University of Cincinnati

Date: 3/12/2013

I, Olimpia Arellano-neri , hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Romance Languages & Literatures.

It is entitled:

Cinematographic and Literary Representations of the Femicides in Ciudad Juarez

Student's name: **Olimpia Arellano-neri**

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Nicasio Urbina, Ph.D.

Committee member: Therese Migraine-George, Ph.D.

Committee member: Maria Moreno, Ph.D.

UNIVERSITY OF Cincinnati

3245

Cinematographic and Literary Representations of the Femicides in Ciudad Juarez.

A dissertation submitted to the

Division of Graduate Studies and Research

of the University of Cincinnati

In partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.)

in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures

of the College of Arts and Sciences

2013

by

Olimpia Arellano-Neri

B.S., Universidad Autonoma de Zacatecas, 1992

M.S., Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1998

Ph.D., University of Cincinnati, 2004

M.A., University of Cincinnati, 2008

Committee Chair: Dr. Nicasio Urbina

Abstract

In the border city of Ciudad Juarez, from 1993 to 2008, around 450 women (the exact number is unknown) were brutally murdered or simply disappeared in mysterious circumstances. Although the femicides have not stopped as of yet, the various patterns that characterized the femicides during this period have recently been overshadowed by a different type of murder which involves both men and women and which seems to occur during the daylight and in more public places. The large number of femicides has attracted international attention from groups ranging from human rights associations to individual authors working in different literary genres. The femicides and all the social conflicts that have been linked to them have yielded a vast production of literary and cinematographic pieces which attempt to represent the murders and the circumstances under which they took place. In this dissertation, six documentaries Señorita extraviada (2001), The City of Lost Girls (2003), The City of Dead Women (2005), Bajo Juárez (2006), On the Edge (2006), and Silencio en Juárez (2008); three fiction films Espejo retrovisor (2002), Bordertown (2006), and Traspatio (2009); and three novels Desert Blood (2005), 2666 (2004), and Las muertas de Ciudad Juárez: El caso de Elizabeth Castro García y Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif (1999) are analyzed and compared.
The ability of writers and filmmakers to use textual, aural and visual elements to reproduce the likeness of the reality before them is assessed, as well as the strategies employed to compel us to believe that that reality is indeed re-presented before us objectively. The comparison of the representation of the victims aims to answer two questions: whether or not an objective depiction of victims can be achieved without compromising their identity and individual value as human beings, and whether or not

these femicides can be represented in a way that neither over-emphasizes nor ignores the implied violence or the socio-political circumstances under which these crimes happened. At the same time, comparison of the plots serves to answer another key question, namely that of the perceived causes of the femicides.

Dedicated to my husband Jeff and to our daughter Lee.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor Dr. Nicasio Urbina, his knowledge, expertise, generosity and commitment made this project possible. Thanks to the members of my committee; Dr.Maria Paz Moreno and Dr. Therese Migraine-George for their willingness to participate in this research, their time to read the dissertation, and their valuable suggestions.

I extend my gratitude to the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at the University of Cincinnati, faculty, adjunct faculty, staff, and fellow graduate students.

I want to give special thanks to my husband Dr. Jeff Loveland for his help editing this manuscript, his love, and encouragement.

Thanks to my beloved daughter Leann Loveland for her love and patience.

Thanks to my sisters: Suny, Adela, Rosalia, Gabriela, and Araceli; my brothers: Armando, Antonio, Arturo, Luis Moises, and Raul; my nephews and my nieces for their love and encouragement.

I will always be grateful to my dear friends Susan Cogan and Emmanuel Wilson for their friendship.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

INTRODUCTION

In the border city of Ciudad Juarez, from 1993 to 2008, around 450 women (the exact number is unknown) were brutally murdered or simply disappeared in mysterious circumstances. Although the femicides have not stopped as of yet, the various patterns that characterized the femicides during this period have recently been overshadowed by a different type of murder which involves both men and women and which seems to occur during the daylight and in more public places. The large number of femicides that took place from 1993 to 2008 has attracted international attention from groups ranging from human rights associations to individual authors working in different literary genres. The femicides and all the social conflicts that have been linked to them have yielded a vast production of literary and cinematographic pieces which attempt to represent the murders and the circumstances under which they took place. In this dissertation, six documentaries *Señorita extraviada* (2001), *The City of Lost Girls* (2003), *The City of Dead Women* (2005), *Bajo Juárez* (2006), *On the Edge* (2006), and *Silencio en Juárez* (2008); three fiction films *Espejo retrovisor (*2002), *Bordertown* (2006), and *Traspatio* (2009); and three novels *Desert Blood* (2005)*, 2666* (2004)*,* and *Las muertas de Ciudad Juárez: El caso de Elizabeth Castro García y Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif* (1999) are analyzed and compared.

The ability of writers and filmmakers to use textual, aural and visual elements to reproduce the likeness of the reality before them will be assessed, as well as the strategies employed to compel us to believe that that reality is indeed re-presented before us objectively. The comparison of the representation of the victims aims to answer two questions: whether or not an objective depiction of victims can be achieved without compromising their identity and individual value as human beings, and whether

or not these femicides can be represented in a way that neither over-emphasizes nor ignores the implied violence or the socio-political circumstances under which these crimes happened. At the same time, comparison of the plots serves to answer another key question, namely that of the perceived causes of the femicides. A word of caution is in order: It is important to keep in mind that we are dealing with mimetic representations rather than with reality.

For convenience, a brief history of the concept of mimesis is offered. The term mimesis has been used since the ancient Greeks, Plato's *Republic* being one of the most important and enduring works related to the subject. With the description of the ideal political and social organization of an imaginary city, Plato (through his character Socrates) exposes his ideas about the act of mimicking in epic poetry. He denounces the practice of mimicking; he argues that the person who performs this act is a liar, for he is hiding his real self and he is pretending to be someone else. In the *Republic,* Plato proposed the expulsion of actors from the imaginary city, for they were not a positive influence for children who were supposed to become governors of the city. Among other inconveniences, Plato sees mimesis as an act which produces only "phantoms" rather than real entities. As far as the response from the audience, Plato explains that the reaction of the audience when exposed to a mimetic representation is irrational, purely emotional. In short, Plato associates mimetic performances with superfluity and dishonesty; therefore he considers them unhealthy.

Plato's student Aristotle also contributed to the theory of mimesis with an important thesis presented in his *Poetics*. Aristotle agrees with some of Plato's ideas; for instance, he agrees on the imitative character of art. But mostly Aristotle has a more

positive way of seeing mimetic performances. Aristotle contends that mimesis, in fact, is not detached from reason, for the audience requires a rational process in order to experience emotions from a mimetic work. For example, normally, a spectator experiences feelings of sorrow when a character who does not deserve any pain suffers, whereas, if the pain is inflicted on a character that deserves to be punished, the spectator usually applauds the punishment. Aristotle treats mimesis as something that has its own laws and aims. For him, a mimetic representation deserves to be analyzed as an independent unity as opposed to being regarded as a dishonest reflection of an external event.

Mimesis is a concept that has been widely applied to almost every human activity. For example, as explained above, Plato initially presented his ideas on artistic mimesis through his reflections on an imaginary socio-political organization. Evidently, this utopia has its origin in an *a priori* assessment of the philosophical and psychological implications of the act of mimicking. Other seminal and controversial contributions to human psychology also have their foundation in conceptions of the act of mimicking; such is the case of theories developed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, for example.

There are a number of theorists whose work involves mimesis in one way or another. In this dissertation, I draw on some of these works when necessary and appropriate. For instance, I adopt two ideas from Plato: first, that mimesis is far from reality and second, that emotions are produced by mimetic art. However, I do not follow his notion that such emotions are impulsive and irrational and that mimesis is inherently unhealthy. From Aristotle, I take the notion of mimetic performances as potentially

edifying and the recommendation that they be valued as independent unities rather than for the fidelity with which they represent reality. Therefore, this dissertation begins with the idea that every representation of the femicides studied here constitutes a microcosm which is different from reality. No doubt there is a reality beyond these representations; if nothing else, it seems cold-hearted and unfair to overlook the suffering of the victims and their families. Still, artistic representations are always distinct from reality, and reality can be difficult to seize or approach, particularly in the case of unsolved "mysteries" like the Juarez femicides. For this reason, this study is focused on realism as a literary convention rather than as conformity to an external reality. As a consequence, the representations of the femicides analyzed here are compared among themselves rather than with reality.

For many centuries, Western artists presented themselves as working toward greater fidelity to external reality; their "realism" was thus a story of definite progress toward a goal, however unreachable. Erich Auerbach, for example, saw progress in the move away from a largely rhetorical realism in such works as the *Odyssey* toward a different type of realism in such works as the Bible. Auerbach emphasizes that, unlike the *Odyssey*, which focuses on heroic and powerful characters, the Bible presents characters that are more like common people and is a text where uncertainty and doubt encourage readers to immerse themselves in deeper psychological reflection. More recently, literary critics have tended to turn away from the notion of realism as conformity to external reality and toward the idea that realism involves a set of conventions that either because of artistic tradition or innate patterns of thinking allows readers and viewers to categorize works as realistic. For example, Roland Barthes has

discussed the “reality effect” in nineteenth- and twentieth-century narrative, by which authors convinced readers of the realism of their texts by including references to apparently insignificant details such as a sofa, a barometer, et cetera. As for cinema, one convention for creating reality is to mimic the grainy, black-and-white footage of old documentaries to create a sense of reality in newer films. In the following study, I compare such conventional realism in depictions of the Juarez femicides.

Another concept of realism that is crucial here follows from Aristotle’s focus on belief and logic, which suggests that the realism of a mimetic work is rooted not in its resemblance to the external world but in its congruence with the norms of human thought. In some of the films and narratives included in this analysis, it is evident that the rational structuring of events is meant to fulfill the needs of human cognition rather than to present an actual truth of the events they represent. For example, in the films *Bordertown* and *Traspatio* and in the novels *Desert Blood* and *2666*, the audience is presented with an ending which indicates that at least one important battle has been won and that the forces behind the femicides are no longer mysterious. This, of course, is far from reality as we know it but such endings are necessary so the plot can be congruent with the norms of human thought.

Many articles have been written about the femicides in Ciudad Juarez, but most of them take the viewpoint of the social sciences. Within this body of scholarship, Katherine Pantaleo has analyzed newspaper articles and reports by human-rights organizations concerning the Juarez femicides, arguing that most of them point to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a significant cause for the murders. Pantaleo also points out that the reality of the Juarez femicides was only established by

means of discourse produced by journalists, human rights organizations, victims' families, et cetera.

On the other hand, critical articles about the literary representations of the femicides have been produced, many of them on Bolaño´s posthumous novel *2666*. For example, Cathy Fourez analyzes the geographic characteristics of the fictional city of Santa Teresa. Ignacio Rodriguez de Arce establishes a parallel between the victims of femicides in Juarez as portrayed in *2666* and the victims of any Latin American dictatorship regime. He also sees the case of Ciudad Juarez as a horrific consequence of globalization which will be propagated worldwide in the future. Dealing with works other than *2666*, Adriana Martinez argues that *Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders* perpetuates the image of women-as-victims who are disempowered, voiceless, and violated by others. In most literary studies of the femicides, the focus is an individual literary representation. Up to now, in fact, a comparison of literary representations of the femicides has not been done. Pantaleo's thesis does involve a comparison of representations. However, these representations are limited to newspaper articles and reports by human rights organizations. Xavier Giró et al. have dealt with representations of the femicides in the media and in documentaries, but not in cinematographic or narrative fiction. Thus, I believe that my project is an original contribution to the field in that it analyzes more literary representations in different genres.

This dissertation is organized around genres. Chapter 1 analyzes documentary films, chapter 2 fiction films, and chapter 3 novels. Lastly, a conclusion summarizes the results of my comparison, both within the genres covered in individual chapters and between genres.

As for methodology, it involves an eclectic mixture of psychoanalysis, feminist theory, narratology, and film theory. To facilitate comparison, each chapter includes sections on the representations of the victims and the causes, sections on the plot and narrators, and sections specific to the focus of the chapter, as indicated in the summaries below.

In chapter 1, I analyze the representations of the victims, drawing on the theory of the construction of identity developed by Erik Erikson. In *Identity and the Life Cycle*, he emphasizes the importance of the mutual complementation of ethos and ego in the process of an individual's identity formation. I assess the ethos and the egos identity of the victims as represented in the documentaries to determine whether these identities are objectively portrayed. Paradoxically for the genre, irony was found to be an important rhetorical element of the documentaries, and it was analyzed with the theoretical framework provided by Claire Colebrook. Lastly, I identify Bill Nichols' "modes" to study different aspects shared by the documentaries.

Chapter 2 analyzes cinematic representations of the Juarez femicides according to film theory. Specifically, I examine the techniques used to create a sense of reality, including camera angle, lighting, casting, selection of leading actors, and production, among others. One theory employed is that of Joseph M. Boggs. In a more psychoanalytical framework, I intensely scrutinize each film in light of Laura Mulvey's feminist film theory as exposed in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which was influenced by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Since violence is a salient element in these films, a section is devoted to its analysis. The studies collected in Steven Prince's *Screening Violence* serve as a reference in this endeavor. Lastly, because all of the

fiction films deal with themes distinct from the femicides, the ideas of universalization and Americanization proposed by Judith E. Doneson are applied here.

In chapter 3, I use narratology, understood as a set of theoretical and nomenclatural tools for describing narrative texts and how they tell a story. In particular, I focus on narrators, plots, and characters, since they illuminate the ethical and political dimensions of these representations. In addition, following from the premise that works of art represent a microcosm distinct from reality, this chapter relies on Michael Riffaterre's theory. He argues that a representation of reality in literature is not a mimesis of reality but rather a mimesis of intertexts; it is a semiosis. Consequently, the reading of the text cannot be complete or satisfactory without going through the intertext; the text does not signify unless as a function of a complementary intertextual homologue.

In the conclusion of my study, I summarize the results of the comparison and mention some suggestions for further research. The details of my arguments are presented in the conclusion, but some of my most general contentions are:

1. The representations of the femicides exemplify the theory of realism as a set of conventional tools or cognitive norms rather than as a direct representation of reality.
2. Creative representations of the femicides differ from media reports in that they typically a) place the femicides in a broader context (patterns, causes, background, metaphorical meanings), b) seek to recreate emotional responses, and c) tend to use conventional techniques for story-telling (such as the hero) and for closure (such as the happy ending).

3. Representations of the femicides are strongly conditioned by genre. Documentaries, fiction films, and novels tend to provide information about the murders and their causes. Documentaries and narrative, however, foreground violence and suffering in a way that fiction films do not, presumably in part because large-budget movies are carefully created to appeal to large audiences and to get appropriate ratings.
4. Contrary to the findings of some scholars, I do not find that women are always presented as mere victims in the representations. In fact, women protagonists are predominant in cinematic representations of the femicides, and they act as a counterweight to the murdered women.

Besides being a work of literary scholarship aimed at elucidating the notion of realism in various genres, my work is meant as a contribution to the voices of many other academics and activists seeking to raise public awareness of the Juarez femicides. Literary representations are certainly not the most important aspect of a tragedy like this one, but representations and language in all their forms are key elements for understanding and denouncing the sexual objectification, torture, and murder of the victims.

CHAPTER 1

DOCUMENTARIES

From the pioneering work of Dziga Vertov in the beginning of the twentieth century to the most recent endeavors, documentaries representing social events have offered alternative views of the common world with the goal of allowing us to understand it objectively. Persuasion has a crucial role in these films, for they are often intended to have an influence on the audience and on the larger world. In order to accomplish that purpose, the filmmaker must convince the spectator that the point of view presented in the documentary is the "correct" one. This is precisely the rhetorical aspect of a documentary and the reason why eloquence is crucial in the making process.

In this chapter, six documentaries representing the femicides in Ciudad Juárez will be analyzed: *Señorita extraviada*, *The City of Lost Girls*, *The City of Dead Women*, *Bajo Juárez*, *On the Edge*, and *Silencio en Juárez*. The ability of filmmakers to use aural and visual elements to reproduce the likeness of the reality before them will be assessed, as well as the strategies employed to compel us to believe that that reality is indeed re-presented before us objectively.

This study focuses particularly on three aspects: the representation of the victims, irony used as a rhetorical tool, and material and format.

The section dealing with the representation of the victims aims to answer two questions: whether or not an objective representation of victims can be achieved without compromising their identity and individual value as human beings, and whether or not these femicides can be represented in a way that neither over-emphasizes the implied violence nor completely ignores it.

The irony in the reality of the femicides and the circumstances surrounding them inevitably leads to irony in the representation of this reality. Here, the ironies detected in

the documentaries will be analyzed in light of a Socratic view of irony as well as a Romantic one.

Lastly, an account of the material and filmic techniques used in every documentary will be provided. Particular attention will be paid to the filmmakers´ judgment and artistry in selecting and editing their material with the objective of convincing the spectator that what is being re-presented is the "truth."

1. Representation of Victims

Representing victims of real life-events is a difficult task as well as a controversial one. The representation of victims of murder and rape frequently raises questions as to what, how, and why certain characteristics of the victims are highlighted and others are ignored, as well as questions about whether or not the socio-economic and political factors surrounding the murders and the impunity and injustice following the events overshadow the importance of rescuing the memory of the young women involved in such horrendous occurrences. The representations of the femicides in Ciudad Juarez in all genres - fiction films, media, novels, poetry, popular songs, and documentaries - implicitly or explicitly have tried to make a reconstruction of the victims, triggering a reaction from general audiences and critics. For example, Katherine Pantaleo analyses thirty-five narratives from newspapers, human rights reports, and academic journals, concluding that the murders are constructed as a significant social problem rather than a landmark narrative for violence against women (67). Evidently, a reconstructed image of the victims is either overlooked or minimized, in such a way that the murders – as Pantaleo puts it - are used as "atrocity tales" with the ultimate goal of demonstrating the

violence produced by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the corruption of the Mexican justice system. In her analysis, Amy Carroll argues that in *Juarez: The Laboratory of our Future,* Charles Bowden uses photos of the dead women of Juarez to illustrate the effects of NAFTA (377). Carroll also argues that Ursula Biemann, in her documentary *Performing the Border*, while acknowledging a link between the arrival of the maquiladora industry and the disappearances and murders of large numbers of women, further "disappears the missing women" by focusing instead on the profile of "a serial killer in the advanced stages of late capitalism" (378). Adriana Martinez, for her part, argues that *Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders*, as well as other texts which have surfaced from the femicides in Ciudad Juárez, "perpetuates the image of women-as-victims who are disempowered, voiceless, and violated *Others*" (91). On the other hand, Sergio de la Mora argues that *Señorita extraviada "a*git comme correcteur de l´invisibilité, la disparition et l´oubli. Il répond aux récits populaires qui parlent des victimes comme si elles n´avaient pas d´histoire derrière la photo qui ne les retient que comme victims de la violence" (128).

These reactions bring back the dichotomy of whether or not an objective and conspicuous representation of victims can be achieved without compromising their life and their death and without obliterating their suffering and the suffering of their relatives. The other question – as posed by Carroll - is "how does one (re)present sexualized and racialized sociopolitical and economic violences/violations while neither contributing to their maintenance nor choosing to ignore them?" (381)

In this section, the way in which the six documentaries mentioned in the introduction deal with the representation of the victims and with the social, cultural,

economic, and political circumstances surrounding the femicides will be scrutinized to determine if they offer an answer to the questions posed above.

First, I would like to point out that all six documentaries attempt to reconstruct the victims by means of life and death. In passing, Xavier Giró *et al.* have already mentioned this duality in the representation of the femicide victims in documentaries. Here, a more detailed and deeper analysis of the representation is made.

1.1. Death

Death of course is a “must” factor omnipresent in all six documentaries, for it is the common denominator grouping the victims as part of the same set and the one that draws attention to such a set. Nuria Vilanova explains:”La memoria surge de la muerte, no la antecede y no tiene presencia antes de ella. La memoria se crea a partir de la muerte y lo hace desde la memoria de una colectividad de mujeres muertas, de unos cuerpos sin vida, recuperados del olvido” (154). It is then evident that in any attempt to reconstruct the life of this community of young women, a common denominator is intrinsically linked: the way they died or disappeared.

Visual and aural filmic devices are used in all the documentaries to represent death, for example shots of pink and black crosses, scenes of poles displaying posters and flyers with a picture of and information about the missing women, musical scores known in Mexican traditions as part of burial ceremonies, takes of burial ceremonies, shots of dusty clothes or shoes lying on the ground, scenes of a covered stretcher being carried to a forensic vehicle, detailed narrations of the conditions of the bodies, and clear and graphical frames of bodies and skeletons on the ground.

The number and duration of these filmic devices vary in every documentary. For example, *The City of Dead Women* is by far the work that contains the largest number of clear and graphical frames and scenes of the dead women, *Silencio en Juárez* and *The City of Lost Girls* also have some of these scenes but a smaller number. *Bajo Juárez* and *Silencio en Juárez* are the documentaries that contain the largest number of scenes showing covered stretchers (but not violated bodies as such) in deserted and semi-deserted areas, presumably where the bodies were found and from where they are being transported. *On the Edge* is the documentary that shows the fewest implied or overt scenes of bodies, having only a couple of takes with poor resolution and partially covered with foreground supers (super-imposed solid color frames displaying information related to what is being shown in the background, e.g. statistics, sources of statistics, identification of an interviewee, etc.).

In addition, all six documentaries include at least one detailed verbal or written description of the violence inflicted on the bodies. For example, Sandra Jordan narrates in *The City of Lost Girls*:

> [The victim] was picked up from this area somewhere over there and a week later her mutilated, tortured, raped body was found abandoned, dumped. She had broken knees, broken nose and she was raped many times by many different people, they think.

Filmic forms depicting violence fall within a spectrum delimited at one end by more sensationalistic and unethical devices and at the other end by less sensationalist and more ethical devices. The use of extremely graphical scenes of violence frequently infringe on the deontological codes established in every country, for they can be too

shocking to the uninvolved spectator as well as extremely cruel for the families and friends of the victims. It is worthwhile to contrast the way in which the photos of the dead women are openly shown and the way it is advisable for co-victims to see pictures of relatives involved in violent events; according to Deborah Spungen,

> the photographs [of victims] should be viewed in a quiet, safe, and private place. Everyone involved needs to understand that co-victims will become upset on viewing the photographs. For this reason, co-victims may wish to have other family members, a victim advocate, or a mental health professional accompany them, or at least provide transportation. (132)

Evidently, the sensitive precautions mentioned by Spungen were not always taken when structuring some documentaries. This does not necessarly mean that the documentaries are not altruistic in intention, it just shows how other factors, such as marketing, play an important role. Spungen, the founder of Families of Murder Victims and a mother herself of a murder victim, testifies that murder is a big business for the media: “A ‘good’ murder and subsequent trial can sell a lot of newspapers, gain viewers for the nightly news, and provide material for docudramas and miniseries” (215). As deconcerting as it may be, it is clear that some documentaries are designed based on marketing facts, which reflect some viewer’s voracious interest in graphical violence and murder. Mora reflects, “Notre société prospère dans la narration et les images de crime” (121).

