

# Preface

The assassination of women in Ciudad Juárez has caught the attention of the world. Hundreds, if not thousands, of women have been brutally raped, mutilated, disfigured, and abandoned in empty lots in the city and in remote locations in the desert in a crime called feminicide.<sup>1</sup> This crime has spanned multiple political administrations in Juárez for over more than two decades. While many estimates of the total number of women killed in sexual assassination crimes and forced disappearances are often unreliable in Ciudad Juárez (Fragoso and Cervera-Gómez 2013: 3; Gaspar de Alba and Gúzman 2010: 10; Gaspar de Alba 2010: 70; Juárez 2012), Fragoso and Cervera-Gómez's (2013: 7) data set is systematic and shows 1411 women killed in feminicide (1993–2013).<sup>2</sup>

Multiple explanations of this heinous crime, often stressing the importance of one factor or another, have been advanced in the national and international news, blogs, academic and journalistic books, and articles. Feminicide in Ciudad Juárez

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<sup>1</sup>**Conceptual Note:** 1. The terms “feminicide” and “femicide” have generated conceptual debate and have witnessed varied usage over time in the literature on Ciudad Juárez (Chew Sánchez 2014: 266). The former concept was originally defined as “the murder of women and girls because they are female” (Russell 2001). In 2010, Latin American feminists added to this definition “founded on a gender power structure” so as to include the involvement of the state, individual perpetrators, and the rooting of such murder in social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities (Fragoso and Bejarano 2010: 5). *Feminicidio* then became the term most often used in the feminist literature on Ciudad Juárez (Staudt and Méndez 2015; Wright 2013; Fragoso 2014; Driver 2015). Chapter 1 defines “sexual assassination” as a complex crime which includes a misogynist or hate crime element precisely because the target is a female (girl or woman) and thus the gender of the victim is central to the crime (Russell 2011; Caputi 1989). Chapter 3 also examines the degree to which the state is implicated in forced disappearances in the Historical Center (corruption). Chapter 2 examines how sociopolitical inequalities in public and private security as well as the failure of vetting of security personnel for sexual violence facilitated sexual assassination at the neighborhood level. Such an analysis looks at the involvement of the state (directly or indirectly), individual perpetrators (private or state actors), and the rooting of such murder in social and political inequalities. As such, the terms “feminicide” and “sexual assassination” are used as appropriate.

<sup>2</sup>The Chihuahua Chamber of Deputies report of 1818 disappeared women (2008–2013) also provides a solid reference point (*El Financiero* 4/29/14).

has been linked to global capitalism, the complicity of public officials, and the rising power of organized crime—particularly drug cartels—in Mexico (Conversi 2015: 69–71; Mueller 2014; Olivera 2010; Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Blancas 2007). Other accounts implicate the Mexican government in femicide crimes via impunity, negligence, complicity and/or corruption (Arizpe 2014), deficits in law enforcement and justice systems (Albuquerque 2007; Corona 2010), and/or a state weakened and underfunded by neoliberal reforms which has reduced its power to protect its own citizens (Weissman 2010: 237). Within the city of Ciudad Juárez, impunity and femicide have been related to a politics of “image” and to the exclusion of human rights organizations from the development of better policies to protect women (Fregoso and Bejarano 2010; Wright 2013). Still other accounts document how men take advantage of the impunity caused by impoverished civil rights protections in multiple neighborhoods in Ciudad Juárez to abduct rape and sexually assassinate (largely) poor women (Cornejo Juárez 2007; Borjón Nieto 2004; Pérez-Espino 2004; CNDH 2003; El Silencio 1999; Rodríguez 2007).

