it with the traditional view of one whose vocation requires him or her to observe a group or culture foreign to his or her own. According to Rosaldo, early scholars in the field of ethnography valued the concept of a “detached observer,” purporting that a social analyst should view his subjects of study from an eminent, scientific position so as to remain neutral (Rosaldo 168, 176). Rosaldo offers a differing notion, suggesting that anyone studying another group from a social perspective ought to do so from a variety of viewpoints. The author claims that by acquiring a level of subjectivity in one’s study, by engaging in “participant-observation” by “simultaneously becoming ‘one of the people’ and remaining an academic,” the social analyst adopts the function of a social critic (Rosaldo 180-181). Though such an investigator maintains his or her identity as an outsider, he or she also assumes a level of membership within the community of research (Smith par. 2). In the four works analyzed in this thesis, the female investigators encompass this participatory yet observational identity of social critics whose ability to critique their subject society stems from their identification with and otherness to the members of that society. Their identification with the victims and return to their cultural roots, as well as their firsthand experience of the misogynist oppression along the border, grants them participation as women in the border society. Nonetheless, they maintain an outsider’s observational perspective and filter the happenings along the border through their personal mindsets that have not been infected

with the prejudices of the patriarchal mindset of that border culture. Lauren and Blanca instigate their investigations as observers and participants, outsiders who participate in the culture. New to Juárez and its customs, they gain an insider's perspective by forming relationships and working with the people, particularly with other women. The opposite stance is that of a participant who acts as an observer, a member of the community who decides to study his or her community with an outsider's view (Smith par. 2). In *Señorita Extraviada*, the first surviving victim interviewed and María, who survived abuse and sexual assault by the police, act as members of their community who step back from their group to scrutinize it. The first interviewed victim does so by researching the murders and recording her findings in a notepad. Both do so by aiding Portillo's investigation with their testimonies and insights into the crimes. Ivon plays both roles, that of a participant who serves as an observer and that of an observer who becomes a participant in the group. While living along the border as a child and young adult, she was a member of that border culture who questioned and viewed it critically and ultimately distanced herself from it. When she returns to Juárez, she dons more of an observer's perspective due to the cultural distinction she has established by becoming a member of the Los Angeles society. However, her history along the border and her familiarity with its customs facilitate her ability to understand the perspectives of the members of that society because she is also a member, though not conformed to all of their ways. In this respect, she fulfills the criteria proposed by Michael Walzer and supported by Rosaldo that a social critic "be meaningfully connected with...the group under critique" so as to be "neither a complete stranger nor a mere spectator" (Rosaldo 182). Ivon's situation

exceeds Rosaldo's ideal that a social critic at least be able to imagine the opposing perspective, whether it be that of an outsider (observer) or of an insider (participant) (Rosaldo 188-189), because she is fully exposed to both perspectives. She, as well as Lauren, Blanca and Portillo, is able to conduct her investigation with a deeper sense of knowledge and understanding of the border culture, as opposed to approaching it with little insight, an advantage of social critics who are connected to the community that they are observing (Rosaldo 194). Thus, regardless of the specific manner in which the female investigators serve as participant observers, their capacity to simultaneously witness and experience the cruelty and sexist oppression in Juárez grants them both a firsthand and a secondhand account of both the murders and the entire system of violence that has overtaken that border society.

The directors and the novelist also act as participant observers. Their research into the crimes caused them to experience Juárez by travelling there and coming in contact with the people, the findings and the overall atmosphere. Gregory Nava, Lourdes Portillo and Alicia Gaspar de Alba stand out among this group. As natives and former residents of the U.S.-Mexico border, going to Juárez to conduct tangible research took them home, particularly for Gaspar de Alba, who grew up in El Paso. Possessing a history with that society and familiarity with its customs granted them access to certain information and insight into the perspectives of those whom they interviewed. For example, with the help of family and friends along the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso border, Gaspar de Alba was granted the opportunity to tour the city and scope out key locations of findings, as well as to view live footage of the city's night life and attend an autopsy in a local morgue

(Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood* 342). Such participatory research enhanced the credibility of her work by enabling her to recreate a vivid image of the geography and the culture of Juárez and of the femicide findings. Furthermore, each of these literary and film artists became participants in the research whose information they initially observed by presenting and interacting with that research in their own investigations. Using the details learned from journalists, scholars and witnesses, they sought a first-hand perspective and gained personal insight into the Juárez femicides. Most noted, they responded to their findings in an activist effort to educate the general public, especially the United States public, on the Juárez femicides. It is in this endeavor that I, as a cultural critic, imitate their participant observer role by joining their efforts. As one who has never been to the Ciudad Juárez-El Paso border, I cannot experience the culture and the tangible investigations that the fictional female investigators and the directors and authors of these works of analysis sustain. Hugh Gusterson explains this reality, claiming that not all contexts are conducive or available to participant observers (Gusterson 115-116). However, in studying and critiquing the cultural productions presented by Nava, Carrera, Portillo and Gaspar de Alba, I combine my observational study of their works with participatory interaction with the works. As opposed to merely viewing the films and reading the novel, I have analyzed them and have found the key element that I wish to use in order to grasp the attention of my audience: the role of the female investigative character. In this sense, I have gained their insider's perspective into the situation on the Juárez-El Paso border, which I have applied to my objective analysis of the crimes and of the cultural productions that expose them.

In becoming participating agents in our study of the femicides in Ciudad Juárez, whether that be by physically investigating the crimes or by utilizing others' research and informing audiences ourselves, we assume an individual and a collaborative activist role. The efforts that we independently produce join the collection of literature and other art forms that increase awareness of the systemic prejudice and violence that plagues the border. We raise our voices on behalf of those affected by the crimes and echo both their cries and the cries of witnesses, scholars and artists who seek justice. For this reason, I have incorporated into the title of this thesis the phrase "Voces con eco" (*Voices with an Echo*), playing off the title of an organization called Voces Sin Eco (*Voices Without Echo*), formed by family members of six femicide victims in Juárez and whose efforts Portillo exposes in her documentary (Castañon par. 1; *Señorita Extraviada*). With this thesis, I hope to aid the founders of this group in seeking justice on behalf of their murdered daughters and sisters by utilizing my research and analysis as a means through which to raise my voice and to make members of my society aware of the femicides and of the need to effect change along the U.S.-Mexico border. Just as the female investigators in *Bordertown*, *El Traspatio*, *Señorita Extraviada* and *Desert Blood* identify with the victims through a renewed sense of their sexual, gender and cultural identities and experience a camaraderie with men and women of like mind and purpose, activist researchers of this topic and of the various cultural productions related to it acquire both an understanding of the border society that encapsulates the murders and a sense of purpose and influence in familiarizing people within their reach with the facts. Therefore, the directors and the novelist of the cultural productions studied in this thesis, the

fictional and actual female investigators and their male and female allies that these artists present, and I collectively serve as *voces con eco*, speaking on behalf of the nearly 600 women and girls who have lost their lives to misogynist oppression and societal corruption.

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