The persistent question arises: Why are some viewers and readers fascinated with detailed brutal scenes and texts? *Screening Violence* is an extensive analysis of the evolution and ruling codes of violence on the screen as well as a summary of

possible reasons for watching violence and its effects on the spectator. The discussion of possible effects spans the continuum from the hypothesis of a cathartic and thus salutory reaction to the theory that violence can arouse the viewer and impel him or her to commit violence in his or her own environment. In a somewhat Aristotelian framework, Vivian Sobchack argues that in the current era of violence,

> our films are trying to make us feel secure about violence and death as much as it is possible, they are allowing us to purge our fear, to find safety in what appears to be knowledge of the unknown. To know the violence is to be temporarily safe from the fear of it. (117)

In the end, the intention of including and the effects of watching highly detailed and descriptive filmic elements of violence in the representations cannot be established with certainty. Here, our focus is to determine if and to what degree the representation of the violence linked to the femicides overshadows the representation of the victims themselves.

Devoting too much attention and time to violence, among other consequences, can cause a shift of attention from victims to perpetrators. Mora explains: “Le journalisme et les médias se repaissent d´histoires et d´images de violence et de mort où les assassins en série acquièrent une notoriété de vedette” (121). I argue that in order to achieve a representation where the victims are indeed the main focus, the use of filmic devices portraying violence should be used discreetly and with the sole intention of informing the spectator about the horrible experience these young women went through. *The City of Dead Women* – and to a lesser degree *Silencio en Juarez* - with the large number of clear and graphical pictures of the brutally murdered women,

goes beyond the limit of the purely informative, burying the victims deeper in their graves and covering them with a bright light of violence.

The City of the Lost Girls, in spite of being a short documentary (23 minutes long) compared to the other five in the corpus, outdoes itself in the verbal description of violence inflicted on the women, as if the point was to emphasize the inhuman aspect of the perpetrators rather than the suffering of the victims and their families. *On the Edge*, *Señorita extraviada*, and *Bajo Juarez* do include some verbal descriptions of violence but without so many details and so much graphicness.

Much further analysis of how these and other documentaries portray violence and death could be conducted. However, the goal here is to examine death as part of the binary opposition between life and death, in light of the process of justly representing the victims of the femicides in Ciudad Juarez.

1.2. Life

The construction of some of the documentaries studied here shows that the large number of murders, the socio-economic and political factors surrounding them, and the violence and impunity which characterize them are too striking to be left aside, in such a way that these issues take over and an effort to present and re-present the victims individually is rarely made. But the victims were more than a digit to be added into a large number of abducted, mutilated, raped, killed, and abandoned bodies, and they cannot be regarded as just a means to scrutinize the capitalist system, NAFTA, and/or the Mexican justice system. They were human beings with an identity, a distinct personality, and they had characteristics that were unique to them which differentiate

them from others. So in the process of trying to re-present the victims, it is imperative to focus on body as well as on mind, on death as well as on life; it is important to make an attempt to perpetuate the memory of every victim as the living being she once was with ideas, doubts, problems, excitements, virtues, and weaknesses – just like any other person - and whose life was prematurely and unjustly terminated.

Now, the question is what is frequently highlighted in every literary or non-literary work which aims to represent "las muertas de Juárez." As shocking as it may seem, when it comes to victims of rape and murder, a severe judgment is frequently made concerning the victims´ virtues. Spungen testifies:

> During the criminal justice process, the victim of a rape and murder, who cannot speak in her own defense, may be demeaned and blamed. Her background is often brought into question, and this may include inferences about her sexual relationships, her possible use of drugs and alcohol, and her lifestyle. Frequently, this information, elicited out of context, allows the defense attorney to cast serious aspersions on the character of the victim, often leading to the assumptions that the victim "asked for it." (16)

Spungen is referring to the United States of America's criminal justice system, but general audiences tend to pose similar questions. Journalists, writers, documentarists, directors, and other people in charge of designing a representational work frequently try to address this binomial question: Were the victims "good" or "bad"? Did they contribute to their own destiny?

1.2.1. "Good" or "Bad"

In this analysis, it was detected that all six documentaries clearly establish that the victims were "normal" people or that they had "normal" lives. For example, in *Bajo Juarez,* Diana Washington (a journalist for *El Paso Times*) explains: "Las mujeres desaparecen en el curso de sus tareas normales, van a la escuela, van al trabajo o vienen de la escuela o vienen del trabajo." In *Señorita extraviada,* Lourdes Portillo states: "Over the 18 months that [it] took to make this documentary, over 50 young women were killed, some were students, some were mothers, some were children and some were maquiladora workers." With these statements, which frequently go together with rhetorical elements such as scenes of young women walking in the streets, some of them wearing maquiladora uniforms, and/or of girls playing or walking in the streets, some of them wearing school uniforms, the idea of "normality" is being clearly transmitted to show that the victims did not do anything to cause their own deaths.

By contrast, three of the documentaries, *Señorita extraviada, The City of Lost Girls*, and *On the Edge* include scenes of night clubs and/or prostitutes on the streets. In spite of a clear statement in all three documentaries that the victims were not prostitutes, the inclusion of these scenes draws attention to the dichotomy between "good" and "bad" women. Furthermore, four of the documentaries include interviews in which people assert that Mexican authorities accused the victims of being prostitutes or of being involved with drug traffickers, or interviews in which Mexican authorities say that directly. For example, in *Señorita extraviada,* Victoria Caraveo (an activist) states that when the governor appeared on television the first time to talk about a group of eight female bodies found together in Ciudad Juarez, he said: "The problem is that they

are prostitutes.'" In the same documentary, the governor explains: "Se ha encontrado un patrón muy parecido, las muchachas se mueven en ciertos lugares, frecuentan a cierto tipo de gentes y entran en una cierta confianza con malvivientes, con gentes de bandas que luego se convierten en sus agresores." In *Silencio en Juarez,* Patricia González Rodríguez (the attorney general of the state of Chihuahua) declares: "Tenemos asuntos relacionados con el narcomenudeo, mujeres que en ocasiones pues acuden a trabajar a ciertos lugares donde se da la comercialización de pequeñas dosis de droga y han perdido la vida en ese tipo de situaciones." In *On the Edge,* Jessica Márquez (a grassroots coordinator for the Mexico Solidarity Network) says: "When a woman goes missing or when a woman's body is found, the first thing authorities do is denounce her. And they say it [she] is a prostitute or is a drug addict or she is just a woman living a double life." *Bajo Juarez* is the only documentary that does not suggest explicitly any relation between the victims and prostitution or drugs.

It is clear then that the majority of these documentaries draw attention to how Mexican authorities have tried to question the reputation of the victims. While this testimony may not have the effect of making the audience believe that the victims were unimportant or even worthless - for a human life is always valuable - they do plant doubt about the victims' contribution to or complicity in their own murder.

In yet another contrast, the documentaries collect testimony from the victims´ families, who frequently highlight the good assets of the young women. For example, in *Señorita extraviada,* the mother of a victim states: "Muy buena era mi hija, ella era muy noble, conmigo muy amable, aquí en la comunidad la querían mucho porque ella era catequista, daba catecismo a los niños de aquí de la comunidad y pertenecía al coro de

la iglesia." In *The City of Lost Girls,* the father of a victim asserts that the victim "soñaba con ser médico para ayudar a la comunidad." In *The City of Dead Women,* a victim´s mother says: "Our daughter went nowhere without our permission; she came straight home from the maquila." In *Bajo Juarez,* another victim's mother shows a certificate: "Este es un diploma de Alejandra que obtuvo el tercer lugar en el concurso de ajedrez ¡ay! ¿qué no jugaba Alejandra quisiera yo saber? A jugar, en básquetbol, estaba en el equipo de las porras [...]." In *Silencio en Juarez,* a victim's mother relates: "Estamos hablando de una chica que es muy responsable, no es de andar por el barrio, cuando ella sale pide permiso […] a bailar, de vez en cuando las dejo ir."

Evidently, the documentaries are trying to show the other side of the coin, a more positive representation of the victims. Except for *On the Edge,* every documentary includes testimony from a family member in which at least one positive quality about the victim is mentioned.

I argue that a more objective representation of the victims is needed in order to destroy the social stigma carried with their violent death and ultimately to free them from that radical dichotomy of "good" or "bad" and to situate them in a more human realm. Such a representation would not be based on the victims' violent deaths or the negative image perpetuated by Mexican authorities or even an idealized image. Instead, it would be based on their identity as individuals and as part of a community.

1.2.2. Ethos and Ego

Erik Erikson emphasizes the importance of the mutual complementation of ethos and ego, or group identity and ego identity, in the process of an individual's identity

formation. He points out that such complementation “puts a greater common potential at the disposal of both ego synthesis and social organization” (23).

As for the ethos, Erikson argues that a child derives a sense of reality from the awareness that his or her individual way of mastering experience (the ego synthesis) is part of a group identity and is in accord with its space-time and life plan (21). All six documentaries show that the victims formed part of various groups; many of them belonged to a low-class social group, a family group, a school group, a maquiladora work force, an adolescent/early adulthood group, a migratory group, and all of them belonged to a gender group and to the Ciudad Juarez population group.

1.2.2.1. Ciudad Juarez Population and Migratory Ethos.

Vilanova explains that in the case of a border city like Juarez, the collective memory “se reformula permanentemente en un proceso que de manera constante y continua erosiona […]. De la misma manera que la memoria del sujeto migrante, porque también ésta se desplaza y se reformula” (151). With this statement, the collective memory of two groups, the Juarez population and the migratory one, could be regarded as diffused, but these groups´ identities still persist, for the permanent changes to which Vilanova is referring happen on a large temporal scale which does not go beyond a young adult’s life span.

Some inherent factors which shape the identity of the eight groups mentioned above - hence the victims’ identity - can be listed, such as necessity, courage, fear, willpower, vulnerability, determination, confusion, experience, inexperience, naïveté, intelligence, foolishness, maturity, immaturity, acceptance, rejection, independence, and

dependence, among others. The point being made here is: The victims were humans, and it would be unfair to say that, just because they belonged to a low-class social group, they were vulnerable or passive or powerless; nor because they were maquiladora workers were they necessarily submissive or foolish or inexperienced.

1.2.2.2. Maquiladora Workforce Ethos

In three of the documentaries, it is mentioned that maquiladoras have a preference for hiring women because – as Marquez describes it – the recruiters think that "they are more docile, they are less likely to complain when their rights are not being respected, and they are less likely to organize themselves into unions" (*On the Edge*). This may indeed be a fact, but it is wrong to assume that the female workers are wholly submissive, as Jason Wallace (the coordinator of the Portland Central America Solidarity Committee) suggests: "They [the corporations] already got people who are trained in their heads to be submissive [...] 'don´t talk back,' 'don´t fuck up'" (*On the Edge*). There are probably many different reasons why women work and tolerate the conditions under which they work in the maquiladoras, not just because their "heads" have been "trained" to do so. For example, in *Señorita extraviada,* Lourdes Portillo interviews a girl (approximately 12 years old). The girl says that she would like to work in a maquiladora, Portillo asks why, and the girl answers, "Porque puedo [podría] ayudar a mis padres con el dinero que saco [saque]." Besides exposing the reason why she wants to work in a maquiladora, this statement shows that far from having a "trained" brain, this girl is aware of her family´s financial struggle, that she wants to do something about it, that she is realistic about what she can do now to help, and that she

is aware that in a maquiladora she can obtain a job. Extrapolating this case and corroborating it with what it is shown in the documentaries, we can conclude that awareness of the appalling economic situation, strength of will to elude that detrimental condition, knowledge of job opportunities available to young women with little or no school education in Ciudad Juarez are identity assets which characterize many of the female maquiladora workers and quite possibly the victims, for most of them belonged to this group.

1.2.2.3. Female-Family Ethos

As for the family identity, the documentaries use filmic devices to portray aspects of such an identity, for example, interviews with family members, family pictures, homemade videos, takes of the victims' houses and belongings, scenes of activities in which the co-victims were engaged, etc. In the documentaries, the co-victims are associated with powerlessness, for the murderers of their relatives were never apprehended or punished. Spungen testifies: "In no-arrest cases, co-victims often feel that no one cares about their deceased loved one […]. These co-victims tend to exist in a void, fraught with uncertainty, frustration, helplessness, and confusion" (103).

By contrast, the family identity is also associated with bravery in the documentaries, for some of the co-victims were courageous enough to confront and contest not only local but federal authorities and even the president of Mexico. In addition, they conducted their own investigations to try to uncover the perpetrators, they formed activist groups to denounce the femicides, the injustice, and the impunity, and they successfully drew international attention to their situation, among other things.

In yet another contrast, the co-victims' wisdom, perspicacity, sense of caution, and sense of awareness is questioned in the documentaries. All of them - even the earliest documentary produced seven years after the femicides were first noticed - use different devices to indicate that the population in general was aware of the femicides and the circumstances surrounding them. Such devices include takes of telephone poles above the city displaying the pink and black crosses and/or the lost-person flyers, scenes of strikes organized by the co-victims calling attention to the crimes and denouncing the impunity and injustice, footage of televisions broadcasting the news about the missing women, the bodies found, and the brutality with which the women were killed, pictures of newspapers disseminating the information, and interviews with inhabitants of Ciudad Juarez. For example a victim's mother in *Silencio en Juarez* says:

> Lo que yo oigo de Juarez es que, pues hay mucho narcotráfico y mucho narcotraficante, hay mucha gente de fuera que no conocemos, que migra y aquí se queda y pues cada quién es diferente porque antes las cosas, estas cosas, no pasaban.

Likewise, Cathy Revtyak, a counselor at the Ciudad Juarez Women's Shelter ("Casa de la Peregrina"), remarks in *On the Edge*: "Most women that I have talked to, have heard about that; I mean, they do not use the word femicide but Juarez is recognized throughout the region and certainly known in other parts of the country as just being an extremely dangerous place". A young woman in *Señorita extraviada* declares: "Las agarran, y no sé qué les hacen, y ya aparecen muertas, y es todo lo que sé."

In spite of the indicated awareness of the femicides, some documentaries show testimony in which the victims' mothers confess that they never imagined "that" would happen to their daughters. For example, in *Silencio en Juarez*, a victim's mother explains:

> La gente se ríe, me inventa historias, que la vieron aquí, que la vieron allá, yo les digo que no me hablen a mí, si la miran, que hablen a la policía […]. Esto no es fácil, esto es algo difícil, esto es algo muy duro que uno siempre cree que nunca, nunca, le va a pasar, pero pasa.

Also, in *Bajo Juarez,* a victim's mother shares these memories:

> Cuando me di cuenta que no se había quedado a trabajar tiempo extra, que no estaba con ninguna de sus amistades, que no le había sucedido un accidente, no quería aceptar la realidad de que se la podían [podía] haber llevado alguien, fue algo en lo que yo nunca pensé.

Families' decisions to leave or stay in the city of Juarez raise questions about their reaction to the situation. A misjudgment, an unwise decision, or maybe the lack of economical resources to leave Ciudad Juarez could have been reasons for staying. Marilyn Nissim-Sabat in *Neither Victim nor Survivor* talks about the victims of natural disasters and the role social pressure and naïve empiricism play in the decision-making of the people who could be potentially affected by them. She explains that some people tend to imitate others who are equally exposed to a particular danger. For example, in spite the possibility of an eruption causing a mudslide over the growing suburban developments near Mt. Rainier in Washington, some people decided to buy a property in these developments with the idea that if they are being built and if others are buying,

then it should be just fine. Another example is the inhabitants of San Francisco, California and their decision to stay there despite the predictions of a devastating upcoming earthquake. Although the femicides are far from being natural disasters, the large number of occurrences each month over a period of fifteen years qualify them as events that were predictable at least in that period of time, The social pressure and naïve empiricism (noticing repeated events without stopping to analyze them) of which Nissim-Sabat talks may have been a factor in the victims' presence in Ciudad Juarez in spite of the danger. In any event, the fact that they or their families chose to stay in Ciudad Juarez suggests agency as much as powerlessness.

In sum, the families portrayed in the documentaries exhibit a mix of powerlessness, bravery, and retrospectively questionable – and thus human - judgment. The victims who belonged to these families are thus associated with the same qualities, for – according to Erikson - family "provides contact and experimental [or experiential] identification with younger and older children and with young and old adults" (123).

As the above discussion indicates, most of the representatives of the victims' families shown in the documentaries are women. It is therefore necessary to talk about males in the family.

1.2.2.4. Male-Family Ethos

The representation of the male figure in the documentaries is controversial and complex. Much can be said about the role of men in all ambits, starting from the role of the fathers, the brothers, the boyfriends, the husbands, and the sexual partners of the victims. Then there are the perpetrators, the falsely incriminated, the male authorities,

the male journalists, the male directors, and even the male narrators. An extensive analysis of the male figure in any one of these roles could be conducted.

Here, attention will be given to the figure of the father, who is present in the documentaries as well as the absence of any male sexual / sentimental partner the victims may have had.

In many of the documentaries, it is mentioned that the femicides are a consequence of misogyny and a patriarchal society. For example, in *On the Edge,* Wallace states: “Men now are out of employment who see women as being employed and I think, hate women for having employment. But who made the choice, that switch? That was the choice of global capital.” And in *Silencio en Juarez* Patricia Gonzalez (the attorney general) declares:

> El 80% de esos casos están asociados a la violencia doméstica, es decir, a la violencia que ejercen los hombres dentro de su entorno familiar, contra mujeres y que después son privadas de la vida. Realmente las causas están en sus raíces más profundas en lo que nosotros consideramos que es la misoginia y el machismo aquí en México.

In the first case, a critique of capitalism is stressed in which this system is blamed for provoking men to hate women because women are being employed, leaving the former without jobs and without the possibility of providing for the family. As a consequence, men are depicted as potential aggressors. In the second case, the authorities are trying to blame the murders on the family in order to convince viewers that it is not a case of serial killing. The question is: If Mexican machismo is at the root of the murders, why did they not happen before, and why did they not happen in other

cities? The dance of numbers has been tried out by Mexican authorities to prove that other cities have equal or even greater femicide rates with the objective of minimizing the importance of these serial killings, as stated in the documentaries.

When intra-domestic violence is mentioned, it is hard not to associate it with some of the closest relatives such as the father, brothers, or a sexual / sentimental partner. As for the fathers, the documentaries include scenes showing how they are involved with the process of finding the murderers, conducting their own investigations, doing their own search for bodies, painting crosses, participating in activists´ strikes, or sharing their experiences in an interview. The number of male relatives interviewed in the documentaries is very small compared with the number of their female counterparts. In *Señorita extraviada,* a man whose daughter went missing while the documentary was being made and whose body was found drained of blood and partially burned, gives all the details of how his daughter disappeared, whom he asked for help, and how the newspaper published an article claiming that his daughter had run away with the boyfriend. He says that it was speculated that she was alive for ten to fourteen days, and that when they found the body, ten days had passed since the time of the murder. The father shares his thoughts: “Quién sabe qué le tocaría vivir, no quiero pensarlo.” In *The City of Lost Girls,* the father of a victim relates that he hired two ex-policemen to help him find the murderers, but they received death threats and left Ciudad Juarez. He says that the Mexican police is covering and protecting the killers. In *Bajo Juarez,* a victim´s father shares his memories: “Era la más chica, ella ahorita si viviera tuviera 26 años. Me sigo haciendo a la idea de cómo se pudo haber perdido, aunque ya van varios años, esperamos todavía mi familia, toda mi familia esperamos justicia, que se

nos haga justicia." By including such testimony, the documentaries are suggesting that intra-family violence on the part of the fathers is improbable as the cause of the femicides.

In the documentaries, there is a noticeable absence, the figure of a husband, a boyfriend, a male friend, or a sexual / sentimental partner. For example, in all six documentaries, it is mentioned that many of these young women were mothers, but the fathers of their children are never interviewed. Another example is seen in *Silencio en Juarez,* where a victim's mother remembers: "Ese día se fueron a la casa del amigo, el amigo le pidió a su mamá el carro para dejarlas en la parada del camión. [...] Desde ahí no sabemos nada, no sabemos qué pasó." However, this male friend is never interviewed. In *Bajo Juarez,* a victim's mother says: "Era mi hija señorita, tenía dos hijos, estaba casada, tenía su casa. Ella salió a buscar trabajo, ese día que ella salió fue el último día que yo la vi." But the husband is never interviewed.

In all six documentaries, the representation of a sexual / sentimental partner is thus missing. This absence could indicate that these partners were gone long before the femicides took place, or it could be a sign of the men's involvement in the murders and thereby could confirm that patriarchal culture and the intra-family violence highlighted in the documentaries by Mexican authorities are to blame for the femicides. Or the reason for this absence might be fear of being accused of, or involved with the abduction, torture, mutilation, rape and murder of their female relatives, friends, or sexual / sentimental partners. This suspicion is verified in some of the documentaries, where it is mentioned that, to make things worse for the grieving family, male family members or/and friends who were closest to the victims were also blamed for the femicides. In

Bajo Juarez, there is one case in which the victim's cousin was inculpated and put in prison for her murder. According to the cousin's mother, he was in Chiapas when the victim disappeared and only came to Ciudad Juarez to help with the search. The victim's mother (the cousin's aunt) complains: "Podría haber estado en Japón, para ellos estaba en ese momento allí porque ellos son la ley y la ley es lo que ellos dicen. Por eso mi sobrino esta ahí [in jail]."

Fear also seems to promote silence among those who discovered the victims' bodies. In *Señorita extraviada*, a man who found a body relates:

> Encontré el cadáver allí, en la sequía, es lo único que le puedo decir. No tengo idea quién haya sido, ni quién sea. Si quisiera que se dieran cuenta las autoridades para que castiguen a esa gente, pero como yo meterme en esos problemas, no quiero meterme.

In *Silencio en Juarez,* there is an interview with another man who found a body; he relates: "Andaba cortando la leña ahí y me vine para acá a buscar más troncos, fue donde me fijé y ya me arrimé y vi que era un cuerpo". The interview is suddenly interrupted and terminated by a man wearing a jacket marked with "Procuraduría General de la República" who pushes and takes away the witness. Evidently, this was done to prevent him from giving any testimony to the media.

By including such scenes and interviews, the documentaries provide more support for the theory that fear is at the root of the absence of male family figures, husbands, and boyfriends, thus undermining the theory that the absence is due to their involvement in the murders.

A corrupt justice system, a patriarchal culture, misogyny, and a society where the male figure is absent are factors associated with the community / family identity to which the victims belonged. These factors also affected the identity of the victims, for according to Erikson: “In any system based on suppression, exclusion, and exploitation, the suppressed, excluded, and exploited unconsciously believe in the evil image which they are made to represent by those who are dominant” (30).