Yet, as Córdoba (2010: 114) notes, “to this day, we do not know why such sex-related serial crimes have occurred for the most part in Ciudad Juárez or whether groups in Juárez are the only ones keeping a careful count of these kinds of hate crime.” This book proposes that it is a particular combination of multiple factors that make the city unique for sexual assassination. These include the following: (a) industrialization without safe streets, (b) a criminal justice system with a history of impunity that fuels *machista* rape murder, (c) a drug war that increased the human trafficking of women by certain organized crime-related elements, and (d) a spatial geography which includes multiple empty lots without adequate public or private security. Taken together, these complex, multiple, interrelated factors *combine* to explain why sexual assassination has been a repetitive crime in Ciudad Juárez.<sup>3</sup>

This book advances a multifactorial analysis of these four elements with a case study and spatial mapping at the “meso-level” of analysis.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 1 presents the general argument that sexual assassination is a specific type of violence against

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<sup>3</sup>It is beyond the scope of this brief to analyze in detail all forms of systematic violence in Ciudad Juárez including male homicide (Albuquerque 2007), politically related homicides (Schatz 2011), and/or human rights abuses by the military (Staudt and Méndez 2015). Similarly, the present analysis does not conduct a city block-by-block spatial analysis of all murders of women in Juárez to correlate them with high crime zones. Nevertheless, it should be noted that with the exception of five downtown blocks in the Historical Center, the zones of sexual assassination identified in this chapter are *not* the highest crime zones in the city for such violent crimes as male homicide, robbery, and assaults (Fuentes and Hernández 2013: 250; 255).

<sup>4</sup>As a sociological concept, this refers to the effort to discover empirical relations among different levels of social reality. Theoretically, the aim is linkage; to analyze individuals (micro) within the context of their immediate, collective social neighborhood/zone (meso) as it is situated within a larger city and nation state (macro). As such, it links “micro”-level narratives of individual girls, teens, and women abducted in Ciudad Juárez with “macro”-level analyzes of the impact of industrial capitalism at the neighborhood or “meso”-level. The aim is also to avoid “all or nothing” (reductionist) approaches to sexual assassination and to foster communication between different theoretical traditions and disciplines.

women consisting of targeted, often premeditated, assassinations accompanied by brutal rape and overkill injuries. In the city, “place” is important because of the repetition of the crime (disappearances and abandonment of bodies) in the same zones over decades (*Norte Digital* 8/7/13). Chapter 2 is an in-depth case study of sexual assassination as a sub-type of femicide that occurs in several identifiable, poorer industrial neighborhoods with a strong *maquila* presence but with very poor public and private security on the streets, especially for pedestrians (1996–2001, 2011–2013). Groups of men often take advantage of impunity to engage in “cruising” auto-abduction sexual assassinations in such zones. In Chap. 3, it is argued that there is a bimodal spatial distribution in the city of multiple forced disappearances of women [2000–2014] concentrated in the Historical Center (a traditional market area for illegal sexual services), which intensified during the rise in organized crime-related human trafficking activity there during the “drug war” (2008–2012). At the same time, forced disappearances of women in Juárez also reflect the “southern–southeastern” expansion of femicide into areas of the city characterized by multiple empty lots without security (Cervera-Gómez 2010: 91–93; Bass and Pérez 2008: 10). Thus, Chaps. 2 and 3 show how industrialization, impunity in the criminal justice system, and human trafficking of women in a city whose spatial geography includes multiple empty lots interrelate to explain why sexual assassination repeats over decades Ciudad Juárez.

The “meso-level analysis” herein thus simultaneously examines how poverty, spatial segregation, and “gaps” in the rule of law mediate the relationship between impunity and femicide in Ciudad Juárez. It is known that poverty and femicide are related and that “social disruption happens in a context where structural factors such as insecurity, stressful conditions, lack of community kinship, absence of social support, and uprootedness prevail” (Chew Sánchez 2014: 268; Weissman 2010). Important advances have been made in correlating the residence (Hernández 2010: 50–51; Fragoso 2009: 120) of “systemic sexual femicide” with such mixed industrial neighborhoods as the Poniente [West], Historical Center, and South-East in the city. Currently, however, the existing “hot spot” literature mapping the spatial location of femicides in Ciudad Juárez does not yet discriminate out systemic sexual femicide from other sub-types of femicide (Cervera-Gómez 2011; Fragoso and Cervera-Gómez 2013).

The spatial analysis of sexual assassination in Ciudad Juárez is of particular interest to the question of impunity and femicide because it demonstrates two elements. First, it is argued that *rape* is key to defining this sub-type of femicide rather than the woman’s relationship of the offender per se.<sup>5</sup> Often, it is an emphasis

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<sup>5</sup>This does not imply that intimate, domestic, or familial femicides (gender-based murder of a woman by a known partner or men close to her) are not violent, brutal crimes that can involve rape as well as the sexual abuse, assault, and murder of women, teens, and children by family members (Fragoso and Cervera-Gómez 2010: 14). Nor does it imply that knowing the woman’s relationship to the offender is not important information. Rather, it advocates linking this information more closely to location or place within the city to view potential repetitive patterns of different sub-types of femicide.

on this relationship which is behind the unresolved debate over what percentage of feminicides in Juárez are “domestic” versus “sexual” in motive. Some government officials have claimed that the majority of the murder of women in the city is not “sexual” at all but arises from domestic violence and communitarian violence (66 % with 26 % sexual and 8 % unknown [2004]) (*Respuesta del Estado* 2008: 31–32). It also stands behind the recent claim of the “myth of the feminicide narrative” in Juárez (Molloy 2014).

By understanding sexual assassination in terms of the rape aspect of these murders, this helps to clarify their gender-specific character. Using both non-governmental and governmental sources, confirmed sexual assault (9 %) is found along with sexual mutilation injuries (19.2 %) and overkill injuries (75 %) in over 145 girls, teens, and women murdered in Ciudad Juárez. Of the thousands of men murdered, mutilated, decapitated, and/or dismembered in Ciudad Juárez either due to organized crime-related violence or not (Shirk 2010; Cervera-Gómez 2013: 19–20), there few, if any, reports on their brutal *rape* and public abandonment as naked or half-unclothed bodies (Shirk and Ríos 2011).<sup>6</sup>

Second, it is shown empirically that many of the murders of women in Ciudad Juárez are *forced abductions*,<sup>7</sup> often vehicular, for the central purpose of sexual assault against women. The act of abduction occurs at a specific geographical location that can be investigated and mapped. Furthermore, forced abduction “disappearances” are mediated and/or facilitated by several “gaps” in the rule of law in Ciudad Juárez (impunity), namely the exemption from law for the powerful and lack of access to the judiciary and to fair process by the underprivileged (O’Donnell 1999).

Third, poverty and neighborhood are analyzed in the context of industrial geography with respect to sexual assassination in Ciudad Juárez. This analysis maps street information of the eyewitnesses of the last person to see the girl, teen, or woman alive in 133 sexual assassinations [1996–2001, 2011–2013] and officially registered disappearances [2000–2014]. On the basis of this geographical information, a systematic spatial mapping in the city over time reveals that female pedestrians in selected, industrial neighborhoods in the Poniente, South/South-East, Border, and Historical Center areas have been subject to repetitive sexual assassinations at the neighborhood level. Thus, the specific contribution of this book is a

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<sup>6</sup>Studies of injuries in organized crime-related homicides typically include torture, defined as the binding or tying up of hands, often accompanied by beating or bruising to the face and head (Personal Communication, David Shirk 2010; TBI NarcoBarometer 2008). As the degree of organized crime-related violence in Juárez expanded after 2008, drug-related homicide mutilation came to include beheading, skinning, hanging, burning, or cooking of the body. Nevertheless, sexual assault-related injuries associated with murders in Juárez continue to be tied to women (Martínez-Amador 2012).

<sup>7</sup>The term “abduction” is also frequently used in relationship to these murders in Juárez across a spectrum of authors (Driver 2015: 157; Molloy 2014; Washington-Váldez 2006: 2; Pantaleo 2006; Amnesty International 2010). It should be noted that the abductions of girls, teens, and women that terminate in rape and murder are not the same as organized crime-related kidnappings for ransom where a specific request for money is made (Heinle et al. 2015: 37).

first systematic spatial study documenting the location of abduction sites in multiple sexual assassinations in Juárez and their mapping to specific, often industrial, zones in the city.