1.2.2.5. Age-Gender Ethos.

As for identity of the age-gender group, other devices are used in the documentaries to try to reconstruct it. For example, *Señorita extraviada, Bajo Juarez,* and *Silencio en Juarez* include testimony of some survivors of captivity, rape, and torture. A fifteen-year-old survivor said she was using a public phone when she was abducted: “De repente llegó una camioneta con cuatro sujetos y me subieron, nunca en mi vida los había visto, pensé que solamente iba a ser una amenaza o iba a ser un susto” (*Silencio en Juarez*). A 17 year old-survivor said she was being trained to be an event model (“edecán”) and one day:

> Me presentaron a un señor y él quería que yo trabajara con él, pero mis jefes le dijeron que yo todavía no estaba lista, él sacó mucho dinero y se los dio. Yo me quise bajar y cuando me quise bajar me agarraron y me subieron a fuerzas a la camioneta de él, le subieron al radio a todo volumen y me taparon la cara. Cuando ya llegué yo a donde me iban a llevar, me destaparon, nada más era un cuarto con una cama y un peinador. Me habló

> mi mamá, cuando me habló, como castigo porque mi mamá me había hablado, me metieron una pistola. (*Bajo Juarez*)

Certainly, some factors strongly linked to the survivors´ age-gender group such as physical weakness, fear, vulnerability, confusion, inexperience, naïveté, or immaturity could be associated with the interviewed survivors in these documentaries. However, they also had the courage and the physical and mental strength to escape from their aggressors. In *Silencio en Juarez,* the survivor remembers:

> Finalmente, en el momento en el que ellos ya habían hecho lo que habían querido hacer conmigo, me dijeron que qué quería antes de morir y lo que se me ocurrió fue decirles que quería ir al baño. Cuando voy entrando al baño, él se quedó afuera y por allá arribita pude salir.

The survivors were also brave enough to denounce their aggressors. These assets can be extrapolated to the victims in general, for they belonged to the same age-gender group as the survivors, they disappeared in similar circumstances, and they probably could have escaped had they had the same opportunity as the survivors.

In addition, the documentaries include interviews with women of the same age and social class as the victims. In three of the documentaries, some of the interviewees clearly express their sense of vulnerability and fear regarding the possibility of being abducted, raped and murdered. For example, in *Silencio en Juarez,* a maquiladora worker confesses:

> Ya llego a mi casa y es la una de la mañana, este camino si me da miedo pero pues tengo que, ahora sí que, todos los días es de caminar. Realmente no traigo nada para defenderme, nada más pues correr o

pedir auxilio. Este camino es muy solo, no hay policías, nadie nos protege.

In *Señorita extraviada,* Portillo asks two adolescent girls if they know about the femicides, the girls say they have heard some things about young women being abducted and killed. Then Portillo asks: "¿Y todas las muchachas tienen miedo?" The girls reply yes. In *The City of Dead Women,* two maquiladora workers state they are afraid to go to work.

On the other hand, the documentaries use devices to show that in spite of many years of horror, young women are still brave; they work, study, laugh, love, and try to continue doing the things they are supposed to do at their age. Among these devices, there are takes of young women working at the maquilas, or walking to or from school, or laughing in the streets of Juarez, some of them are dressing conservatively, others not as conservatively. Another device used in *Bajo Juarez* is like a follow-up report which follows the life of a young woman who has just arrived from a small town in Veracruz. She starts working at a maquila and at the beginning of the documentary she says she does not like to go out with people she just met. Towards the end of the documentary, she shows a picture of herself and a young man embracing each other, and she shares in a playful way: "¿Qué ha pasado con mi vida? No, pues ¿qué les puedo contar? Que he conocido más personas, ya tengo más amigas, más amigos. Me gusta uno que no es de Veracruz, es de allá de Durango. Es buena onda, a veces se porta regular." Nevertheless, the documentary shows that this young woman is aware of the danger of the city; it does that by using scenes where she is watching the news about the femicides on television.

Another interesting device is the shots of women looking at the camera with an expression that can be interpreted as defiant toward the viewer, whoever the viewer is, whether the aggressor or a judgmental society. These shots are included in *Señorita extraviada* and *Silencio en Juarez* and will be discussed in further detail in the section concerning the technical form and format of the documentaries.

The fact that some women in the same age-group as the victims are represented as determined individuals who are not going to be stopped from doing what they need to do or what they want to do may be a sign of them being naïve or brave. In either case, it is plausible that the victims themselves were split in their feelings of fear versus confidence regarding their safety in the city.

1.2.2.6. The Ego

The ego, also called self-concept or self-identity is a construct that refers to an individual's perception of "self" in relation to a number of characteristics such as age, gender, race, and others. According to Erikson, it arises from “the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications, and their absorption in a new configuration, which in turn, is dependent in on the process by which a *society identifies the young individual”* (122). This repudiation / assimilation process neither begins nor ends with adolescence. The age of the victims, which ranges from thirteen years to twenty-four years old, falls into two stages as described by Erikson:

- Adolescence (ages 13-19): The transition from childhood to adulthood is most important. Children are becoming more independent, they explore possibilities and begin to form their own identity based upon the outcome of their

explorations. A sense of who they are can be hindered, which results in a sense of confusion about themselves and their role in the world.

- Young Adulthood (ages 20-24): They explore relationships leading toward longer-term commitments with someone other than a family member. Successful completion can lead to comfortable relationships and a sense of commitment, safety, and care within a relationship. Avoiding intimacy, fearing commitment and relationships can lead to isolation, loneliness, and sometimes depression.

According to this framework, most victims were just initiating the process of self-concept formation. Also, many of them, based on the fact that they were mothers, started the exploration with intimate relationships at an early stage. Quite possibly, some of them were experiencing a sense of confusion or/and isolation and loneliness. But these are only conjectures that can be made based on the natural cycle of life according to Erikson. The victims are the only people who could – in a given moment – provide the value of the incognita - ego identity - and thus solve the equation:

ethos identity + ego identity = identification formation

According to Erikson, by using his or her voice, the child may come to develop a particular combination of whining or sighing, judging or arguing, as part of a new element of the future identity. “This element, in turn, will be related to other elements of the child’s developing identity (he is clever and/or good-looking and/or tough) and will be compared with other people, alive or dead, judged ideal or evil” (124). Unfortunately this element is missing, this voice has been silenced. The process of self-concept

formation has been brutally terminated; therefore nobody can solve the equation of the identity formation for the victims.

The documentaries provide valuable material for the reconstruction of the ethos identity but the ego identity is the piece of the puzzle that cannot be, and should not be put in. By leaving these blanks, we are giving, I believe, the victims the right to have their identity formation inconclusive like that of any other living human being or like that of any other dead human being who died under different circumstances. We are setting the femicide victims free from that binomial good / bad dichotomy. On the other hand, by making a balanced use of material representing the socio-economical circumstances under which the femicides took place and the hyper-violence inflicted on the bodies, we neither contribute to their maintenance nor do we ignore them.

2. Irony in the Documentaries

It was argued above that one of the main intentions of making a documentary is rhetorical: The filmmaker will present a point of view and will attempt to convince the spectator of its validity.

In each documentary analyzed here, irony is repeatedly used as a persuasive tool. In her book *Irony*, Claire Colebrook indicates that the concept of irony has been variously theorized for both literary works and popular culture. Defined by Quintilian as saying something contrary to what is meant, irony dates back at least to Socrates' method of dialogue, in which he pretended to be ignorant in order to expose the fragility of received knowledge. Besides employing irony as a rhetorical device, Socrates used it in a broader way in the creation of a whole, enigmatic persona, but this broader

meaning of irony was only theorized and developed much later, in the early nineteenth century. Indeed, since the late eighteenth century, thinkers ranging from German Romantics like Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel to post-modernists like Richard Rorty have proposed that irony is the fundamental condition of modern life.

One major division of thought about irony is between those who see it as a stabilizing force leading to definite conclusions and those who see it as a destabilizing force leaving conclusions open. Wayne Booth's concept of irony, for example, as expressed in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, presupposes a stable context of shared assumptions, so that irony ends up taking readers or observers toward a common realization. In contrast, Claire Colebrook shows more inclination for a destabilizing view of irony, one indebted to the Romantic notion of it as a fundamental condition of life and creativity. In this view, irony cannot simply unveil a hidden truth about situations, for any such truth would be a creation of language and of the irony itself. In the case of Socratic dialogue, irony in this destabilizing sense does not lead to fixed conclusions but merely to the refutation of wrong assertions by Sophists and others.

Colebrook admits, however, that the choice to apply one or the other of these two frameworks for irony to a given statement or utterance should be made according to context. For example, Socrates' irony may be best analyzed as destabilizing (Colebrook 37), whereas a frequent "everyday" use of irony may be better analyzed as stabilizing (Colebrook 27).

Both models will be used here, accordingly, to analyze irony in the documentaries. It is expected that a stabilizing irony will be found in those instances

where the filmmaker and the viewer have shared assumptions and come to the same realization. This will be termed here “the first level of irony.”

Later it will be proposed that a ”second level of irony” can be found in some documentaries. Irony at this level is destabilizing, since the spectator follows a different path from that of the filmmaker.

For the first level of irony, two arguments are anticipated: 1) The type of irony shown in the documentaries can only be attained by combining filmic elements which are unique to this kind of representation. Verbal irony in the form of overstatements, litotes, and/or sarcasm can be present in a single scene and is therefore comparable to verbal irony in speech or texts. However, the way a scene works together with a musical score, interviews, narrative voices, footage, and other archival documents produces a type of irony that only succeeds in combination with these elements. 2) In all cases, irony serves to flag one of the social viewpoints presented in a documentary. The irony encountered in a sequence or a scene uncovers a hidden meaning in that particular element, but on a larger scale, the irony points to the main themes of the documentary as a whole.

As for the second level of irony, it is proposed that in some documentaries, a level of irony which is different from the level of irony intended by the director can be found. Although the directors of these documentaries cleverly used form and subject to create the platform where their irony stands and where they expect to be joined by the spectator, the spectator can find a deeper level of irony which goes beyond the directors’ irony. On this new level, the viewer stands on a platform to which the director is no longer invited. Analysis of this unintended irony is obviously akin to a

poststructuralist analysis, such as that proposed by Jacques Derrida in *Writing and Difference,* of the ways in which language "escapes" authors and opens up spaces for interpretation beyond their intentions.

For the first level of irony, Booth's method was used as a guide to avoid over-reading or under-reading irony. In this method, Booth lists three steps for the recognition of an ironic element and the reconstruction of the alternative intended meaning in a text or a speech: 1) The reader is required to reject the literal meaning. The route to new meanings passes through an unspoken conviction that cannot be reconciled with the literal meaning. 2) Alternative interpretations or explanations are tried out. One possible alternative, usually unformulated except when controversy about a passage puts us in doubt about it, is thus that the author himself or herself is too foolish to see that his or her statement cannot be accepted as it stands. 3) A decision must therefore be made about the author's knowledge or beliefs. It is this decision about the author's beliefs that secures the interpretation of stable ironies (10).

To start the analysis, the ironic value of the musical score in *Bajo Juárez* is assessed. In this documentary, the director Alejandra Sánchez uses this cinematographic element to convey irony in the very opening of the film, which unfolds as follows. First, a musical score is synchronized with the opening credits displayed against a solid dark background. This dull visual opening emphasizes the importance of the musical score, for it forces the spectator to concentrate on the aural element. The score is a cheerful and rhythmic song depicting Ciudad Juarez as the promised land: "en la frontera otra vida me espera," "voy rumbo al Norte a conseguirme un amor, en Ciudad Juarez hallaré mi destino, en Juarez todo estará mejor". The score overlaps the

next scene composed of panoramic shots of Ciudad Juarez with natural light, and finally a zoom-in shot of a road sign reading “Bienvenidos a la ciudad más importante del estado grande” (“Welcome to the most important city of the big state”).

In this introductory sequence, the director is allowing the musical score not only to demand our conscious attention but even to dominate the picture, with the sole intention of setting a mood; it depicts Juarez as a city where you can find love, where your lifestyle can improve, and where everything will be better. Evidently, this opening has a highly ironic level of meaning conveyed by means of the musical score, which suggests a mood exactly opposite to the mood normally suggested by what is about to occur on the screen.

The irony is a stabilized one, for filmmaker and audience know that the film is representing the large number of femicides occurring in Ciudad Juárez; therefore, the city is nothing but dangerous. So they come to the same realization that Sánchez is being ironic when she opens her film with a “promised land” portrait of Juárez.

In spite of the ”obvious” ironic intention of the overture, to avoid over-reading irony, corroboration can be performed by returning to the steps suggested by Booth. This procedure will also allow a reconstruction of the sequence’s subtext. Once the optimistic tone of the musical score has been rejected, possible explanations for the use of it need to be ruled out, for example that the filmmaker is unaware of the violence in Ciudad Juarez or that she is committed to sugar-coating it.

Indeed, the documentary includes elements and techniques that convey the filmmaker´s commitment to denouncing the femicides. In the first five minutes, for example, the film includes: a voice on the radio that talks about the many cases of

young women being murdered, an interview with the mother and sister of a victim, and footage insinuating that bodies of the young women are being taken to a forensic vehicle. Then the shared realization of filmmaker and spectator is that Juarez, far from being a place where women find a future of love and good fortune, is a place where they find poverty, hatred, and ultimately death. Thus, the overture of the documentary points clearly to an ironic interpretation.

This tragic irony might also be read as a cosmic irony. Colebrook describes the doubleness in meaning of this type of irony as follows: “It is as though there is the course of human events and intentions, involving our awarding of rankings and expectations that exists alongside another order of fate beyond our predictions” (13). Young women come to Juárez to build a more prosperous future and a better way of life and instead many of them live in subhuman conditions, work many hours a week, receive a derisory salary, and many of them end up suffering the most horrendous and inhuman physical and mental abuse, and lastly dying. This irony covers twists of fate in everyday life.

In order for this irony to achieve the effect intended by the director, all the filmic devices utilized were necessary: the dull visual element, the musical score, the panoramic shots, the footage, and the interviews. A textual or an oral irony would not have had the same effect. Also, it is important to note that the temporal-spatial scale termed by Bakthin as *chronotope* (84) is crucial for the construction of the irony. On a different temporal scale, the cheerful introductory sequence could have set the mood for a positive depiction of Ciudad Juarez, which was valid before the 1990s, but the documentary was made in 2006, thirteen years into a dark history of violence, murder,

corruption, impunity, and injustice - social problems that have become (and remain) iconic to the city of Juarez.

At this first level of irony, the viewer joins the filmmaker on the platform established by her and reconstructs the ironic meaning as she suggests. However, the spectator can find a second level of irony where a different reconstruction of the ironic meaning can be made. This proposed second level rules out Northrop Frye´s statement regarding the stability of irony, where he warns that “once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions” (Booth 6). In this documentary, the inclusion of cinematographic elements indicating that despite the femicides, some people remained in or even moved to Juárez (updated statistics, footage of big crowds arriving at maquiladoras to work, and the tracking of a young woman´s life, who - like many femicides victims - left her native Veracruz and came to Juárez to work in a maquiladora) call for further deconstruction. A more Romantic and transcendental irony aiming to foster thinking beyond the immediate context must be unveiled.

The statement sung in the musical score “Ciudad Juarez is where everything will be better” can be read by some people as a stable irony in which the meaning is clearly contrary to the words. However, it may not be read ironically by some other people, for whom Juárez represents a place where “things will be better.” This is precisely the irony we find in a further deconstruction of the documentary, an irony that is unintended, an irony that challenges just how shared, common, and stable our conventions and assumptions are (Colebrook 18).

Here the concept of irony corresponds to a certain elitism of perspective, since the shared assumptions that allow irony to be recognized and decoded are only shared by a particular, knowing group.

The fact that the content within the documentary can be seen as undermining the director's perspective, as communicated through the irony of the musical score, will not be a surprise to students of deconstructionism; such unintended irony constitutes a parallel to the notorious difficulty of mastering one's own language, as analyzed by Derrida. Nor does perception of this unintended irony mean that the spectator chooses to dwell in happy ignorance about the high level of violence of Ciudad Juarez, for he/she acknowledges the danger of the city even while recognizing people's different perceptions of it.

The spectator probably wonders about the concept of life of those who, in spite of the femicides, keep on moving to Juárez. In short, the unresolved irony is to be found in the clash between the migrating people and the director (and non-migrating people), for they are not dealing only with "verbal" matters; they are driven into debate about the very concept of life.

The irony of the introductory sequence of *Bajo Juarez* flags two of the main points on which the whole documentary focuses: the unquestionable violence in the city and the effort that Mexican authorities make to show the contrary by minimizing the number of femicides, by rejecting the idea that the femicides are linked, and by blaming the murders on male family members.

A different kind of irony is shown in a sequence of *The City of Lost Girls* which is inserted shortly after the prologue, where the journalist Sandra Jordan in the voice of a

first-person narrator introduces the spectator to the subject of the femicides and the mystery surrounding them. The irony unfolds in two scenes. First, a shot of the leitmotif of the black and pink cross painted on a street pole is shown while Jordan's voice off-camera is heard: "The week I arrived, the city had just opened a new morgue." Her voice overlaps the next scene inside a morgue; Jordan explains that inside the morgue "they are doing the autopsy of a man who was executed by drugs dealers, narco-traffickers." The scene shows a group of some eight men in hospital garb and face-masks conducting a forensic analysis, taking apparently stringent measures to avoid contaminating the body. As part of the morgue equipment, there is a camera recording the action right above the male body placed on a stretcher, and a monitor is showing what the camera captures. A man explains that there is a specialist in ballistics and a chemistry-photographer. Jordan explains that "the team's priority isn´t drug killings; it's identifying the remains of the murdered women."

The first impression of this scene is one of professionalism and technical competence; the team and equipment seem ideally suited to analyze the bodies and to find and track evidence to resolve the mystery of the femicides. Of course, the scene and the apparently meticulous process that it connotes also raise questions in the spectator, namely why such professionalism was not applied to earlier murders and why they are working on a male body if the team's priority is solving the femicides.

In order to avoid over-reading irony, an alternative explanation can be tried out: Perhaps they do not have a body of a femicide victim at the moment, so the equipment is being used for another type of process. But the following handheld-camera scene rules out the alternative rationalization: The camera follows Jordan as she accompanies

a man who opens a cold chamber, explaining “aquí están los cuartos fríos.” The next shot shows what seem to be two covered bodies; finally, Jordan addresses the camera saying, “Some victims have just arrived. These are bodies that have not been identified yet; they are being stored here.” Like Jordan, the spectator has no other choice but to think that the team is doing the “right thing” except to the wrong body.

In spite of the obvious discrepancy found in the first scene between what is being said (the team’s priority is identifying the remains of the murdered women) and what is being done (the autopsy of a man who got killed by narco-traffickers), the scene individually cannot be accounted as an irony, for there is a plausible alternative explanation (at the moment they do not have a victim’s body). It is only together with the second scene that the irony is confirmed, for it shows that there are indeed victims’ bodies that must be identified; this scene thus destroys the alternative plausible interpretation.

Evidently, Rodrigo Vázquez, the director, foresaw the spectator’s reaction at the end of every scene and edited the sequence accordingly. The sequence then becomes an ironic device employed to undermine the clarity of the professionalism and technical competence shown in the sequence. Once again, the irony is only achieved through the combination of elements which are unique to documentaries.

The irony intended by Vazquez is located on the first level of irony, but the spectator, once again, can explore a second level of irony in which Vazquez´s irony is undermined. A trusting spectator might concur with the director and remain on the same platform as he does, but a more “deconstructive” one might question the meaning of the whole sequence, for the scene is partly constructed by the narrator. It is Jordan, the

narrator, who says that the team´s priority is “identifying the remains of the murdered women,” and it is she who says, “Some victims have just arrived. These are bodies that have not been identified yet; they are being stored here.” In the documentary, nobody in the morgue besides Jordan states what the priority of the forensic team in that location is; nor do they mention that the bodies kept in the cold chambers are female bodies or that they are victims of femicides. The irony of this deeper level undermines the clarity and authenticity of the first irony intended by Vazquez, for the construction of the sequence greatly depends on the voice of the narrator.

It is important to emphasize that the irony found as a result of a further deconstruction (the irony of the second level) of this sequence undermines the intended irony of the first level but it does not undermine the perspective of the documentary as a whole. For the documentary supplies evidence that in the ten years since the opening of “the new morgue,” nobody had been found guilty of the femicides in spite of the highly professional and competent forensic team and equipment.

Furthermore, the intended ironic sequence points to two of the main focuses of the documentary: the obscure processes by which Mexican police attempt to “solve” the murders and the possibility that Mexican authorities are not interested in solving the murders because of their alleged involvement in the femicides.

In *Señorita extraviada*, verbal irony can be detected. One example is the sequence containing an interview with the assistant general of the state of Chihuahua. The sequence takes place halfway into the documentary. Lourdes Portillo has stated that she came to Juarez “to track ghosts”; she has already introduced the viewer to the geographical, social, and economic situation of Juárez, and she has shared the known

facts of the femicides. Furthermore, she has posed two questions crucial to the progress of her work: Why were the deaths of so many young women ignored? And why were the murders still happening?

The ironic sequence unfolds as follows: 1) There is a segment of an interview with activist Victoria Caraveo, who states that when the governor of Chihuahua appeared on television for the first time to talk about a group of eight female bodies found together in Ciudad Juarez, he said: “The problem is that they are prostitutes.” 2) The next take is a follow-up of an interview with the governor of Chihuahua Francisco Barrio, who explains “las muchachas se mueven en ciertos lugares, frecuentan a cierto tipo de gentes y entran en una cierta confianza con malvivientes, con gentes de bandas que luego se convierten en sus agresores” (“the girls move in certain places, they make the acquaintance of certain kinds of people and they come to trust vandals, and people from gangs who later on become their aggressors”). Portillo’s eagerness to keep on bringing together the opinions and perspectives of Mexican authorities is confirmed by the insertion of an interview with Jorge López (the Assistant General of the state of Chihuahua. 3) Portillo prefaces the scene with the following appraisal: “The General Officer had an interesting solution.” In fact, what the General proposed was this: “Que la comunidad se autoaplicara un toque de queda; todos los buenos pues que estén en sus domicilios, que estén con sus famillias y bueno los malos, que sean los que andan en la calle” (“that the community would apply a curfew to itself, good people would be at home, would be with their families, and bad people would be the ones in the streets”).

When Portillo states that the General had “an interesting solution,” she is expressing an idea by an affirmation of its opposite. This type of irony has the format

and intention of irony in the Socratic dialogues, for it conceals what is really meant. Colebrook explains: “this practice opened the Western political/philosophical tradition, for it is through the art of playing with meaning that the interlocutors of a dialogue are compelled to question the fundamental concepts of our language” (2).

Portillo’s characterization of the General’s statement must be rejected out of hand, first because evidently no successful solution had been given for preventing the femicides, and second, because the “solution” the General is giving is not a solution at all, for the documentary shows that many people have to commute very late (to or from work), especially targeted young women.