The sociological focus of the analysis on the social, public, and private security conditions in zones where such abductions occur can also help to clarify another of the so-called myths of feminicide in Juárez, the “*maquila*” myth. A singular significance placed on the *occupation* of the girl, teen, or woman as key to understanding these murders can lead to unresolved disputes over the relative percentage of women killed in Ciudad Juárez who were employed in manufacturing (Fragoso 2002: 10, 2009: 106) with some claiming that a profile of Juárez feminicide victims as “young, *maquiladora* workers” is a “stereotype” (Albuquerque and Vemala 2008: 8). By focusing primarily on “place” or location rather than on occupation per se, it is argued that while occupations may vary (students, *maquila* workers, housewives, unemployed, bar or night club workers, or unknown), the geographical concentration of sexual assassination remains relatively stable in specific repetitive zones with public and private security deficits over time in the city.<sup>8</sup>

Over a twenty-year historical span, there is little doubt that the violence in Ciudad Juárez is “extremely complex: the forms of victimization and their victims are multiple and varied (Fragoso 2014: 42)”. Yet, as Fragoso (2014: 44) notes, “there are two key international benchmarks for understanding this violence in this city: feminicide and the disappearance of women in the 1990s and the *Chihuahua Joint Operation*, which began the warlike conflict between the state and organized crime gangs in 2008. The damage that these caused and continue to inflict has not been calculated, neither in physical terms nor psychological, economic, social, or political.”

This book captures both of the pivotal historical benchmarks—feminicide in the 1990s and disappearances before and after the 2008 *Chihuahua Joint Operation*. A road map to the analysis begins with the geographical fact that feminicides in Ciudad Juárez cluster in zones which lack social investment in neighborhood public security and equipment, particularly in the Poniente [West] and that many disappearances of women in Ciudad Juárez over time have been concentrated in a few specific areas in the city, especially in the Historical Center after 2008 [1987–2011, n = 180] (Cervera-Gómez 2005, 2011; Fragoso 2009; Volk and Schlotterbeck 2010: 130; Hernandez 2010: 51; *Norte Digital* 8/7/13; Fragoso and Cervera Gómez 2013: 18). The argument advanced herein is that there is a pattern of assassinations

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<sup>8</sup>This also does not imply that knowing the occupation of the girl, teen, or woman who died from sexual assassination is not important information. Rather, the point is that the interpretation of its significance be taken in context of multiple other features importantly location. Another issue is to take care with the relatively high percentages of “unknowns” in relationship to occupation data (31 % unknown, Fragoso 2009: 106; 21 % unknown, Albuquerque and Velma 2008: Fig. #1). Similarly, caution in interpreting “not employed” (51 %) as an occupational variable without further specification of this category into “students” or others is encouraged (Albuquerque and Velma 2008: Fig. #1).

in repetitive locations to silence girls, teens, and women after sexual assault and when human trafficking victims are no longer considered “useful.”<sup>9</sup>

Chapter 2 focuses heavily on the time period of 1996–2001 with updates from 2011 to 2013. It presents a micro-level analysis of how exclusion from public and private security and a lack of vetting of public and private security personnel for sexual violence facilitated lethal, confirmed sexual assaults upon girls, teens, and women engaged in routine activities (walking to and from school and work) in the Poniente, South/South-East, and Border zones. A close mapping reveals repetitive crimes, often on the very same pedestrian pathways along abandoned railroad land corridors to and from urban industrial parks (Poniente) and on federal lands and *maquiladora* plants located at uninhabited areas of the city (South-South-East). The repetition of daytime, blitz auto abductions on public streets (Border, Poniente) also points to a history of impunity in the criminal justice system which produces “pockets of opportunity” at the neighborhood level for repetitive sexual assaults.