The next scene confirms that the filmmaker foresaw the spectator’s reaction to the scene and is prepared for it with the next segment, in which the interviewer asks the General what would happen to all those young people working in maquiladoras from 5 or 6 in the morning, or those who get out at midnight, and whose economic conditions do not allow them to quit their jobs. His answer is: “Pues a esa gente que trabaja no se le puede imponer eso” (“to those people who work we cannot impose the curfew”).

With López´s “solution,” young women who need to go to work and upon whom “we cannot impose the curfew” would be out at night with nobody around but the “malos” (bad guys); it would be the perfect scenario for those women to be abducted, mutilated, raped, and killed. The reconstructed meaning of Portillo’s statement about an “interesting” solution could be: “This is absurd, and this is not by any means a solution.”

It can be inferred that Portillo chose irony as a rhetorical tool because she assumes the spectator’s capacity for dealing with it; she knows she does not have to spell out the shared and secret truths on which the reconstruction is built. Evidently, the

editing of the interviews plays a crucial role in the construction of irony; the interviews are also archival materials which make this kind of irony uniquely possible in a documentary. A second level of irony was not found in this example. In this case, the spectator stays on the same platform as Portillo. The irony here flags one of the main focuses of the documentary, namely to show the absurd attitude Mexican authorities have towards the murder and disappearance of hundreds of young women and how this attitude is at the root of the injustice and impunity which characterize these femicides.

A dramatic irony is visible in *The City of Dead Women*. According to Booth (63), this type of irony occurs whenever an author deliberately asks us to compare what two or more characters say about the same event. In this sequence George Avgeropoulos revives the dramatic irony in a way that can only be possible using the techniques of a documentary. It unfolds as follows: 1) The first scene is a segment of an interview with Juan Carlos Olivares (the Vice-president of Ciudad Juárez's Maquiladora Association) in which the interviewer asks: "Do you ask women to take pregnancy tests?" The Vice-president answers: "Mexican labor law does not permit us to do so." 2) In the next scene, Claudia Elizabeth Hinojosa Torres (a maquiladora worker) is interviewed:

> Hinojosa Torres: I went to look for work on Monday, and they did it to me.
>
> Interviewer: What?
>
> H. T.: The pregnancy test.
>
> I.: Really?
>
> H. T.: I went with a friend of mine. She was found to be pregnant, and they didn't give her the job.

Obviously, the sequence is product of an editing process, but what makes it "objective" is the suppression of all explicit moral judgments. Although a narrator's voice prefaces the sequence, explaining that female workers "face medieval conditions at work," no further comments are added at the end of the sequence. The director first shows the interviews with the Vice-president of the Maquiladora Association and the maquiladora worker. Then he allows the spectator to reflect on the contradiction.

This dramatic irony is constructed with filmic elements which are unique to this type of representation. It flags one of the main viewpoints of the documentary: to denounce how transnational maquiladoras contribute to the misery of young women who come to Juárez to look for a better life, including victims of the femicides, and to suggest that these maquiladoras could have done something to prevent some killings from happening, for example, by raising their salaries, decreasing the working hours, and offering a better transportation system.

A second level of irony extends beyond the stable, intended irony constructed with the interviews. This irony points to a contradiction of perspectives with respect to the acceptance of work conditions in maquiladoras. On the one hand, the perspective of the narrator is that female workers should not accept the "medieval conditions" they face at work. On the other hand, there is the perspective of those women who think they should (and they do) accept work-related abuses such as illegal dismissals, work schedule violations, poor safety measures, sexual harassment, and more, not to mention facing the high probability of being mutilated, raped, and killed.

Once again, the irony mainly resides on the very concept of life: The young women face abuses at work and risk their life by working in maquiladoras in Juárez, but

this provides them with a salary and with the opportunity to survive. If they stay at home, they do not have to accept abuses and do not risk their lives, but they do not have a way to earn a salary and thus do not have the opportunity to survive. This is a clear example of Colebrook's assertion that our entire epoch, as postmodern, is ironic.

In *On the Edge,* there is a type of verbal irony which falls into the realm of sarcasm. In the first scene, Charles Bowden (a journalist and the author of *Juarez: The Laboratory of Our Future*) is being interviewed and is giving an explanation about how the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States, Canada, and Mexico triggered the chaotic economic and social situation in border cities like Ciudad Juarez. He states: "Our brilliant NAFTA, our brilliant government [he refers to the US government] has produced this as the end product." Evidently this statement was deliberately created by Bowden to be understood in a precise, stable way by the spectator; it is intended to be reconstructed with meanings opposite from those on the surface. In the second scene Bowden adds:

> If you want to create jobs where workers have no rights, where you are killed if you start a union, where there is no environmental protection, where American factories move there to pay slave wages and then leave overnight if anybody demands their raise - which has already been done - you just go to Juarez; you do not have to speculate.

The irony found in Bowden's evocation of "our brilliant NAFTA, our brilliant government" is undoubtedly a negative criticism of the US system. In Booth's words, this statement destroys by revealing the inescapable canker of negation at the heart of the affirmation. The irony is confirmed with the accusations made in the second scene.

This irony flags to one of the main focuses of the documentary: to emphasize that only the US benefited from the NAFTA agreement and that the Mexican economy was negatively affected by it in various sectors, namely the agricultural, the industrial, and the social. The documentary also speculates that capitalism and NAFTA are indirectly responsible for the femicides.

On this first level of irony, the director Steev Hise and the spectator are supposed to concur in reversing Bowden's characterization of NAFTA and the US government. However, a further reconstruction of this irony can be made, and an unintended, destabilizing irony could be detected; the reconstructed perspective suggested by Bowden's irony is thereby destroyed, enabling the formation of a different judgment. On this second level of irony, the chronotope is crucial, for the irony read into Bowden's mention of "our brilliant NAFTA, our brilliant government" could easily be dismissed as irony if seen from the perspective of somebody in a different place and time, somebody not located in Mexico during the 1990s, somebody whose concept of life tells him or her that the US government and NAFTA are indeed brilliant in spite of how the results of their decisions affected Mexicans sociologically and economically. Furthermore, the ongoing arrival of potential maquiladora workers in Ciudad Juarez even after the 1990s, as depicted in this and other documentaries, suggests that not all Mexicans saw the opportunities created by NAFTA as any more exploitative than the opportunities they had before. Finally, many Americans may think of NAFTA as "brilliant" insofar as it allows lower labor costs for maquiladora owners and thus lower prices for American consumers. According to Colebrook, the Romantics regarded irony as something like an inescapable predicament (48), which is exactly the way this irony appears.

One of the ironies in *Silencio en Juarez* is found in the juxtaposition of three consecutive sequences of commentary. 1) Former Chihuahua Forensic Chief Oscar Maynez Grijalba states: “Ciudad Juárez es una ciudad muy violenta, faltan policías, estaciones de policías, de bomberos, de rescate o emergencia, servicios médicos” (“Ciudad Juarez is a very violent city; the city needs policemen, fire stations, police stations, rescue or emergency stations, medical service”). 2) Journalist and writer Diana Washington states: “[Ciudad Juarez] es una ciudad que ha crecido rápidamente, se ha convertido por estar en la frontera y ser afectada por el tráfico de drogas, el tráfico de humanos y otras situaciones de crimen organizado en una ciudad muy violenta” (“[Ciudad Juarez] is a city which has grown rapidly, it has become – as a result of being on the border and of being affected by drug trafficking, human trafficking and other organized crime situations - a very violent city”). 3) Lastly, the State of Chihuahua Attorney Patricia González Rodríguez states: “Ciudad Juárez es una ciudad fronteriza donde podemos decir que hay cierto grado de inseguridad” (“Ciudad Juarez is a border city where we can say there is certain degree of insecurity”).

The irony in this sequence is not found in González Rodríguez’s statement, for her perspective indicates that she either believes what she says or she wants to believe it; there are no indications that she is being ironic. The dramatic irony is found in the construction of the whole sequence, which would not have been possible without the arrangement of the three interviews. The sequence resembles the structure proposed by Booth:

> A very great proportion of ironic essays could be said to have this essential structure: a) a plausible but false voice is presented; b)

> contradictions of this voice are introduced; c) a correct voice is finally heard, repudiating all or most or some of what the ostensible speaker has said. (62)

The archival material shown in the documentary proves that what is considered the false voice is the voice of González Rodríguez, whereas the correct voice is the voice of Maynez and Washington: Ciudad Juarez is indeed a very violent city. This ironic sequence points to one of the main concerns in the documentary: to make the femicides public and to confront Mexican authorities who insist that there is nothing of concern in Ciudad Juarez and that the women are being killed by their male relatives as a result of a patriarchal culture.

The second level of irony resides in the fact that, in spite of the violence, people keep on arriving to Juarez to work there. Consistent with Friedrich Neitzsche's view, this irony exists in a space of forces that go beyond the experiences of any one individual (Colebrook 99). Specifically, political forces encourage Mexican officials to minimize the importance of the violence in Ciudad Juarez, while economic and social forces ensure that a constant supply of workers will arrive to take on jobs in the maquiladoras.

In conclusion, the examples of irony described here demonstrate that 1) the type of irony shown in the documentaries can only be attained by combining filmic elements, 2) in all cases, irony flags one of the main concerns on which a particular documentary focuses, 3) the irony in which spectator and filmmaker concur (irony on the first level) is always a stable irony, and 4) in some documentaries, a further deconstruction of the first level irony can be performed, leading in every case to a destabilizing, second level

irony; this second level irony fits with Romantic conceptions, for it points to the very irony of life itself.

3. Material and Format

It was pointed out earlier that documentaries combine aural and visual resources to represent the historical world as we know it. These cinematographic elements and their strategic arrangement convey a social point of view with the ultimate intention of persuading the spectator to accept that viewpoint as the “right” one. This is what aligns documentary with the rhetorical tradition, in which eloquence serves a social as well as aesthetic purpose. Gathering, selecting, and editing the material are crucial steps when aiming for eloquence in a film. Bill Nichols (46) lists some of the decisions filmmakers have to make when making a film:

> (1) when to cut, or edit, and what to juxtapose and how to frame or compose a shot (close-up or long shot, low or high angle, artificial or natural lighting, color or black and white, whether to pan, zoom in or out, track or remain stationary, and so on),
>
> (2) whether to record synchronous sound at the time of shooting, and whether to add additional sound, such as voice-over translations, dubbed dialogue, music, sound effects, or commentary, at a later point,
>
> (3) whether to adhere to an accurate chronology or rearrange events to support a point,
>
> (4) whether to use archival or other people's footage and photographs or only those images shot by the filmmaker on the spot, and

(5) which mode of representation to rely on to organize the film.

This section contains an analysis of the rhetorical and social implications resulting from directors' judgment regarding the aspects listed above.

3.1. Narrators

The voice of a documentary is presented by means of an intended selection and arrangement of interviews, footage, photos, musical score, and other cinematographic elements; this arrangement also serves as a narrative to guide the spectator. A narrative is structurally fundamental for a documentary; according to Dave Saunders, it is "what distinguishes a story from a mere list of events, and sets a documentary apart from raw footage" (16). Besides the arrangement of elements, some documentaries support the narrative with a voice-over (also known as the Voice of God), which maintains the veracity of the film and attempts to persuade the spectator of the validity of a certain point of view regarding the subject.

The inclusion of a voice-over commentary in non-fiction films is a widely commented subject as well as a controversial one. It was initially used as a resource to support the images shown in the screen, since these could not be synchronized with the original audio with which they had initially been recorded. The voice-over soon became an overused tool, for the information given with the voice-over was easily understood without the need of any images. That is to say, the image became a subordinate element. Carlos Mendoza explains: "La imagen quedó a cargo de la tarea que en química farmacéutica se asigna al excipiente, es decir, a la sustancia inactiva que se

emplea en la composición de los medicamentos como simple vehículo de los elementos activos y curativos" (71).

In the second half of the twentieth century, cameras with the capability to record synchronized audio and image were introduced. This new resource granted the image veracity and realism and gave voice to social actors. Although the "voice of God" did not completely disappear, it did go through a restructuration, and it is used now in a variety of formats depending on the director´s style and the kind of documentary that is being produced.

Different types of voice-over were detected in the documentaries analyzed here. For example, in *Silencio en Juárez* and *The City of Dead Women*, there is a deep, male voice-over commentary which informs us about some aspect of the world in an impersonal but authoritative manner. According to Nichols, the credibility of this type of commentator seems assured by a solemn intonation and objective style, for "they are also male voices, tapping into a culturally constructed assumption that it is men who speak of the actual world and that they can do so in an authoritative manner" (55). While it is true that the male voice-over supports credibility in these two documentaries, it is also true, as shown below, that credibility is equally granted to the female voice-over in *Señorita Extraviada*, even though it does not carry an authoritative and impersonal tone.

The omniscient tone of the voice-over commentary in *Silencio en Juárez* and *The City of Dead Women* is somewhat minimized by the fact that in both documentaries the interviewees´ voice is edited in such a way that it is frequently and strategically heard

before or after the narrator's voice. This makes the voice-over commentary appear more objective, for it is only supporting the argument of a social actor.

In *Señorita Extraviada* and *The City of Lost Girls*, there is a female voice-over which uses the "I" throughout the documentary. In the introduction to *Señorita Extraviada*, for example, the director Lourdes Portillo states: "I came to Juárez to track down ghosts and to listen to the mystery that surrounds them." And in *The City of Lost Girls,* the journalist Sandra Jordan explains: "I came to Juárez to find out who is doing the killings and why they haven't been caught." Nichols (13) talks about the interaction between filmmaker, subject, and audience, and he classifies verbal formulations based on that interaction. The formulation "*I* speak about *them* to *you"* best describes the interaction in *Señorita Extraviada* and *The City of Lost Girls*. In these documentaries, the filmmakers take on a personal persona; in the former, Portillo herself speaks off-camera, whereas in *The City of Lost Girls,* the director Rodrigo Vázquez speaks through Jordan, who is on-camera throughout the whole documentary. In both films the intention is to portray a socially conscious person who will get to the bottom of things, no matter what it takes. Physical presence serves a rhetorical function. Nichols argues that it also functions as a metonymy, for "reporters standing on the scene of a news event will get the true story because they are there, in physical proximity to the event itself" (54).

However, the personal persona that Portillo and Jordan take on becomes more involved as the documentaries progress, in such a way that the initial verbal formulation changes to: "*I* speak about *them* and about *me* to *you."* Although the commentators are not victims of the femicides, they became witnesses and victims of fear, insecurity, injustice, covering, and silencing around Ciudad Juárez. Portillo confesses: "I found

myself mistrusting everything I am told and everything I read; the only reliable sources of information are from the victims and their families." Jordan admits, "We have been forced to stop by the federal police to see what we are doing and complains have been made against us. After a while I started to feel quite insecure."

By contrast, in *On the Edge* and *Bajo Juárez*, the voice-over is omitted; it is the coherent organization of cinematographic components itself which guides the spectator and voices the filmmakers' perspective. Alejandra Sánchez and Steev Hise influence our thoughts, associations, and emotional responses with the editing of their work, in which aesthetic, dramatic, and psychological reactions to the juxtaposition of images and sounds have to be considered. In both cases the partition into chapters gives the films a sense of a sequence and links the femicides with the social, economic and cultural circumstances under which they occurred.

In *Bajo Juárez*, despite the effort to omit the presence of a commentator, there are three instances where the interviewer is seen or heard on-camera: 1) when a victim and survivor of rape is being interviewed, she does not want to face the camera; therefore the interviewer has no other choice but to face it himself, 2) when the mother of a victim proudly hands the interviewer a certificate proving her daughter´s participation in an oratorical contest, the interviewer has to take it and makes a comment about it, 3) when the sister of a victim is reluctant to name the owners of the land where some of the women's bodies were found, she explains: "Es difícil mencionar sus nombres porque a nadie le gusta que se ande divulgando y diciendo que en su propiedad encontraron algunos cuerpos." The interviewer pushes the co-vicitm to say the names, so the interviewer´s voice is heard: "Pero bueno el hecho de que sea el

propietario no quiere decir tampoco que esté necesariamente vinculado." Evidently, the impossibility of repeating these interviews and their rhetorical value make their inclusion (as they are) essential even though the format of the documentary is changed in terms of the absence or presence of a commentator.

The different narrative techniques used in these documentaries show that there is not a particular trend as far as the inclusion of a voice-over is concerned. Also, in all documentaries, it is obvious that the image, far from being merely subordinate to the voice-over, provides information that could not be given by the commentator. The shocking photographs, footage, and interviews included in these films could have never been orally described, and the effect they cause on the spectator is unique.

3.2. Interviews

Although everyone has a general idea of what an interview is, for convenience, the concept summarized by Mendoza is reproduced here:

> Es un procedimiento documentalista original y específico con metodología, rasgos estilísticos, valencia ideológica y valores éticos propios, muchas veces autónomos del discurso general del que forma parte y casi siempre con un valor documentalista propio, un recurso – como ningún otro - privativo del cine de no ficción (86).

In every documentary, there are interviews with relatives of the victims, in most cases the mother, although there are cases were the father or another close relative is interviewed. In the above section "Representation of the Victims," the absence of

husbands, boyfriends, or male friends of the victims was already mentioned; therefore interviews with these people are not included.

In every documentary, at least one interview with a Mexican authority or a member of a police organization is included. These interviews tend to present a perspective which is opposite to the one presented on the interviews with family and friends of the victims and activists. On the one hand, Mexican authorities tend to emphasize that the number of femicides is lower than believed, that the cases have been mostly solved, that the victims were involved in prostitution and narcotraficking and therefore contributed to their own demise. On the other hand, co-victims and activists highlight the good assets which characterized the victims; they did not go anywhere without their parents' permission, they went directly home after work, and they were very well behaved young women. These opposite perspectives emphasize the dualism which is forced in some representations to narrow the identity of the victims as good or bad women. This subject has been amply discussed in the section above on "Representation of the Victims."

In *Señorita Extraviada*, *The City of Dead Women,*and *Bajo Juárez,* women with a similar profile to that of the victims (dark and long hair, dark skin, young, skinny, short, with scant economic resources, many of them maquiladora workers) are interviewed. This practice supports the argument regarding identity formation of the victims (as discussed above in "Representation of the Victims"), for when information about a group to which the victims belonged (gender, age, social class, and workforce) is gathered, this serves to reconstruct the Ethos which is part of the victims´ identity. Another group to which the victims belonged and which is therefore part of their Ethos identity is the

group of victims and survivors of abduction, torture, and rape. Interviews with survivors are conducted in *Bajo Juárez*, *Señorita Extraviada*, and *Silencio en Juárez.* Evidently, these young women did not go through exactly the same experience as the victims of the femicides, but their testimony could be the closest to the testimony of those who died.

Most of the documentaries include interviews with journalists or/and writers who have worked with the subject of the femicides and the injustice and impunity linked to them. Such is the case of Charles Bowden[1] (interviewed in *On the Edge*), Diana Washington[2] (interviewed in *Bajo Juárez*, *The City of Lost Girls*, and *Silencio en Juárez*), and Sergio Gonzalez[3] (interviewed in *Bajo Juárez*). Bowden analyzes in depth NAFTA and the negative repercussions of this trade on the Mexican economy. All the interviewees tend to express their opinion openly. In general, they tend to implicate a complicity of Mexican authorities, police, and rich and powerful people in the state of Chihuahua in the femicides. They also denounce the fact that maquiladoras violate labor rights: They pay very low wages, demand working hours that exceed what is allowed by "La Ley Federal del Trabajo," do not take employees' safety seriously, etc.

Some of these allegations made by journalists and writers are supported by the interviews conducted in *The City of Dead Women.* In one interview, a maquiladora owner explains that she and every maquiladora manager she knows are seriously committed to protecting her female workers. In the next shot, however, she says, "Our first reaction [to the femicides] was to tell every girl to carry a whistle." Of course, the

[1] Author of *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* (1998), and *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Fields* among others (2010).
[2] Author of *The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women* (2006).
[3] Author of *Huesos en el Desierto* (2006).

whistle does not seem like a serious measure, for many of the victims were abducted in desolated areas where nobody could hear them and where the maquiladora buses dropped them, far from their homes. In another interview, the vice-president of Ciudad Juárez Maquiladora Association denies that pregnancy tests are given to prospective workers, for that is against labor law. This interview is followed by an interview with a maquiladora worker who states that when she and her female friend went to look for a job in a maquiladora, they were given pregnancy tests; she did get the job but not her friend, who was in fact pregnant, so they refused to hire her. Evidently, the director George Avgeropoulos utilized the interviews to support the allegations against maquiladoras, and used the juxtaposition of testimonies to add a touch of irony.

Only *The City of Dead Women* included interviews with people of the maquiladora industry (besides the employees). This is bizarre, considering that many victims were maquiladora workers and they disappeared on the way to or from work. It would be interesting to know why the other documentaries did not interview these people, was it a lack of cooperation on their part or lack of interest on the directors' part?

In *On the Edge* and *The City of Dead Women,* university professors from fields such as sociology, history, and Chicano studies are interviewed. In these interviews, they tend to analyze the femicides and the violence in Ciudad Juárez from a historical point of view. According to them, the social, cultural, economical, and political factors in this border city over time have led to striking and devastating consequences such as the femicides.

In *On the Edge, The City of Lost Girls*, and *Bajo Juárez* some people who have been incriminated for the murders by Mexican police, and some of their relatives are interviewed. Besides declaring their innocence, these people claim that Mexican authorities, Mexican police, and some rich and powerful people in Ciudad Juarez are directly involved in the femicides, and that it is in their best interest to maintain the mystery around the femicides.

All interviews were conducted using techniques strategically selected to give them rhetorical power. Some of these techniques involve the camera angle and position, which will be discussed next.

According to Joseph Boggs, camera angles "communicate special kinds of dramatic information or emotional attitudes" (135). In these documentaries, most of the interviews with professors, journalists, and writers present an objective point of view which is achieved with a fixed-camera and a normal, natural and straightforward angle, which suggests an emotional distance between camera and subject. In contrast, close-ups, hand-held cameras, and eye-line and low-angles were frequently used to record interviews with the close relatives of the victims. All these cinematographic tools are intended to create a subjective point of view, which ideally would make the audience feel emotionally involved with the social actors, to experience their feelings, and furthermore to become them. A close-up is especially powerful; Boggs explains that "a close-up of a face contorted in pain makes us feel that pain more vividly than an objective shot from a greater distance" (132). As for the low-angle shots, he assures that the size and importance of the subject are exaggerated when they are used (135). Note, for example, the technique used for the interview with the mother of one of the

victims in *On the Edge* (figure 1.1). She is in an office, the shot is a medium long one (not a close-up), and the camera angle is eye-line. It is the viewpoint of an objective, impersonal observer; the camera does not comment on the subject, but just records it.

By contrast, a very different interview with the same person is conducted in *Bajo Juárez* (figure 1.2). The mother of the victim is seated next to where the body of her daughter was found, the cross representing her death is behind her, and a close-up is used with an angle below eye-line. Evidently, this is the director´s interpretative point of view; Sánchez uses these tools to manipulate the spectator´s viewpoint, to impose an emotional attitude on the image. We are forced to react in a certain way to what we see. We have not experienced what the interviewee has sadly experienced, yet we are drawn into the feeling that is being conveyed in a subjective way.

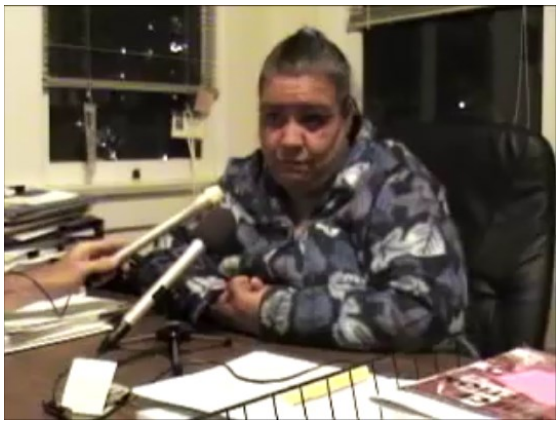

Fig. 1.1 Objective viewpoint of the mother of one of the victims. © 2006 *On the Edge*.

Fig. 1.2 Subjective viewpoint of the same person as in Fig. 1. © 2006 *Bajo Juárez.*

The goal of *Bajo Juárez* is to represent the reality of these horrendous acts: the abduction, torture, mutilation, rape, and assassination of a young woman, the unimaginable pain suffered by her family, the frustration of not knowing who was responsible, not having them punished, and of being ignored by the police, the Chihuahua government, and even the Federal government. The audience has to know, the audience has to believe, and the audience has to feel. On the other hand, in *On the Edge*, the goal is to convey, as unobtrusively as possible, what the mother of the victim is communicating. The objective viewpoint forces spectators to locate slight but perhaps significant visual details by themselves. However - as Boggs explains (127) – overuse of uninvolved and distanced scenes may cause the audience to lose interest.

A subjective point of view could be also achieved with the use of a moving camera. For example, the interview with a victim and survivor of abduction, rape and torture in *Silencio en Juárez* is recorded in the back of a car. The car is passing by the corner where the victim was abducted when she was using a public phone on the street. As the interviewee recounts her experience, the car follows the trajectory that, according to her, the perpetrators used. In this sequence, close-ups of the victim being interviewed are mixed in with scenes of the place where the young woman was raped, including the part of the roof where she managed to escape. The moving camera, according to Boggs "forces us to see exactly what the character is seeing and in a sense to become the character" (131).

The place where an interview takes place also conveys a viewpoint. An objective observer is normally situated in an external place, distant from where the event took place. For example, most of the interviews with journalists and writers were recorded in

their offices or in a classroom. Some activists were also interviewed in an office. In contrast, most of the relatives of the victims were interviewed at their houses, the family room, the victim´s bedroom, the kitchen, and the patio, or where the bodies of the young women were found.

Another powerful rhetorical tool is the selection of *social actors.* In this case, interviewees are social actors: What they have to share and the way they share it is fundamental when the intention is to persuade the spectator. In *Señorita Extraviada*, for example, a victim and survivor of abduction, torture, and rape is interviewed, she lived this terrible experience when she was pregnant, expecting a baby girl, who 20 years later would become a victim of the femicides in Ciudad Juárez. She tells her story in a very calm manner, in the intimacy of her home, carrying a 5-year-old boy on her lap. Tears show up as she remembers and recounts the event. Her testimony is emotionally powerful.

In contrast, in the same documentary, there is an interview with a woman who was tortured and raped by members of the police of Ciudad Juárez while she was in jail. Not only does she share the horrendous experience she went through while she was detained, but she also states that she saw women´s clothes in the premises, presumably belonging to the victims of the femicides, as well as pictures where they were being tortured and raped. The way this woman recounts what she witnessed, in spite of its awfulness seems to work better to inform than to sensitize the spectator. The sequence containing this interview is mixed in with scenes of this woman´s house, her neighborhood, photos of the newspaper displaying her case, and even the legal testimony with the official seal. These elements are used to support the veracity of her

story. However, the spectator´s emotional involvement is best achieved with the former interview.

As far as the interviewers are concerned, their presence/absence also supports a particular viewpoint. In *The City of Lost Girls*, for example, Jordan´s physical presence transmits a more subjective point of view. She is reporting from where the events are taking place, which persuades the spectator to believe that a seriously involved journalist is reporting; thus her account is more realistic than that of somebody who is not on-site. Her presence in the recordings also guarantees that the interviews were conducted for the making of this particular documentary. In some of the documentaries, it is not clear whether an interview was conducted during the making of that film or at a different time or even by a different production, for such documentaries do not specify the source of some interviews. In the old days, recycled footage could be easily distinguished from the documentary in progress, for the quality and other characteristics of the images were different. With the capabilities of advanced technology, it is possible to match these images in such a way that it is hard to tell one from the other. According to Ellis and McLane, this is one of the disadvantages of state-of-the-art technology; they argue that “anyone with a digital camera and a home computer could put together a documentary, and fortunately many more people can tell their stories. At the same time, the professionalism of documentary craft and artistry, to say nothing of concern for ethical considerations, has suffered” (294).

The material edited before and after an interview also has a crucial role for the political viewpoint. For example, in *The City of Lost Girls*, there is a sequence which starts with a shot where the trial to sentence the alleged murderer of a young woman in

the city of Chihuahua is about to take place. Everything seems to indicate that the accused woman has been unjustly charged with this murder, and in this trial it will be decided whether or not she is innocent. The media, the mother of the accused woman, and the team making the documentary are all there. All of the sudden, they learn that the trial has been suspended indefinitely. The inexplicable cancellation of the trial, of course, puzzles Jordan, who is most interested in knowing the reasons for the cancellation. She follows the judge outside the premises to interrogate him, a hand-held camera is recording as she runs to catch up with the judge. The judge refuses to stop and to give her any explanation. This interview, with no words at all, says more than a long interview. It is clear that there is something obscure about the way the investigations and prosecutions are being conducted and that there is little willingness on the part of Mexican authorities to report transparently on advances with the investigations.

Another example is shown in *Bajo Juárez*. The sequence starts with an interview with Special Prosecutor María López Urbina who after describing the concept of femicide, assures “esto no está sucediendo en Ciudad Juárez.” The scenes following her statement are three different sections of footage where people in desolated and semi-desolated areas are carrying covered stretchers or black bags to a forensic vehicle, presumably young women´s bodies or remains. The arrangement of this material clearly says more than what is said in the interview itself, for once again Mexican authorities are trying to deny the severity of the problem.

With this analysis we see how the voice of a documentary is supported by means of an interview. However, it is not only the interviewee and his/her statements (or

absence of statements) that makes of an interview such a strong, persuasive tool; it is also the technical strategies used to record the interview, and the material chosen to precede and follow the interview in the editing process that makes the audience´s experience more intense. The objective is to convince the spectator that the viewpoint shown in the documentary is the correct one. On the other end of the spectrum, some directors overuse the interview, reducing their documentaries to a series of "talking heads." Mendoza states that some filmakers delegate their obligations to the interviewees and that this practice destroys the purpose of the interview: "[the filmakers] ponen la cámara ante un candidato a ser entrevistado, confiando en que éste les hará la tarea, es decir, la investigación y la realización, mediante una transferencia de roles que auspicia abusos y torpezas en nombre –y en perjuicio- de la entrevista" (76).

3.3. Footage

Footage is another resource frequently used to prove that what is shown in a documentary is "the truth," for it is considered the recording of the facts "of life unscripted" (Rhodes 1). This idea has its origins on Dziga Vertov´s *Kino Pravda* (Cinema Truth) series. Vertov´s theory was that "cinema rose to its full potentials as a medium only when it was built on the organization of documentary footage recorded by the camera" (qtd in Rhodes 1).

The filmmakers of the six documentaries use stock footage to support the idea or the viewpoint they want to convey. For example, when they want to emphasize the vicinity of Ciudad Juárez and the United States, footage of the cross-border bridges Santa Fé, Américas, Zaragosa or Pérez Serna is frequently employed. Footage of

streets like Vicente Guerrero, 16 de Septiembre, and other nearby streets is frequently used along with remarks about the fact that many of the victims disappeared while doing their everyday activities, or when directors want to emphasize and document the presence of pink and black crosses and flyers all over the city denouncing the femicides, the injustice, and the impunity linked to them, or simply when demographic data about Juárez is given. When the fact that many of the victims were maquiladora workers is to be stressed, footage of maquiladora facades or people working inside maquiladoras is utilized. Footage of areas like Puerto de Anapra, Lomas de Poleo, and Lote Bravo is frequently employed when the subhuman conditions under which most of the victims lived is to be illustrated. To indicate that bodies of young women were found, footage of people carrying covered stretchers or black bags to a forensic vehicle is frequently used. More graphic footage showing bodies or skeletons of the victims clearly is also utilized. When it is mentioned that the victims were or were not prostitutes, footage of night clubs in streets like Avenida Juárez at night is shown. Also, footage of prostitutes on the streets is included. Such is the case of *Señorita Extraviada* and *The City of Lost Girls*.

Footage is also used to get the spectator emotionally involved with the subject. In particular, footage of the victims is employed to individualize the victims, to remind the audience that each one of them had a unique personality, that they cannot be regarded as a mere statistic among a large number of victims. In *Bajo Juárez*, for instance, there are home videos of two victims when they were alive; footage shows the religious ceremony and the party of the quinceañera celebration of the victim.

Most of the documentaries include footage showing the apprehension of some of the people who have been declared guilty of the femicides, as well as footage where these people maintain that they are innocent and that they were tortured by Mexican police to confess that they had committed the crimes. Such is the case of the Egyptian engineer, the man who was accused of killing his own cousin, some bus drivers, and some members of the so-called gang "Los Rebeldes." All this footage supports the theory that Mexican police is not only involved with the femicides but that they are incriminating innocent people for the crimes. Footage showing relatives and friends of the victims, and activists striking on the streets of Ciudad Juárez, México City, and even in some cities in the United States is included in all six documentaries. This material provides a different perspective on the mothers of the victims. It is not the romantic representation of a mother who stays home to cry not only for what was brutally done to her daughter but also for feeling powerless and frustrated insofar as nothing has been clarified and nobody has been punished for the horrendous act. Instead, it is a mother who is aware that nothing will bring her daughter back but still will fight to bring attention to what was done to her daughter, to break the silence.

As with the interviews, the technique used to edit footage carries a connotation. For example, Lourdes Portillo uses black and white (B&W) to show some footage. According to Joseph Boggs, "naturalistic, serious, somber stories stressing the harsh realities of life and set in drab, dull, or sordid settings cry out for black and white" (192). Evidently, Portillo was well aware of this, for the use of B&W in all her work conveys exactly that. Fast-paced footage is used when the rapid growth of Ciudad Juárez, its industrial development, and the traffic of all kinds of goods is emphasized. Such is the

case in *Señorita Extraviada* and *Silencio en Juárez*. Slow motion, on the other hand, is used to concentrate the spectator´s attention on an action and to intensify the emotion associated with it. In *Silencio en Juárez,* for example, footage of the mothers of some victims on a strike in front of the State of Chihuahua´s Governmental premises is shown. The footage includes a close-up of the mothers' feet in slow motion. This technique goes beyond showing the strike; it is also indicating the feelings of the mothers. It could be the feeling of somebody who is tired of searching for justice and who secretly feels defeated. But this is communicated solely through the technique used in the footage, for in the strike, the mothers look strong, decisive, and tireless, shouting "justicia, justicia."

3.4. Archival Documents

Archival material is used with the objective of reproducing the world which is familiar to us, and ultimately to convince the audience that what they see is real and therefore that the point of view presented is the "right" way to see things. Besides footage, other archival material was used in the documentaries, such as official documents, photographs, newspaper reports, etc. In *Señorita Extraviada*, immediately after a victim and survivor of rape and torture tells her story, Portillo includes a shot of the victim´s official statement with the seals of the competent authorities of Juárez and the newspaper displaying the news with pictures of the interviewee. In *The City of Lost Girls*, there is a take showing the document that was allegedly written by an FBI agent where the names of people directly involved with the femicides are listed. Some parts of the documents are scratched out with a black marker to avoid having the camera

display them. All documentaries include photographs of some of the victims in various contexts, at work, with their kids, with their parents, in parties, frequently with their quinceañera attire. Also, photos of bodies or objects indicating the presence of bodies are shown, such as shoes, clothes, a stretcher, a black bag, etc.

3.5. Symbols

A symbol is a tool which has been used since ancient civilizations as a means of communication among humans. It is also regarded as a means to represent reality. According to David Fontana, there is also another aspect of symbolism: “The side that relates to our inner psychological and spiritual world. Within the inner world, a symbol can represent some deep intuitive wisdom that eludes direct expression” (9).

In all six documentaries, visual symbols are employed to suggest an idea or a feeling and thus acquire significance beyond them. According to Boggs, two of the most common methods of charging an object symbolically with a set of associations (ideas, attitudes, or feelings) are through repetition and through placing value on an object by a character (46). Both methods are used in the documentaries. In this section, some of the symbols will be mentioned, but further analysis is needed to treat the subject in depth.

One set of objects that are symbolically charged by repetition are the pink and black crosses painted all over the city. According to some interpretations, pink is the color of the flesh, sensuality, and the emotions (Cirlot 54), whereas black is related to darkness, to subterranean zones, and even to the descent into hell (Cirlot 58). In *Silencio en Juárez*, the sister of one of the victims explains (while she is painting a

cross), “el rosa significa la mujer y el negro significa el luto pero también el conjunto en sí significa la impunidad de los femicidios en ciudad Juárez.”

Another symbol is the buses which transport maquiladora workers. This vehicle has different meanings: 1) the victims were abducted while commuting from one place to another, and most of them used these buses to commute, 2) the fact that maquiladoras do not offer better protection to their employees, 3) many of the victims migrated from other Mexican cities, mainly from the south and to do so they traveled for days in a bus, 4) a group of bus drivers was accused and put in jail for killing maquiladora workers.

Women´s shoes are a symbol used in all the documentaries. They are shown using a variety of techniques such as still frames, slow motion, fast pace, dissolves, white and black, sepia, as well as in a variety of material, including footage, magazines, newspapers, interviews, police reports, photographs, etc. In *Señorita Extraviada*, Lourdes Portillo uses this symbol frequently, sometimes with a very simple and cold shot and sometimes with a very artistic, elaborated, and warm take. Some of the meanings of women´s shoes in the documentaries are: 1) the walking of the victims as the continuation of their lives, and this walking is abruptly stopped, 2) some of the victims worked at a shoe store, 3) many victims were abducted in downtown Juárez where one of the main business is shoes (especially along the streets Vicente Guerrero and 16 de Septiembre), 4) the fascination for women of this piece of clothing, 5) many of the bodies found were in an advanced stage of decomposition and the only way to identify at least the gender was through their shoes, 6) the contrast of the story of Cinderella´s crystal slipper left on the castle with the story of these young women´s

shoes buried in the desert. In a more general sense, and according to Udo Becker, “en la teoría psicoanalítica el pie adquiere a menudo un significado fálico, correspondiendo al zapato la representación simbólica de la vulva” (336).

These are just some of the symbols that filmmakers used to present their ideas in a more artistic manner, which adds complexity to the perspective and in some instances even confusion. Here, some of the possible interpretations were listed. However, it is important to keep in mind that every symbol can be interpreted in many ways and that there may be no single "right answer." Also -and as recommended by Boggs- “it is important to keep in mind that although decoding a film's symbols may lead to rich and profound insights, it can also be carried to the point of absurdity. As Sigmund Freud, the granddaddy of symbolism once put it: ‘Sometimes a cigar is just a good smoke’” (53).

3.6. Musical Score

This cinematographic element was discussed in the “Irony” section. However, due to the importance it has in enriching and enhancing the spectator’s reaction, it is mentioned here again. In all documentaries, a variety of musical scores were used, to reinforce the emotional content of the image, to stimulate the kinetic sense, and to set a pace for the action, and in general for the film. In *The City of Dead Women* and *Silencio en* Juárez, the musical score used at times is a tension-building music, which gradually increases in volume or pitch, switches from a major to a minor key, or introduces percussion instruments and dissonance. All these effects deliberately play on the audience’s mind, causing a feeling of nervousness and anxiety. In *Señorita Extraviada*, at times, a harmonious score accompanies long shots of the city and B&W photographs

of the victims. According to Amy Carroll (387), Portillo uses Gregorian chants (among other elements), including “Kyrie Eleison,” to suggest allegory’s religious roots. In *Bajo Juárez*, the musical score plays an important role; it is not just a random musical background used to accompany images. Folkloric music is used to portray the celebration of death and life in Mexican culture, but it also serves to illustrate the feelings of Mexican people towards the femicides, the police cover-up, the silence, and the ever going injustice and impunity linked to the killings. As we have seen, the musical score is also an ironic element which serves to mock the allegations of Mexican authorities about Juárez being a peaceful place, about almost all the femicides being solved, and about the perpetrators being captured. Finally, the musical score sadly portrays how, in spite of the femicides and the aftermath of horrors, some people kept on seeing on Juárez a land of opportunity.

3.7. The Opening

Ideally, the opening in every documentary should give the spectator an idea of what material will be presented and from what perspective. In this section, it is concluded that most of the documentaries accomplished this task in the first minute of the film. For example, in the first minute of *Silencio en Juárez,* the following information is given: the location of Juárez in relation to the United States, the approximate number of women who have been killed or who have disappeared, the physical profile and the social and economic conditions of the victims, the fact that there are various hypothesis regarding the identity of the perpetrators and their motivations , and the fact that people have been charged and prosecuted and that nevertheless the mystery is unsolved. This

information is provided by a narrator and is reinforced with various types of footage. For example, during the first minute there are three short segments of footage clearly showing women´s death bodies, and another three segments of footage where the femicides are hinted at (men carrying covered stretchers or black bags to a forensic vehicle). There is also footage of young women with school uniforms walking around downtown, while other footage shows people arriving to work at a maquiladora, and one more of people marching to denounce the femicides. Shots of flyers on the walls and poles, photographs of some of the victims, a scene of a maquiladora worker walking in the darkness in a very empty neighborhood saying: “nadie nos protege, estamos muy olvidados aqui.” A segment of an interview with Patricia González Rodríguez (an attorney for the State of Chihuahua) records her saying: “esos casos están asociados a la violencia doméstica,” and Verónica Leyva (of Red Solidaridad México) saying “en Ciudad Juárez parece que ser mujer es un delito.”

The director of this documentary, Sol Colom, uses fast-paced shots, zoom-in and zoom-out, panning, and fast cuts to portray a city where everything is constantly and quickly moving: economic growth, the crime rate, the maquiladora industry growth, corruption, drug trafficking, and violence, among other things. This first minute is rich in material and technique; it summarizes in a very clear and organized manner what the spectator is about to see.

In *Bajo Juárez*, the opening includes scenes of the desert in the daylight, with blue skies, and a bus moving along a road, while the musical score is playing a cheerful song: “en la frontera otra vida me espera, voy rumbo al norte a conseguirme un amor, en Ciudad Juárez hayaré mi destino, en Juárez todo estará mejor.” Then there is a cut

to a shot in the interior of a bus which provides transportation to maquiladora workers, who are listening to the radio. The voice of the radio announcer describes the case of "la jovencita que fue encontrada asesinada el miércoles pasado" and mentions the fact that many young women who leave their work in the maquiladoras are being forced to ride cars without license plates. The bus approaches a pole, and we are presented with a close-up of a flyer attached to the pole giving information on a young woman who went missing. Music in the background "Te vas angel mío" and the title of the documentary is displayed.

This opening is more symbolic in the way it summarizes what the audience is about to see. First, irony is immediately presented with the juxtaposition of the image of Juárez as portrayed in the opening, with the musical score and the footage, and the image of Juárez as portrayed in the documentary, with the horrors of the femicides. The documentary also emphasizes irony with respect to the meaning of life. For example, for those people who do not have any other option but to risk their lives to hold a job, to support their families. The fact that, in the first minute, this documentary presents the maquiladora transportation and the radio voice saying that the women abducted are maquiladora workers intimately links the femicides with the maquiladoras. Alejandra Sánchez gives this information about the femicides indirectly through the voice of the radio announcer. This strategy works well to show that the femicides are happening as they are making the film.

In *On the Edge,* the opening is a hand-held camera scene of the desert, while the musical score is a tension-building music. A map of México is displayed, then a zoom-in to the border with the US. Next comes a dissolve to a higher resolution map and then a

dissolve to a brick wall painted black and pink to form a cross. The screen is divided into four portions: one portion shows a dress, the second portion shows crosses and the names of the victims written on pink tags and being attached to the crosses, the third portion shows the mothers of some of the victims with a photo of their daughters on their chests, the fourth portion shows a strike where the mothers are demanding justice. Speaking from off-camera, Charles Bowden says "the city kills women." Then, Marisela Ortiz (the co-founder of the group "Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa") states off-camera: "absolutamente ninguna respuesta del gobierno." There is an on-screen dedication: "dedicado a todas las mujeres y niños víctimas de la violencia, el abuso y la explotación." Women off-camera shout "justicia, justicia, justicia." Finally, the screen dissolves to relatives of the victims and activists striking.

This opening prefaces a documentary that will mainly focus on the families of the victims. In fact, it focuses more on analysis of the cultural, economic, and social aspects of Juárez during, before, and after the femicides. It goes in depth with the rise of NAFTA and how it negatively affected the economy (also indirectly cultural and social aspects) of cities like Juárez. It talks about how this trade agreement and other decisions made by the US government affect Mexican economy. It exposes the fact that US citizens are the biggest consumers of illegal drugs and the fact that this directly affects the culture, economy and social aspects of other countries which, like Mexico, are affected by the production, traffic, and negotiations of these drugs. The documentary closes by giving some recommendations for the audience to help remedy the situation: 1) educate your community, 2) visit Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua City, 3) support US House Resolution 466 and Senate Resolution 392. The list of recommendations included in *On the Edge*

undermines the purely altruistic intention of the documentary, for it seems to stand for or represent the interests of others, in this case the political party supporting this House Resolution and Senate Resolution. Nichols talks about this practice regarding *Nanook of the North* (1922):

> Robert Flaherty's great story of an Inuit family's struggle for survival in the Arctic, represents Inuit culture in ways that the Inuit were not yet prepared to do for themselves and represents the interests of Revillon Freres, Flaherty's sponsor, at least to the extent of depleting fur hunting as a practice that benefits the Inuit as well as consumers. (3)

For its part, *Señorita Extraviada* opens with a melancholic musical score. Then there is a dissolve to the profile of a young, skinny, dark-skinned woman, then a dissolve to a Ciudad Juárez street, and a cut to a hand-held camera shot in slow motion of two young, dark–skinned women with long, dark hair; they are walking in the street with a young man. They are approaching a pole which has a pink and black cross. Next comes a fade-in and out to a B&W shot of a woman's shoe in a store display and a cut to a slow-motion take of the feet (socks, shoes, and skirts) of three girls dressed with school uniforms. The camera tilts to take in the long, dark hair of the girls who are looking at the shoes in the shoe store display. Lastly, we see a cut to a B&W shot of a bus in a poor neighborhood.