In Chap. 3, an analysis is presented of a series of officially registered disappearances with the Special Prosecutor of Gender Crimes of the State Attorney General’s Office [Fiscalía Especializada en Atención a Mujeres Víctimas por Razones de Género [FEM] of multiple girls, teens, and women in Ciudad Juárez (2000–2014).<sup>10</sup> It is argued that their spatial distribution in the city follows a

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<sup>9</sup>Survivor testimonies reveal similar coercion tactics such as forced auto abductions and death threats against self and family (Baldwin et al. 2014). One escaped teen survivor of human trafficking in the Historical Center of Ciudad Juárez recounted at a subsequent court trial how she tried to refuse to show up for work when she realized the “store” where she had been “hired” was a front for sexual slavery. She was then immediately picked up at her home, driven back to the “store,” and threatened by the trafficker that “none of this would have happened to me if I had “behaved” and that from now on, they would remind me of the name of my daughter so that I would remember why I was there” (*Diario* 7/26/13).

<sup>10</sup>It is beyond the scope of this brief to conduct a spatial analysis of the abduction point of every sub-type of femicide in Ciudad Juárez. Fragoso and Cervera-Gómez (2010: 14) estimate that 22.4 % of 833 femicides and assassinations in Ciudad Juárez and the Valle de Juárez (1993–2009) were intimate femicides. They argue that intimate femicides in Juárez display a distinctive, more private configuration than “systemic sexual femicides.” This is because the majority of bodies (63 %) are abandoned in interior, often private spaces [house—50 %, inside an auto—6 %, business—3 %] and also in bars (1.5 %), hotels (1.5 %), prisons (1.5 %), hospitals (0.7 %) with only 14 % unknown; 10.9 % uninhabited area, 10 % on the street, 3 % other] (Hernandez 2010: 131). Research also correlated residence with a sample of 125 girls and women who died from intimate femicide (1993–2009). It was found that the majority lived in the North-Poniente and South-East zones of the city (Hernandez 2010: 48). Furthermore, it is also beyond the scope of this brief to analyze the multiple kidnappings, disappearances of young men, and the killing of innocent citizens in Ciudad Juárez. Heinle et al. (2015: 37) estimate a total of 23,605 disappeared persons in Mexico (2007–2014) with the National Attorney General’s Office searching for about 2.7 %, at least in the state of Mexico. Finally, this book’s focus on sexual assassination also does not mean to imply that every violent act (intimate femicide, female organized crime and drug-related, imprudent, communitarian deaths) which represents a heinous crime against women should not be studied in its own right. As European Parliamentarian for Social, Health and Family Affairs Verhofstadt (2005: 100) noted: “What made the Ciudad Juárez murders of women visible in the end was their sheer overwhelming number. Also, every victim deserves to be counted (and her story told)”.

bimodal pattern in the city: concentrated where there is a market for illegal sexual services (55 %, Historical Center) and where more diffuse forms of human trafficking are suspected (40 % in several smaller “hotspots” in the Poniente/South-South-East). Chapter 3 also presents a detailed institutional analysis of the roots of judicial, police, and public security-related impunity or lack of monitoring in these zones. It is found that fiscal incentives (corruption, collusion) and bureaucratic obstacles (budgetary) perpetuate a situation lacking in proper public security equipment such as surveillance cameras (Cervera-Gómez 2011: 57) and often a failure to use such security equipment correctly. Limited institutional capacity, budgetary constraints, and a US policy of dumping sexual offenders in El Paso or repatriating them to Juárez hamper recent governmental efforts to reverse judicial and police apathy toward the investigation and prosecution of sexual assassinations in the city.

In sum, a lack of social investment in neighborhood public security and equipment (Cervera-Gómez 2005, 2011), a failure of private security and a lack of vetting of public and private security personnel for sexual violence facilitate sexual assassinations in specific, mixed industrial neighborhoods (Poniente, South-South-East, Border) and the Historical Center. This combines with the use of force (violence) in the abductions (solo and group auto abductions, bus abductions, attacks on solo pedestrians) irrespective of whether offenders were engaged in unorganized and organized crime and/or were “off-duty” organized crime assassins. Together, these elements (lack of public and private security, violent abduction tactics) help explain the repetition of sexual assassinations over time in specific zones in the city.

Columbus, OH, USA

Sara Schatz

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