Evidently, this opening has a high artistic content, technically and symbolically speaking. For example, the take where the girls are approaching the pole with the cross is very significant for it is contrasting the vitality of the young women alive and those who are not. On the other hand, the girls approach the pole with the cross as if they

were approaching death as well. This constant dualism of presence / absence, life / death emphasized by Portillo is also commented on by Mora (122) and Giró et al. (30). This documentary goes beyond showing in a straightforward manner the economic, social, and political aspects of this part of the country. It also proves how a non-fiction film can be rich artistically. Lourdes Portillo comments on this aspect of her work in an interview conducted in 2010 in "Documentaries with a Point Of View," produced by Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Portillo explains: "I do think that that is the great thing about documentary, that we are hearing the truth as we see it but at the same time within a truth, there is a lot of possibilities of art, imagination, of poetry, metaphor, allegory, all that." All these possibilities are used by Portillo to represent in a very particular manner the femicides of Ciudad Juárez and the circumstances around them.

The opening of *The City of Dead Women* starts with a hand-held camera shot inside a car which is driving in the middle of the desert. A tension-building musical score is heard in the background, while the voice off-camera of a narrator explains: "There is nothing in the city of Juárez that makes it worth visiting. Not unless you're a businessman, a police officer, or a reporter." There follows a cut to a yellow arch in the desert, and off-camera the narrator states: "And here's the monument which the local municipality installed at the city gates, to bring in the new millennium." Then there is a close-up of a wood cross painted in pink with plastic flowers attached to it. The narrator explains: "Next to it, the people of Juárez have placed something else: pink crosses in the middle of the desert."

This opening is less elaborate in the way it is edited, yet it is rich symbolically. With just a few words and images, it represents in a concrete and precise manner the

situation in Ciudad Juárez, how the industry sector continues to develop in spite of the femicides, how Mexican authorities are not interested in solving the crimes, how it is only individuals who have drawn attention to these crimes by painting poles and posting flyers all over the city, protesting with photos of the victims, forming groups, writing internet blogs, etc. The desert is also symbolic, for many of the bodies were found there, and also the truth was buried with them. This documentary goes beyond the femicides to cover the violence and injustice that ensued, including the incrimination of arguably innocent people, threat to and killings of people who have tried to contribute to solving the crimes or have helped families of the victims or the people who have been otherwise involved with these crimes such as lawyers, journalists, etc.

The opening of *The City of Lost Girls* starts with shots at night of some streets in downtown Ciudad Juárez along with the voice off-camera of Sandra Jordan: “The Mexicans call it the city of the lost girls. Ciudad Juárez is held hostage by killers who slaughtered almost 400 women.” Then there is a cut to takes of poles with the pink and black crosses and a cut to buses which transport maquiladora workers at night. Jordan explains that she is outside a maquiladora that it is near midnight, that she is about to see the workers coming out after their shift to take the bus which ideally would take them safely back home, but that this does not always work so well. Accompanying a cut to a hand-held camera shot inside a bus is Jordan´s voice off-camera: “For 10 years the pattern has been the same, abduction, rape, torture, and then death. At least 15 victims this year so far.” Next comes a cut to footage showing the legs of a woman’s body facing to the ground, her underwear and pants down to her ankles. Off-camera Jordan states: “I came to Juárez to find out who is doing the killings and why they haven’t been

caught." Then there is a cut to the trunk of a woman on the ground. Part of her stomach, one of her hands, and her jacket are visible; a man´s hands put the body on a stretcher. Cut to the woman´s face: She has dark, long hair, her skin is light brown, and her nose and chin are disfigured. This opening relates how, in spite of 10 years of a history of abduction, torture, rape, and murder, the maquiladoras keep on having shifts which put their female workers at a high risk of being killed. It emphasizes the little or non-existent protection the maquiladora transportation offers to the workers. It indirectly criticizes the Mexican police system, for Jordan mentions that the reason for her visit is to investigate who kills them and why they have not been caught. The fact that a couple of segments of very graphical footage were included in the first minute foreshadows what the spectator should expect from the documentary.

3.8. Inconsistencies in Documentaries

Minor errors in the editing of some documentaries were detected. Such discrepancies are not so significant as to interfere with the exposed viewpoint. For example, in *On the Edge,* Alma Gómez (a lawyer representing victims´families and co-founder of "Justicia para nuestras hijas") explains in Spanish that Mexican authorities classified the femicides to get rid of some pressure and they said that they will investigate only those with a sexual motivation. As a result of that decision, they reduced the number of cases from 410 to 96. The super shows the translation of this statement into English, but displays "from 400 to 96". In *The City of Dead Women*, the mother of one of the victims says in Spanish that her daughter went missing April 16, 1998, and the super shows the translation in English as "April 18, 1998." In these cases,

the numerical error is not crucial, for it does not distort the information drastically. A bilingual spectator could notice the discrepancy but does not get distracted by it.

However, it is somewhat disturbing the way Sandra Jordan in *The City of Lost Girls* interprets what the relatives of the victims declare, for example when the father of a victim is showing Jordan where the body of his daughter was found: There is a close-up shot of the father stating: “y encontraron los calcetines también.” Then in the same shot (there is not a transition to another shot), the camera does a pan to take a close-up of Jordan who translates as follows: “where the cloths were found, they supposedly found her hand, one of her hands, and also some socks.” The preceding scene does not show the father talking about the hand either. This does not necessarily mean that the father did not mention that the hand was found there; there is a possibility that that part of the interview was eliminated. What is important to emphasize here is the importance of the editing process, for the final version shows a discrepancy between what is being said in Spanish and what is being translated into English. For a bilingual audience this discrepancy could raise doubts about the quality of the edition or in the worst case, undermine what is being presented. Discrepancies like the above described happen more than once in Jordan´s interpretations.

Another type of discrepancy can result from the process of electing the material or the way it is edited. For example, in *Señorita Extraviada*, the violent, sadistic, and inhuman character of the perpetrators is frequently noted in different ways, including with descriptions of the remains when the bodies were found. At the same time, the documentary includes three interviews with victims and survivors of abduction, rape, and torture. In the testimony given by two of these survivors, the perpetrators show

some mercy, for at the end they did not kill their victims. María, for example, states that the policeman who raped her while she was detained in jail took pictures of her and warned her: “Pero si tú dices algo o nos denuncias, aquí te tenemos, con estas fotos donde quiera te sacamos […] y te vamos a matar, no nomás a ti, sino a tu familia también.” During the interview, María states that she saw pictures of the femicides´ victims being tortured and raped and their clothes. She said that the policeman told her: “Toda esa ropa es de las que les quitamos a todas las que metemos aquí y nos las llevamos pa’llá.” With all this evidence that María saw, her perpetrator lets her go with just one warning: “if you say anything, we have your pictures, we can get you.”

The other victim and survivor is the mother of one of the victims. She was abducted, tortured and raped when she was pregnant expecting the baby girl who twenty years later will become a victim of the femicides. She recounts the horrible experience she had and she says that after her attacker drove her around the desert all night, tortured her physically and mentally, he finally told her: “Dame bien tu dirección porque ya te voy a llevar a tu casa y ten mucho cuidado porque esta persona que te dijo que te llevaba, ella te vendió conmigo por quince pesos.” The perpetrator, according to the victim, not only allowed her to live, but took her home and advised her to be careful with the other woman.

The other survivor was the young woman who was allegedly attacked by the Egypcian engineer Sharif; there is not an interview with her but evidently she was not killed.

In all three cases, the perpetrators for one reason or another chose not to kill the victims. What is this saying about the perpetrators? Of course, these few cases do not

overshadow the hundreds of cases where the victims were not only killed but burned alive and mutilated. However, it is interesting how the selection of material could be interpreted differently. Most probably the intention with the inclusion of these interviews was not so much to show how some perpetrators can be merciful but instead to have testimony from somebody who went through a similar experience to the victims', for they will never be able to give their testimony.

Another discrepancy is the one detected in the testimony of the mother of one of the victims, as shown in two documentaries. In *On the Edge,* she recounts what happened when the policemen came to her house to ask her to come with them to identify her daughter´s body. She remembers: "Me fui y me llevaron en la patrulla, uno de mis hijos se quiso subir conmigo, la policía no quiso, dijo que yo sola tenía que identificar el cadáver de mi hija." This same person explains in *Silencio en Juárez*: "el primero de septiembre llego una patrulla aquí a la casa, me dicen a mí, 'señora, ya encontramos a su hija,' no me dijeron que la habían encontrado muerta." The first discrepancy has to do with whether or not they told her that her daughter was dead. The other discrepancy is that in *On the Edge,* she says that she went to identify the body all by herself because the police had not allowed her son to go with her. But in *Silencio en Juárez,* while she narrates her story, there is a re-enactment with actors who represent what she is saying. When she explains that she went to the police station, the actor who plays her husband in the previous scene is with her and when she sees the body the husband hugs her. So this discrepancy has to do with whether or not she was alone when she saw the body. The verbal discrepancy in the testimony coming directly from the mother of the victim could be the result of a very stressful period of her life as co-

victim or else the result of trying to recollect information from a highly traumatic event. In the case of the re-enactment, the discrepancy could have been caused by a discrepancy in the testimony of the co-victim or by a failure to re-enact the testimony accurately.

Far from creating doubt about the veracity of the testimony, such discrepancies in a co-victim´s testimony emphasize how the nature of the events can give rise to inconsistencies in testimonies caused by pain, fear, or other factors. Technical discrepancies detected in the way an event is represented do not invalidate the altruistic intention but they could raise doubts about the transparency with which the testimony is being conveyed and therefore the reliability of the documentary. Nichols explains that modifications "can become a form of misrepresentation, or distortion, in one sense, but they also document the ways in which the act of filmmaking alters the reality it sets out to represent" (6).

3.9 Violation to the Body of the Documentary

In this section, the theory developed by Mark Ledbetter in *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative, or Doing Violence to the Body* is explored. Ledbetter argues that the body metaphor is "the most intense of language's efforts to fathom realities" (12). He then sees narrative as a body metaphor where the body-text, like the human body, seeks coherence, which is equivalent to the healthy body. To have a healthy body is to long for the perpetuation of the status quo; to strive to maintain the culture and the history that has best sustained existence with the least amount of disease. Nevertheless, just as no human body exists without chaos and scars, no narrative is

without moments of disruption: when the body-text is violated. Ledbetter calls this the narrative´s scar, which is an apocalyptic moment in the text, and which reveals a moment of ethical awareness over against the otherwise powerful and complete narrative that suggests a moral coherence (18). In other words, the ethical narrative is the diseased body, where violation is found. Making an analogy, a documentary dealing with the femicides could be regarded as the unhealthy body, for it shows abduction, mutilation, violation, and murder. The film is the dis-ease of a healthy body; it is hurting the view of a wholesome world. The narrative of a documentary comes to destabilize the status quo; it comes to put an end to the unawareness of the audience. The film is thus emotionally wounding the spectator.

Besides the narrative itself, some documentaries employ other cinematographic elements to make the emotional violation of the spectator by the diseased body-text more palpable; such is the case, for example, of the lens of the camera pointing at the audience in *Señorita Extraviada* (figure 1.3). Mora states that Portillo uses this technique as part of an auto-reflexive visual design to signal the fact that documentaries do not reproduce reality neutrally; instead, they reproduce it subjectively and convey a particular point of view (127).

Fig. 1.3 The lens of a camera pointing at the audience. © 2006 *Señorita Extraviada*.

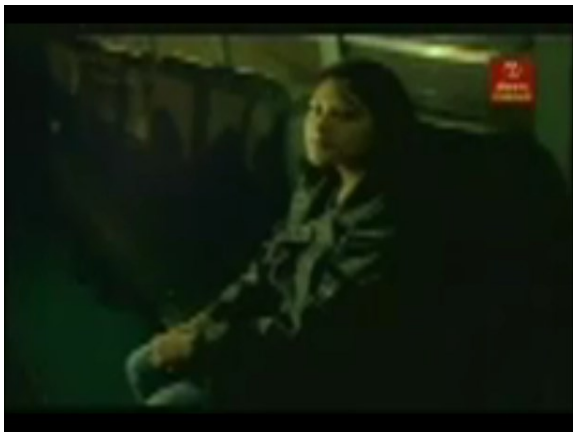

Fig. 1.4 Young woman looking at the camera. © 2006 *Señorita Extraviada.*

The film *No Lies* uses a related technique, where the camera is recording another camera which is recording an interview with a woman who was recently raped. Bill Nichols (13) develops a similar analysis to the one made by Ledbetter. First, he states that this technique functions like a meta-commentary on the very act of filmmaking itself by suggesting that the audience is put in a position similar to the young woman's. Then he notes that in this film, the spectator, like the interviewed woman, can be left distressed not only by the aggressive interrogation but also by the filmmaker's deliberate misrepresentation of the film's status as a fiction. Nichols explains: “The film becomes, in a sense, a second rape, a new form of abuse, and, more importantly, it becomes a comment on this very form of abuse and the risk of turning people into victims so that we can learn about their suffering and misery” (13).

Another element Portillo includes in her work is a set of takes of young women who look at the filming camera fixedly for several seconds (figure 1.4). Boggs states that a frozen image on the screen “burns itself into our brain and is locked into our memory

in a way that moving images seldom are" (143). On one level, it may appear as if these young women are defying the audience or the perpetrators or fear itself. They refuse to live afraid of being abducted, tortured, mutilated, and killed by the perpetrators and of being judged by people who link the victims of the femicides with women who contributed to their own destiny, to "bad girls". On another level, the use of this component of fixed gazes could be regarded as a way of disrupting the status quo as suggested by Ledbetter.

In *Bajo Juárez,* these scenes are also included but unlike those in *Señorita Extraviada*, the scenes here are of men as well as of women (figures 1.5 and 1.6).

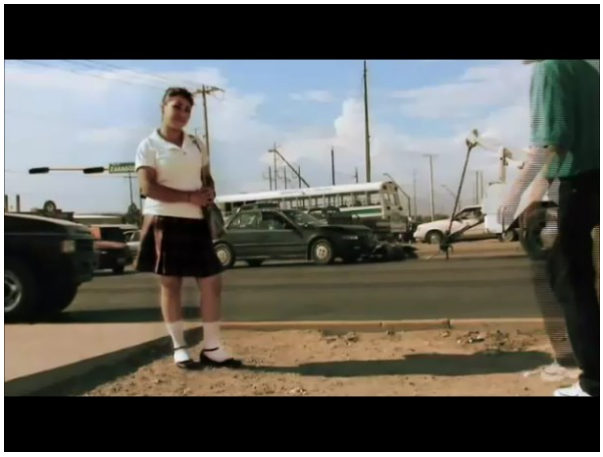

Fig. 1.5 Young woman looking at the camera. © 2006 *Bajo Juárez*.

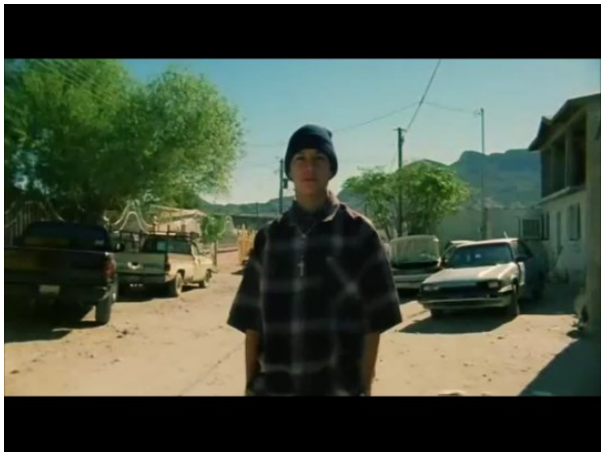

Fig. 1.6 Young man looking at the camera. © 2006 *Bajo Juárez*.

3.10. Nichols´ Modes

In *Introduction to Documentary,* Nichols proposes a classification by modes, which along with periods and movements characterize documentaries. A new mode usually has its principles or goals, but it also tends to have a broader base of support so

that different movements can derive from a single mode (33). Specifically, Nichol's modes of documentary are: poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive, and performative. This classification has been accepted but also criticized. Stella Bruzzi, for example, argues that Nichols´ genealogical classification has become so important and influential that in some undergraduate courses "Nichols´ modes are attributed as if they are not a way of looking at documentary history and production, but *the* way" (3). One of Bruzzi's main objections is the chronology on which Nichols bases his classification. Bruzzi also argues that a problem with Nichols' "family tree" is that, in order to sustain itself, "wildly heterogeneous documentaries are forced to co-exist, very uncomfortable a times, within one mode" (4).

In this analysis, an attempt to identify the modes proposed by Nichols in the documentaries about the femicides is made. His classification is applied not because it is *the* way to assess documentaries but because the modes embrace and group a variety of aspects of documentaries that will be troublesome to deal with individually and because the modes are mostly well structured, based on a long trajectory and expertise in the field rather than just a random grouping of characteristics. Most of all, the elasticity of the classification is what makes it attractive, for even Nichols recognizes that a film identified with a given mode needs not be so entirely (100).

The poetic mode particularly excels at opening up the possibility of alternative forms of knowledge to replace the straightforward way to convey information. In *Señorita Extraviada*, Portillo represents reality in terms of a series of fragments, subjective impressions, and loose associations with the use of various cinematographic tools such as overlapping images, color filters, slow-motion shots, fast-paced shots, etc.

Carroll states that Portillo experiments with form to illustrate "concretely the multifarious 'false leads' of screen-allegory" (381). The use of similes is another way to open up ideas and possibilities. In that sense, Steev Hise experiments with a poetic mode in *On the Edge.* By using off-time footage (footage from a different epoch), he alters time and space creating a stage of incoherence or unconsciousness to enrich his perspective. *The City of Dead Women* and *Silencio en Juárez* have elements which are characteristic of the expository mode. They present the femicides in a more rhetorical or argumentative frame than a poetic one. They address the spectator directly with voices that advance an argument. Lastly, both documentaries have a male voice-of-God commentary, which is richly toned like that of news anchors and reporters. It attempts to achieve a sense of credibility by being distant, neutral, or omniscient.

Señorita Extraviada and *The City of Lost Girls* have components which distinguish the participative mode from others. This mode provides a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be in a given situation and how that situation alters as a result (116). The director Portillo and the journalist Jordan both go "into the field" to live among those who suffered the loss of a daughter, a sister, a mother, those whose lives were shaped by the horrors of the femicides. The personal "I" in the narrative used by Portillo and Jordan and their physical presence in the making of the documentary contribute to raising the expectations of the audience, for the spectator believes that what he/she is about to witness is the historical world as represented by someone who actively engages with that world. In these works, the filmmakers become social actors.

It is evident here that although *Señorita Extraviada* has some elements proper to the poetic mode, it also has elements which fit into the participatory mode. This

illustrates the flexibility of the modes to which Nichols refers to when describing his classification. In *On the Edge* and *Bajo Juárez*, a different participatory mode is contemplated. These two documentaries (unlike *Señorita Extraviada* and *The City of Lost Girls*) lack a voice-over. However, they both use the interview which, as Nichols notes, stands as one of the most common forms of encounter between filmmaker and subject in participatory documentary (121). In these two films, the interview allows the filmmakers to address people who appear in the film formally rather than address the audience through voice-over commentary.

In a broader view, all the documentaries forming the corpus could be regarded as participatory, for according to Nichols filmmakers who seek to represent their own encounter with the surrounding world and those who seek to represent broad social issues and historical perspectives through interviews and compiled footage constitute two large components of the participatory mode (123).

The reflexive mode, on the other hand, has to do more with the relation between the filmmaker and the spectator. In these documentaries, the spectator no longer follows the filmmaker in his/her engagement with other social actors; instead, the spectator attends to the filmmaker´s engagement with him/herself. All documentaries, to a certain extent, make the spectator aware of the process of representing the world. They do that using various cinematographic techniques. But it is in *Señorita Extraviada* and *Bajo Juárez*, with the use of the camera lens pointing to the audience and with the stationary images of people looking directly to the audience, that the filmmakers establish a direct communication with the audience. By “breaking the fourth wall,” these filmmakers make the spectator into a social actor.

As we can see, Nichols´ modes are not mutually exclusive, for one documentary can have aspects of more than one mode. Nichols notes that these modes give structure to the overall film, but they do not dictate or determine every aspect of its organization (100). In other words, this classification is a tool which can give us a way to see and to group documentaries but it does not necessarily encapsulate them into one mode or into one specific time.

4. Conclusions

In this study, the theory developed by Erik Erikson in *Identity and the Cycle of Life* was applied to analyze the identity of the victims of the femicides. According to Erikson, the identity formation of every human is composed of ethos identity and ego identity. All six documentaries in the corpus provide valuable information for the reconstruction of the ethos identity, but the ego identity is the piece of the puzzle that cannot and should not be put in. It is concluded here that by leaving these blanks, we are giving the victims the right to keep their identity formation inconclusive like that of any other living human being or like that of any other dead human being who died under different circumstances. By leaving these blanks, we set the femicide victims free from the binomial good / bad dichotomy, which is inevitably emphasized at some point in every documentary. Furthermore, it was noted here that the only way of representing the femicides that neither contributes to their continuation nor ignores them is by portraying every victim as individually as possible and by making a balanced use of material representing the socio-economical circumstances under which the femicides took place and the hyper-violence inflicted on the bodies.

In the analysis of irony, it was noticed that there are two different levels of irony in the documentaries. The first level is where the spectator and the filmmaker concur to undermine the meaning of a statement behind an irony and to unveil the true meaning of that statement; irony on this level is usually a stable one. The irony found on the second level, which results from further deconstruction of the first level irony, is a destabilized one, and it is an irony more in agreement with Romantics´ conceptions.

In the analysis of material and techniques, it is concluded that the process of gathering, selecting, and editing the material is crucial to achieve eloquence in a film and to give a stronger voice to a documentary. Decisions made by filmmakers, such as when to cut, what to juxtapose, how to frame a shot, how to record sound, and whether to add a commentary, are essential to 1) conveying a viewpoint, 2) getting the spectator emotionally involved, and 3) ultimately persuading the audience to believe that what they present is nothing but the truth.

Bill Nichols' classification was used as a means of grouping the documentaries based on the characteristics of the modes. It was noted that every documentary has elements of various modes, in particular of the poetic, explanatory, participatory, and reflexive modes.

Lastly, in this section, the theory developed by Mark Ledbetter in *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative, or Doing Violence to the Body* was applied with the intention of proving that the narrative of this type of documentary is a metaphor of the body-text which disrupts the text as a whole and also disturbs the spectator. It was concluded that the documentaries considered here are indeed a metaphor of an unhealthy body, for they hurt the view of a wholesome world. They come to destabilize the status quo, for

they put an end to the audience's unawareness. The film is thus emotionally wounding the spectator. This wounding is necessary, however, to instill an ethical awareness over and against the otherwise powerful and complete narrative that suggests a moral coherence.

CHAPTER 2

FICTION FILMS

Some of the most widespread representations of the Juarez femicides are those pertaining to the fiction film genre. It is evident that film can convey a particularly vivid sense of reality; this is the reason why directors around the world, taking advantage of this characteristic, have contributed with their work to the denunciation of the horrors surrounding this black episode of Mexican history. With film's continuous stream of sight, sound, and motion, they try to create an excitement that not only immerses the viewer in the cinematic experience but also has the objective of informing the audience about a social problem that calls for international attention. The intention of this chapter is to analyze the way film directors define the femicides, how they emphasize their importance, how they treat or attack the subject, what aspects they focus on, and, most importantly, how they represent the victims. The questions asked in the previous chapters are still asked here: In fiction film, is it possible to achieve an objective representation of the victims without compromising their identity and individual value as human beings? Can these femicides be represented in a way that neither over-emphasizes nor ignores the implied violence and the socio-political circumstances surrounding Juarez?

A number of films have been made whose style and plot directly denounce the Juarez femicides, such as *Rearview Mirror [Espejo retrovisor]*, *Bordertown [Ciudad del silencio]*, *The Virgin of Juarez [La virgen de Juárez]*, *Juarez, Mexico*, and *Traspatio [Backyard]*. Other films deal with these crimes indirectly, for example, *Casi divas [Almost Divas]* and *Bajo la sal [Under the Salt]*. Certainly every fiction film dealing with the femicides has important elements which deserve a profound analysis; however, because of the broad corpus studied in this dissertation, only three films will be

scrutinized in depth: *Espejo retrovisor, Bordertown*, and *Traspatio. Espejo retrovisor* was selected for three reasons: 1) it was one of the first Mexican films dealing with the femicides, 2) it is one of the few movies (if not the only one) that really focuses on the life of a victim rather than the violent acts of the perpetrators or the socio-political circumstances in Juarez before and after the femicides, and 3) the profile of the victim differs from the average victim's profile as described in police reports, newspapers, and other media. *Bordertown* was chosen because 1) it is probably the best-known (worldwide) fiction film dealing with the Juarez femicides, 2) the work of the director Gregory Nava, recognized as one of the leaders of the border cinema genre, invites comparison with the work of Mexican filmmakers, and 3) the presence in the film of Jennifer Lopez - who is perhaps the most iconic figure of a Latino woman - contributes to the analysis from several points of view: Lopez as the feminine, strong, determined, and agile heroine, Lopez as the sexualized figure of the Latino woman, Lopez as a woman refusing to be a victim, and Lopez as guaranteed profit in the box office. *Traspatio* was chosen because 1) it is one of the most recent Mexican representations of the femicides, and 2) it was very well received by the public and critics. For example, in the 2010 awarding of the Ariel, which is the Mexican Academy of Film award, it was nominated eight times, and it received five awards, best director and best actress among them. It also got film awards in the US, Cuba, and Spain.

These three films have garnered positive and negative feedback from general audiences as well as academic critics. For example, in spite of having won the award of the Berlin International Film Festival, *Bordertown* was severely criticized by the *Berliner Zeitung* (Jens Balzer) during the premier**.** Balzer described the movie as "funny, but

unintentionally" and reported that viewers at the press screening had reacted with "frenetic laughter" at supposedly serious scenes. The newspaper also described Nava´s movie as "distasteful" and accused Lopez of exploiting the real suffering of Mexican women in order to become a star in the American market. Also, in the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDb) website, 5,893 viewers rated Nava´s film 5.9 (out of 10). One of them, Olivier Bachelard, complains:

> *Bordertown* possédait un sujet en or, à la fois politique, social et humain, aux potentialités indéniables en termes de suspense. Malheureusement, Gregory Nava rate complètement sa cible, avec un scénario, certes basé sur un ensemble de faits divers, mais accumulant à la fois clichés sur le journalisme d'investigation, comme sur la société mexicaine aux prises avec des croyances ancestrales qui brouillent la raison. Ainsi le film s'enlise dans un récit degré zéro, qui n'approfondit aucun des sujets hautements politiques qu'il aborde, préférant nous gratifier de scènes d'actions à la limite du ridicule et nous imposer un festival “super-jennie.”

On the other hand, in the *Journal of Chicano Studies*, Volk and Schlotterbeck describe *Bordertown* as one of the films that arose as a cultural response precisely because the state has so roundly failed to stop these murders. They argue that “fictional” (their quotations) narratives have become both “the site where victims are mourned and the means by which justice can be restored” (54).

For its part, *Traspatio* was rated at the IMDb site 6.8 among 725 users. One of the comments on this site states:

> This film really sounds stuffed with plot threads, but they are handled fairly economically and help director Carrera paint a picture of this community that goes beyond the bogeyman horrors with which it has come to be associated. The fact is that because of a lack of resources and political will, it has become easy to get away with killing women in Ciudad Juarez, and so they continue to die. As Bravo learns, so do we—there is no serial killer or sex ring *per se*, just the usual femicides with more publicity.

Another comment assures:

> While *Traspatio* persuasively, and sensitively, portrays the ignored plight of young Mexican women ensnared in a chronic and occasionally terminal cycle of hard labor and machismo battering, the potentially thousands of Juarez victims deserve more than Mexi-caricatures and a heroine that must have taken cosmetology and modeling classes while attending police academy.

On the other hand, Priscilla Meléndez in the journal *Modern Drama* states that *Traspatio* "takes us into the space of the US-México border, recognizing its tragic consequences, denouncing its horrors, and crying out for justice" and that "what underlies the capacity of the film to denounce injustice is that the technical and theoretical languages have been ironically framed within the discourse of the literal, metaphorical, and ethical language of the dismembered body" (41).

Finally, *Espejo Retrovisor* was rated 7.5 among 13 users in the IMDb. Although comments by the general audience were not found, an academic paper analyzing this film was included in *Gender Violence at the US-México Border.* In this paper, Maria

Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba explains that the film represents the problem of the femicides from a different perspective: first, the main protagonist Paloma (a femicide victim) subverts the stereotype of the "unchaste woman of Juarez" (96), for she is a teenager of character and strong morals, and second, the film, while presenting a patriarchal, classist, and troubled society, gives a voice to the victims and privileges the lives of the women of Ciudad Juárez rather than their deaths.

In spite of the positive and negative reviews, success, as David Rosen noted, is defined differently by different filmmakers. For some, it is about getting one's work completed; for others, it is about achieving critical recognition; for others, it is about repaying their investors; and, for others, it is about achieving the acclaim that leads to a sizable theatrical performance and significant return (259). Whether these films were rated low or high, whether they got an award or did not, an in-depth analysis will be made here in order to compare the plots, the way Ciudad Juarez is portrayed, the femicide cases that were chosen for representation, the theories they mention, the role of maquiladoras, the police force, the Mexican government as well as the US government, whether or not there is media freedom to publicize the crimes, how the perpetrators and the heroes (or heroines) are represented, and, most importantly, how the figure of the victim is depicted in every film.

1. The focus

In order to start this discussion, a basic but crucial question should be asked: What is the focus of these films? Is it the plot, the character (and if so, what character?), the emotional effect, the style, an idea, or a moral statement? Then a second question

arises: Can the focus of a cinematographic representation of the Ciudad Juarez femicides be other than the victims themselves? The answer is yes, first because the complexity of these particular gender-violence acts calls for representation of a variety of socio-political aspects of the situation. Second, the violence involved in these crimes frequently takes over; making a representation that is solely focused on the victims almost impossible. Third, the advantage of using fiction to represent a social problem is precisely the freedom for creativity and experimentation.

1.1 Focus on style

One of the works that represents the femicides but focuses on style is *Bajo la sal.* This film is about the series of femicides that occur in the fictional town of Santa Rosa de la Sal, where the bodies of several young women have been found buried under the salt of a salt mine for which the town receives its name. Everything seems to indicate that Victor Zepeda, a lonely teenager who works in his father's funeral home, is the culprit, for Zepeda spends his free time making animated horror films using Barbie dolls, and the plots always involve a femicide. The plot is a traditional mystery, a whodunit story, but what makes this film different is that the killings of women are represented by means of graphical, violent, and bloody animated scenes, which Zepeda puts together with Barbie dolls. The film ingeniously shows three microcosms where the common denominator is violence against women: the Barbie universe, the Santa Rosa de la Sal universe, and the Ciudad Juarez universe. The microcosm of the Barbie dolls serves as a metonymy, for it is a fictional concept representing the femicides. Furthermore, the dolls are a metonymy of the victims, for they are being manipulated by an organized

and strong external force. In the case of the dolls, the force is Zepeda, and in the case of the Juarez victims it is a corrupted system composed of all sorts of institutions and motives. The metonymical Barbie microcosm is a salient example of filmic similes as described by Roman Jakobson (111), for the victims and their stories are transformed into a set of synecdoches: the construction of the crimes, the silence, the manipulation, etc. Although femicides do occur in the main plot of the film, it is in the Barbie doll microcosm where the viewer witnesses them in detail. The metonymy is the way the director is adding context to the life and the death of the victims.

Another film that focuses on style is Issa López´s *Casi divas,* for it represents the femicides by means of a secondary plot. The main plot follows four ambitious and beautiful young Mexican women who compete to obtain the main role in the next big movie of one of the country's most powerful producers. The subject of the femicides is brought in with Diana García's character, Catalina, who is a maquiladora worker in Ciudad Juárez and who is one of the finalists in the casting. Catalina does not win the contest and her character is not transcendental or crucial for the main plot. So then the film is as a metonymy for the lack of importance of the femicides from the viewpoint of the government, media, and even society. With Lacan´s theory in mind, one can say that this film is the object as well as the signifier. This is to say, the film with the femicides as a side plot demonstrates how show business in Mexico is far more important than poverty, violence, corruption, and impunity, and how overlooking these problems and directing society´s attention toward soap operas and TV reality shows frequently works to keep problems from rising to the surface.

Despite the altruistic intention of these two films, style becomes their dominant and most memorable aspect. According to Boggs, in this type of film, it is precisely the style that makes "a stronger impact on our minds and senses than any of the other thematic elements" (13). This could be the reason why these films are rarely mentioned as cinematographic representations of the Juarez femicides. On the other hand, the most well-known films dealing with the subject are those that focus on characters and/or the plot; such is the case of the three films analyzed here.

1.2 Focus on the plot

For convenience, the plot of *Bordertown* will be recapitulated. This film is the story of Lauren (Jennifer Lopez), who is a successful journalist for a newspaper in Chicago. She was born in Mexico but when she was little her parents were killed and she was adopted by an American family. Lauren´s boss asks her to go to Mexico to cover the Juarez femicides; she is reluctant to go, but the idea of getting a promotion encourages her. Once in Juarez, Lauren is reunited with Díaz (Antonio Banderas), her ex-boyfriend and a journalist in a local newspaper. Soon after arriving in Juarez, Lauren meets Eva, a young maquiladora worker who was recently raped, tortured, beaten, and left for dead in the desert. Lauren is determined to protect Eva and to help her find the perpetrators. Eva and Lauren work together to find the culprits and they succeed. To their frustration, they realize that Aris - one of Eva´s attackers - cannot be put in jail, for he belongs to one of the richest families in Juarez and therefore is untouchable. Lauren´s frustration climbs to immeasurable levels when she learns that, for this same reason, the newspaper for which she works will not publish her article. Aris´s family has

strong liaisons with maquiladora owners and other business people in the US and Mexico, and according to Lauren´s boss, it is not prudent to publicize a negative image of maquiladoras. Lauren quits her job in Chicago and stays in Juarez working for the local newspaper. Aris tries to kill Lauren, but Eva comes to her rescue and manages to kill him.

Evidently, the focus of this film is on the character of the journalist Lauren, which will be discussed in the next section, but considerable weight is also placed on the plot, which has the format of an adventure-detective story. In this type of film the emphasis is on events, on what happens: Lauren interviews the victim, she knows that Eva might be able to identify the bus driver who attacked her, and so she tries to photograph as many bus drivers as possible. Eva identifies the driver through a photo but insists that there was a second attacker (Aris), whom she later recognizes at a party. Lauren disguises herself as a maquiladora worker to entrap Aris and get him arrested. Clearly, these events succeed one another in a logical, exciting, and quick rhythm. Nothing can be removed from the tightly unified plot without affecting or altering the whole, and the conflict must be resolved by agents present in the plot itself.

Director Nava decided to present this social problem by means of an adventure-detective plot. According to Boggs, “the aim of such films is generally to provide escape from the boredom and drabness of everyday life” (10). Therefore, all the elements of the film are fast-paced: the musical score, the action, the dialogues, and the flow of information. And like any action film, this one contains some chase scenes such as the one in which Lauren runs into the middle of traffic to stop the bus where Eva and her mother are riding. Another element of the adventure-action film is the final outcome,

which is important only within the context of the story and has little significance in a general or abstract sense. In *Bordertown* the end is only significant within Lauren´s story, for despite the killing of the murderer in the film, the femicides will continue in real life.

Evidently Nava chose to represent a social problem that desperately called for attention within an adventure-action film featuring a heroic, risk-taking, altruistic journalist and depicting a fast-paced investigation, identification of the perpetrators, and killing of the culprit. Whether this decision was the correct one or not, he succeeded in getting the attention of a much larger public than perhaps any other fiction film representing the femicides. It is true, however that the outreach of the film was not entirely due to the plot but also to the participation of the leading actor Antonio Banderas and actress Jennifer Lopez, and to Hollywood marketing and distribution. After all, as Leon Wiesseltier says, “one thing doesn´t have reality in this culture until Hollywood says it does” (229). This subject will be more amply discussed in a later section.

In a general sense, *Bordetown* is about a journalist who comes to Juarez and re-encounters herself; she re-evaluates her Mexican roots, her goals in life, and even her moral principles. The plot and its elements serve as a regenerating force, which helps Lauren accomplish her unconscious objective. In a way, the people that Lauren encounters during this process are mere objects who contribute to the reconstruction of her identity. This aspect of the plot – Lauren’s development via interrelationships with other characters - can be better understood in the framework of feminist film theory. Eva, for example, despite the horrible experience of being abducted, tortured, and left

for dead, still has a positive conception of life based on family and culture. As a result, Lauren sees in Eva the woman that she would like to be; Eva is the reflection of Lauren´s ideal "other." This is clearly symbolized in two scenes, first in the scene where Eva looks at Lauren, who has just dyed her hair dark, and exclaims, "Now, you look more like me," and later, in the scene where Lauren is about to dye her hair back to blonde: As she looks at herself in the mirror with her black hair, she sees the image of the "other," the woman that she desires to be, the woman that "looks more" like Eva, the Mexican woman who knows and accepts her past and her roots, and she decides to keep her hair black to preserve that ideal. Evidently, this analysis follows the line of Jacques Lacan´s theory concerning the mirror stage. According to Lacan, six month-old babies are able to recognize themselves in a mirror, prior to the attainment of physical co-ordination. Children see their image as a whole and such image produces a sense of contrast with the lack of co-ordination of the body, which is perceived as fragmented. To resolve this tension, the child identifies with the image: this primary identification with the counterpart forms the Ego. Similarly, Lauren discovers that her reflected image embodied by Eva is not fragmented and desires to be like her. This gives the plot an uncanny narcissistic element, for normally the victim desires to be like the hero but here the hero desires to be like the victim.

As for the male characters that cross Lauren´s path, they also contribute to the restructuration of her identity, namely by giving her an opportunity, which she rejects, to enter into their phallocentric world. In Laura Mulvey´s terms, they are the subjects who objectivize the woman with their gaze to possess her and ultimately to control her. The bus driver and Aris, for instance, try to possess and control Lauren with their physical

force. Marco uses more subtle and romantic tactics but his goal is still to poses her. Even George, Lauren´s boss, tries to control her by reproving her new "moralistic" personality. George opens up to Lauren when he confesses "I liked you better before," this means when Lauren was unsentimental, practical, daring (thus sexy?). On his part Díaz (Antonio Banderas), despite the fact that many years back Lauren broke up with him to pursue her career in Chicago, still desires her and his gaze also objectivizes her. Then all male characters in the film try to control Lauren through their active role as the subjects who look at her. Continuing with Mulvey´s theory, we see that Lauren as the controlled figure is a pleasurable experience for the male characters but she also embodies a threat for them: her lack of penis, which is the material evidence that marks her exclusion from the law of the father. According to Mulvey, the male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: "counterbalance by the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object […] or else disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous" (64). Some of the male characters, like the driver and Aris, chose the first avenue as a way to escape from the castration anxiety, which is more voyeuristic and sadistic, for they attempt to punish Lauren by raping her and killing her but they do not succeed. Other male characters, like Marco and Díaz chose the more scopophilic avenue by turning Lauren into a fetish to release the fear of castration without punishing her. As for the gaze of the male spectator, it parallels that of the male characters in the film. For according to Mulvey, the male spectator tends to identify with one of the male characters. In so doing, the spectator "projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he

controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence" (63). The analysis of the diegesis from a feminist perspective examines how the relationships of Lauren and the protagonists contribute to the reconstruction of her identity and it also serves as a discursive explanation of the femicides as a way to punish women for revolting against a phallocentric culture.

On its part, *Traspatio* has two main plots. Plot A is the story of Blanca Bravo, a Mexico City police officer who will soon become the police chief in Ciudad Juarez. While Blanca is being trained to assume her new position, she is investigating the femicides. With the help of social worker Sara, who keeps a very complete report on the crimes and the victims, Blanca gets clues which take her to some suspects: an Egyptian man, the "Cheros" gang, and businessman Mickey Santos. All these men allegedly rape and kill women for sexual pleasure. Blanca investigates them and manages to incarcerate the gang and the Egyptian but this only provokes the anger of the police chief, who warns Blanca to stop her investigations or else she will get fired. Blanca soon discovers that the police chief receives money from the perpetrators to cover up their crimes. Blanca comes across Santos abducting a school girl and kills him right on the spot. Knowing that her career is over and that she could even confront charges for killing Santos, Blanca gives up her life in Juarez and crosses the US border. Plot B is about Juanita, a young woman who has just arrived in Juarez from a small town in Chiapas. She lives with her cousin Margarita and works in the same maquiladora. In a dancing club, Juanita meets Cudberto, a young man from Oaxaca who wants to have a respectable relationship with her. However, Juanita has more liberal ideas and despite having sex with Cudberto, she wants to keep "meeting" other men. Cudberto´s jealousy

pushes him to join a group of vandals, and after drinking and smoking marijuana, they all abduct Juanita. Against Cudberto´s will, the gang rapes her and finally obliges him (at gun point) to kill her. Cudberto is arrested by Blanca.

Although the film has a little of a detective plot - Blanca investigates some facts, makes connections, draws conclusions, and acts accordingly - the plot does not follow a linear chain of events as it does in *Bordertown. Traspatio* does not have a unified plot or story line; it does not focus on a single thread of continuous action: Blanca investigates the case of Karen, the woman who was acquainted with Sara and whose murderer seems to be the Egyptian; she rescues Hilda, who was attacked by the "Cheros;" she gets involved with Juanita´s case, and finally she rescues the school girl who was abducted by Mickey Santos. The femicide cases are presented in the film like isolated files contained in a cabinet; they cross Blanca´s path, but there is not a strong cause-and-effect relationship between these events.

In *Traspatio* there is also a restructuration of Blanca Bravo´s identity. Her name could even be an indicator of the conceptual transformation she experiences. Initially, Blanca obeys the police codes and trusts the police system but as she gets to know it better and as she realizes about the obscure transactions and corruption around it, she revolts against it; she becomes a more "bravo" being. Here, it is important to note that "bravo" in Spanish, unlike the meaning of the word in English (brave), has a connotation of aggressiveness and, to a certain extent, transgression (for example, she kills Santos without giving him the opportunity to have a trail). Blanca, like Lauren, also embodies the castration anxiety of the male characters in the film. Her partner Fierro feels threatened because a woman will soon be in control of his actions, in other words, he

will be castrated. The Egyptian and Mickey Santos control women with money, physical force and their penis and Blanca comes as a threat because she deprives them from controlling (in a way she controls them) without using any of the elements listed above. As for the police chief, Blanca is a threat because she realizes about the use and abuse of his political power. In order to escape from the castration anxiety, the male characters follow the voyeuristic avenue, they punish Blanca. Fierro puts her down criticizing the way she conducts her investigations; the Egyptian insults her and criticizes her appearance and her "lack" of a man; the police chief and the governor are about to fire her. But Blanca does not permit the objectification, for after she kills Santos she leaves Juarez and the country. Victim Juanita, with her liberal ideas about dating men, also embodies a threat for Cudberto and the gang that indirectly ends up killing her. The members of the gang had already expressed their misogynistic ideas when they convinced Cudberto to "get even" with Juanita. Therefore they chose to punish her by terminating her "liberal" sexuality and body. On the other hand, Cudberto wants to punish her but only to recover control over her body, not to terminate her. This plot is a chain of examples of the controlling gaze and the voyeuristic and sadist response of the male protagonists and perhaps the gaze of some of the spectators, for even if the spectators repudiate the acts of the male characters, the cinematographic medium convert them into an active part of the "looking at" act. According to Mulvey "film and the conventions within which it has consciously evolved, portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy" (60), thus they have an indirect controlling power with their gaze.

The plot of *Espejo Retrovisor* focuses on the quotidian and uneventful life of Paloma before she becomes a femicide victim. Paloma is a young middle-class woman who lives with her parents and her sister in Ciudad Juarez. She is an excellent student in a Catholic high school. She falls in love with Jorge, a new student in her school. For their part, Jorge and his friend Fabián apparently enjoy the advantages of wealth, but in reality they resent the fact that they are mostly ignored by their parents (Jorge's parents are absorbed with affairs outside their marriage and Fabián´s father with narcotrafficking). The lack of attention and the conduct they observed on their parents have yielded Jorge and Fabián to conceive life as something without attachments and based on breaking rules. However, Paloma teaches Jorge a new meaning of living and of being loved. Ironically, once the relationship of Paloma and Jorge is established and flourishing, Paloma is abducted, raped, and killed. The killer is a destitute young man who was abandoned in the streets as a child and has dedicated his life to robbery and other acts of vandalism. The plot of this film is to a certain extent episodic, for the events bear no direct, cause-and-effect relationship to each other. Instead, most of the events contribute to the viewer´s understanding of Paloma's character.

In the plot of *Espejo retrovisor*, Paloma is the object of the male gaze in three different ways. In Jorgito, her eight year-old friend, it is the gaze of a platonic love; Jorgito looks at Paloma but she is not objectivized, instead she is transformed into a fetish image, for she embodies the physical and spiritual beauty. Jorge, Paloma's boyfriend looks at Paloma but she also looks at him, so their gazes are corresponding in a way that they control each other. Jorge, Paloma's murderer controls Paloma, first in a scopophilic manner by spying on her. Then when he wants to escape from the

castration anxiety which Paloma personifies, he punishes her by killing her and raping her. He deprives her from the elements that make Paloma the symbolic "lack" for him: a family, a place in society, and her sexuality. The spectator can then identify with one of these three male protagonists and the control he has over the object depends on the subject on whom he will project his own desires.

In this analysis, it is concluded that despite the fact that the plots of *Bordertown* and *Traspatio* feature a sturdy, brave, strong-minded heroine, they are still objectivized by the male protagonists. The victims, on their part, are portrayed like mere parts of a capitalist machinery, their importance and destine are even measured by means of currency. For example, in *Bordertown* Lauren mentions that the whole system (the Mexican government, the US government and the maquiladora industry) does not care about all these Mexican women dying; for them, female maquiladora workers are just cheap, unproblematic labor and if they do become a problem, it is easier to replace them by taking the factories to other countries, because protecting them is more expensive and it is not profitable. This same vision is presented in *Traspatio,* in the scene where the Chihuahua governor asks the transnational industry representatives to do something to protect the female workers and they refuse to do anything because they have already "invested on them." Pam Cook and Claire Johnston, in their analysis of Raoul Walsh films, have already remarked on the analogy woman-currency in a capitalist system, they argue that "as a system, the circulation of money embodies phallic power and the right of possession; it is a system by which women are controlled (28)". Evidently, this is another way of objectivizing women in film and in a more

abstract way to expose a possible explanation of the femicides. A detailed analysis of the female character is included in the following section.

1.3 Focus on a character

It was mentioned above that the focus in *Bordertown* is on journalist Lauren (Jennifer Lopez), in *Traspatio*, the focus is on police officer Blanca (Ana de la Reguera), and in *Espejo retrovisor* the focus is on teenager Paloma (Geraldine Bazan). The protagonists Lauren and Blanca have some characteristics in common: they both are Latino, pretty and physically fit and they both are heroines. According to Boggs (11), the major appeal of those characters on whom a film focuses lies in the qualities that set them apart from ordinary people. Lauren, for example, puts her life at risk several times in the story with the objective of finding out who is behind the femicides: in spite of the chaos and violence surrounding the city, she questions people in Ciudad Juarez, she photographs the bus drivers, and she disguises herself as a maquiladora worker to entrap Eva's attackers, among other things. For her part, Blanca also risks her life in the process of finding out the truth about and stopping the killings: she arrests the Egyptian, she arrests the "Cheros," and she kills Mickey Santos. Lauren and Blanca had clear motivations: to discover who was to be blamed for all the horrendous acts of violence against women and to do something to stop them. The drive to achieve these aims and overcome a series of obstacles provides the plot of the story.

It has been noticed that filmmakers dealing with the Juarez femicides frequently feature a heroine; such is the case of Nava, Carrera, and Kevin Dobson (*The Virgin of Juarez,* 2006). It is hard to say when the figure of the heroine made her first

appearance, for in the seventies Princess Leia in *Star War* (*1977*) and Ripley in *Alien* (1979), for example, were already recognized as heroines. In the eighties, the figure of Sarah Connor in *Terminator (1984)* is remembered as one of the action female stars of that decade. In the nineties and in the new millennium, heroines played by Angelina Jolie, Uma Thurman, and Lucy Liu, for example, contributed to the construction of a genre where the "action babes" were the protagonists. Marc O'Day argues that action-babe cinema is an example of how, in commercial jargon, movies are made for and marketed to the broadest possible demographic. According to him, this type of cinema appeals to both (mainly young) men and women: men want to "have" the action-babe heroine in fantasy and women desire to "be" her in fantasy (204). The action-babe cinema phenomenon responds and contributes to changing gender representations and relationships, O'Day observes:

> Beautiful, well-qualified women are sometimes best placed to succeed in a competitive, individualist, appearance-obsessed meritocracy – to produce potent fantasies of female empowerment […]. Virtually unmarked by the rape or patriarchal abuse motifs which underpin the figure of the avenging heroine and less obsessed with rage, resistance and fighting back against white male oppression than much woman-centered action cinema, these films *assume that women are powerful* [his italics], offering heroines who are both vulnerable and strong and, above all, who survive and win, often in great style. (216)

It is true that the characters of Lauren and Blanca produce fantasies of female empowerment. However, as it was mentioned before, they are in fact marked by

patriarchal abuse: Lauren is attacked by the bus driver, who tries to rape her, and she is also attacked by Aris, who tries to kill her. For her part, Blanca has to accept the mistreatments on the part of the police chief and the Chihuahua governor. She also has to tolerate macho comments from Mickey Santos and from her job partner Fierro, and even the verbal attacks from the Egyptian. Therefore, these heroines differ from those babe heroines described by O'Day. They are also different in that Lauren and Blanca do survive but they do not exactly win in "great style," maybe because they both were working hard to get a job promotion and they both have to quit their jobs at the end, or perhaps because their attempts to re-establish order and to protect women in Juarez are not completely successful. Despite the fact that they are not heroines for whom the audience would cheer at the end, they do contribute to the termination of some femicides which were being committed by Mickey Santos and Aris. In a more ontological context, Lauren and Blanca can be regarded as winners, for Blanca realizes how corrupt the police force is and abandons the system and even the country, and Lauren rediscovers herself as a Mexican woman and by staying in Mexico she recovers her sense of knowing and accepting who she is. Blanca's decision seems like a logical one: she kills the perpetrator and so then she leaves the country. However, Lauren's decision to stay in the most dangerous city where a woman can be and to take over Diaz's risky position in the local newspaper, though altruistic, was judged by some viewers as unbelievable and even absurd. From a more conceptual perspective, the film could not have ended by contradicting the very point it is trying to make: to do something about the femicides, to break the silence, to stop the indifference with which not only the government is dealing with these killings but also the indifference with

which society regards these violent acts against women. Lauren could not have left Juarez knowing what she already knew; she had to stay, she had to give voice to the victims and their families.

Another aspect of these heroines is that they both are Latino women. There could be several reasons why directors Nava and Carrera both opted for Latinas instead heroines with other nationalities. First, it could be as a result of intertextuality. For example, journalist Lauren's character may have been inspired by the documentary *Señorita extraviada* in which Mexican-born filmmaker Lourdes Portillo arrives in Juarez to collect information about the femicides to make her film. Another reason to cast Latino heroines is the moral sense which comes with the process of sympathizing and/or self-identifying with the victims. Lauren and Blanca - like the victims - are placed in a position of disadvantage, for they struggle with a dehumanizing force (the perpetrators and people involved with the femicides), a corrupt system (the government and the police), and an attitude of indifference (that of people who have gotten used to the killing of women in Ciudad Juarez). A third reason could be the one explained by Mary Beltrán, who suggests that the entrance of Latino action heroes into cinema is an attempt to present protagonists appealing to an increasingly Latino audience. Beltrán states: "Latinos now comprise more than 12 percent of the population, making us the largest non-white ethnic group in the US, and are more likely than any other ethnic group to go to the movies […]" (190). She also argues that the popularity and box office success of actors such as Jennifer Lopez, Penelope Cruz, and Antonio Banderas, in both domestic and international markets, has prompted an interest in casting and promoting Latinas and Latinos in bigger budget films.

The Latino heroine had to follow the trend of the new millennium-heroine: physically fit but not exceptionally muscular, powerful but sexy, tough but feminine. Beltrán in her analysis of Jennifer Lopez´s character Karen Sisco in *Out of Sight* (1998) emphazises how director Steven Soderbergh reinforces Karen´s dual construction as sexy and feisty. She notes that frequently before Karen takes decisive and strong action, the camera lingers on Lopez´s body. In *Bordertown,* director Nava also opted to highlight the heroine's duality, for example in the sequence where Lauren is in a restaurant having dinner with Marcos (a friend of the perpetrator), which develops as follows: She has just cleverly managed to get the name of the man who tried to kill Eva from Marcos when she gets a phone called from her boss George, who amply congratulates her on the excellent article she wrote about the femicides for the newspaper, she stands up in front of the aquarium to take the call, and the peaceful and light blue of the aquarium makes the perfect background to frame the silhouette of Lopez´s body as her boss praises her brilliant work as a journalist (figure 2.1).

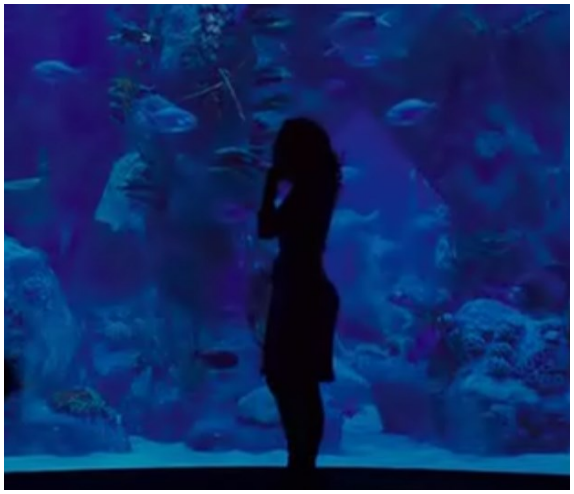

Fig. 2.1 Journalist Lauren (Jennifer Lopez). © 2006 *Bordertown.*

This is the moment where most of the Lauren attributes are presented at once: her cleverness in getting what she wants (Aris's name), her ability to write the femicides report, her beauty, and her sensuality. This is also a turning point in the movie, for Lauren gives her life a 180-degree turn; her job in Juarez was done, she had already gotten the job promotion she wanted, so she could have gone back to Chicago and continued with her life. Instead she decides to stay in Juarez, partly because of her identification of herself as a Mexican and possible victim, and partly because of ethical concerns. It is precisely this human and altruistic side of Lauren´s character, which she had not acknowledged before, that made her stay to help Eva, to uncover the perpetrators, to achieve justice for all those victims, to make a difference.

Director Carrera, on the other hand, does not seem to be too focused on Blanca´s dual construction. She is perspicacious, strong, and physically fit, but at no point is her femininity particularly emphasized (figure 2.2).

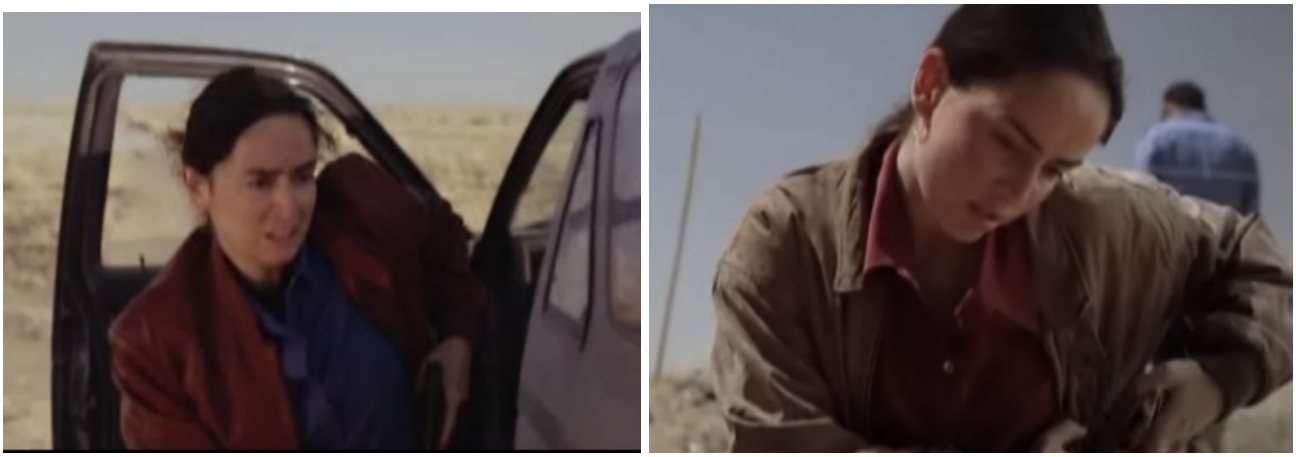

Fig. 2.2 Police officer Blanca (Ana de la Reguera). © 2009 *Traspatio*.

In contrast, the character on which *Espejo retrovisor* focuses, Paloma, differs from Blanca and Lauren in not being heroic. Furthermore, she is not a unique character; she represents an average girl, as many of the victims probably were. Apart from the way Paloma dies, this film could have been termed by Alfred Hitchcock "a slice of life," for it follows Paloma in her daily routine with family, schoolmates, and friends. But the film also illustrates the routine way with which women disappear in Juarez and how these crimes have become part of "normalcy." By ironic extrapolation, a femicide *is* "a slice of life" in Juarez. More about Paloma will be discussed in the section dedicated to the victims.

It is then clear that featuring an attractive, Latino heroine was a cinematographic strategy that directors Nava and Carrera used, among other reasons, to attract the attention of this ethnic audience, for this group is growing rapidly and it is very likely to go to the movies. The identification of the viewers with the protagonists is more likely to happen if they have some characteristics in common. Of course the visual pleasure also plays a role for the selection of characters. As mentioned above, the gaze of the audience defines whether the heroine is desired as an object to control and possess or as an ideal image of oneself.

1.4 Focus on ideas

In these films, the plot, the characters and the denouncement of a particular social problem have significance beyond the context of the films themselves, a significance that clarifies some aspects of life and of the human condition. The ideas are presented indirectly and subtly and as stated by Boggs (13), viewers are challenged to find an

interpretation that they feel best fits the film as a whole. Here, it is proposed that the three films represent the idea of dehumanization, a process that triggers the dismembering of a structure. This structure could be anything and everything; it could be a woman´s body, a family, the economy of a country, a society, a criminal justice system, a government, etc. Someone who no longer has a sense of what is human and civilized and becomes brutal out of necessity, greediness, or the effects of drugs or alcohol, breaks first her/his own structure as an individual, and then this profanation extends to others around her/him. Some of the de-structuralized beings are intimately linked to the unbalanced economy of a country; they either suffer the consequences of this disequilibrium or else they contribute to it, or both. A femicide evidently represents a corporal dismembering but it also represents a psychological dismembering. Physical torture, the destruction and extraction of internal organs, and the penetration of a body with objects that tear it up are obviously actions which dismember the corporeal structure of the female body. Physical and verbal abuse also destroys the equilibrium reached by means of sensuality and pleasure during the sexual act, which normally - humanly - should satisfy all people involved in such an act. A femicide is an emotional dismembering which tears apart the victim´s feelings of self-esteem and security. The femicides also reflect the disequilibrium of a justice system, which is dismembered by the dehumanization of those involved with it, those who have previously been de-structuralized as individuals. Finally, the femicides and their representations echo the dismembering of a corrupted society, which looks at these crimes as something quotidian. The situation is reminiscent of a story that Blanca recounts in *Traspatio*: A village holds a ceremony every month. One night, a tiger comes and eats one of the

townspeople, shocking everyone, but later, when the tiger continues to come and devour one person each month, they grow used to the slaughter and consider it a part of the ceremony. Blanca compares the village to Ciudad Juarez: “Así es esto de las muertas, una muerta cada mes o cada semana, ya se sabe, nadie se agobia, todo mundo se indigna por un rato pero ya estamos en la espera de la próxima visita del tigre.”

2. Representation of the victims

2.1 Direct victims

A section of Chapter 1 was devoted to the representation of the victims of the Juarez femicides. There, it was concluded that even though documentaries provide valuable material for the reconstruction of the ethos or group identity of the victims, the ego or self-identity was the missing piece of information that only the victims themselves (if anyone) could have been able to provide in order to complete their identity formation. Therefore, it is only right to leave their identity inconclusive and not try to determine whether they were “good” or “bad.” In fiction films, the audience is presented with the opportunity to “meet” some of the fictional victims, to see how they dress, how they think, what they do and, more importantly, if they – as the Mexican police alleges - contribute to their own terrible fate. It is important to analyze these fictional characters because according to Boggs, representative characters serve as “cinematic vehicles to illustrate a widely accepted truth about human nature” (16). This statement seems to cast doubt on the previous observation about the impossibility of reconstructing the identity of the victims in non-fiction films. Thus, is it being concluded here that in non-

fiction films the testimony of a victim´s family is not enough to reconstruct the victim´s identity but that a fictional character is significant enough to illustrate a truth about human nature? Does this mean that fiction films acquire more importance than documentaries? How do the victims who are constructed by their relatives and friends differ from the victims constructed by filmmakers? How do filmmakers construct these victims? Do they not do it by means of relatives' testimony or by the newspapers' reports or by other media reports? Here, an attempt to answer all these questions will be made.

In order to start the discussion, a quick description of the victims will be made. In *Bordertown* the victim and survivor is a young, maquiladora worker named Eva (Figure 2.3). She came from Oaxaca and lives with her mother and her little sister in a poor neighborhood in Juarez. In *Traspatio* the cases of four victims are presented. The first victim is Karen, who according to the social worker Sara came from the state of Hidalgo. She did not have family in Juarez; she lived with her boyfriend – an Egyptian man - and worked in a maquiladora. Another victim is Juanita (Figure 2.4), a young, poor woman who came from a small town in Chiapas. She lives with her cousin Margarita and they work in the same maquiladora. The third victim and survivor is Hilda (Figure 2.5), who was a maquiladora worker when she was abducted. The fourth victim and survivor is a schoolgirl (Figure 2.6) who is abducted by Mickey Santos. The victim in *Espejo Retrovisor* is Paloma (Figure 2.7), a young woman who attends a Catholic high school. Her family is from a medium-low social class and has lived in Juarez since she was little.

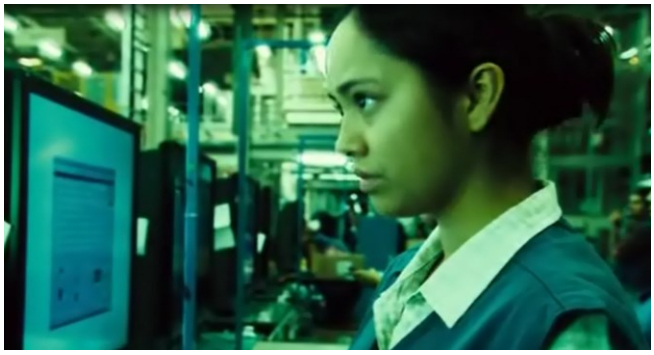

Fig. 2.3 Eva working at the Maquila. © *Bordertown* 2006.

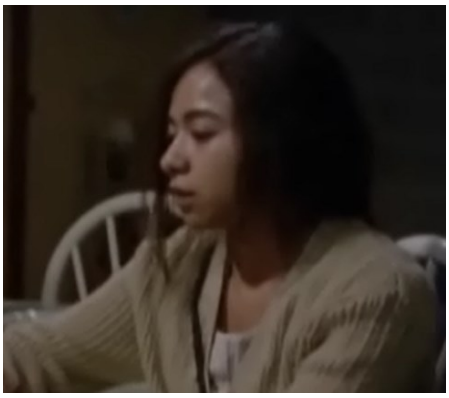

Fig. 2.4 The day Juanita arrived in Juarez. © 2009 *Traspatio*.

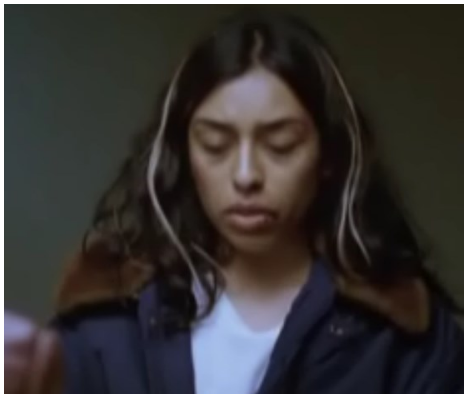

Fig. 2.5 Hilda giving her testimony. © 2009 *Traspatio*.

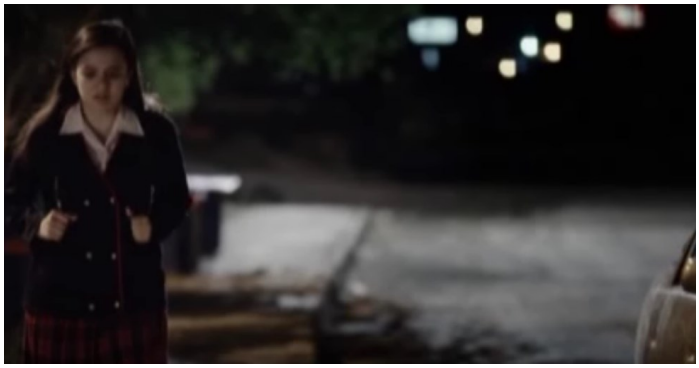

Fig. 2.6 Schoolgirl who is abducted by Mickey Santos. © 2009 *Traspatio.*

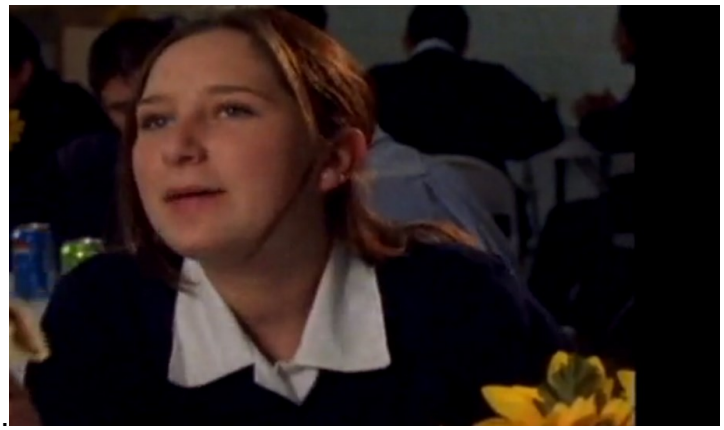

Fig. 2.7 Paloma chatting at the school cafeteria. © 2002 *Espejo retrovisor.*

Physically speaking, Eva, Juanita, Hilda, and the schoolgirl represent the victim with the profile that has been described repeatedly in police reports, newspapers, and other media: age range 13-25 years old, dark skin, long, dark hair, and slim. Paloma, nevetheless is a white woman with light brown hair and blue eyes. According to Maria Socorro Tabuenca, in some representations which aim to portray the femicide victims, a race stigma does arise. In her analysis of the film *16 en la lista* (1998), Tabuenca talks about a rearticulation of ethnicity and social class detected in the film by means of the victims and potential victims. In particular, she points out that in the aforementioned film, it is suggested that dark-skinned women tend to put themselves more at risk than white women by accepting invitations to go out with unknown men. On the other hand, white women are constructed as "pure" in the film (91). In this analysis, it was noticed that in *Espejo retrovisor,* Paloma - who is the white victim - puts herself at risk by going out with Fabian and Jorge shortly after she meets them. Paloma was aware of the danger to which a young woman was exposed in Juarez and she still trusted them. Despite the fact that Jorge was her classmate, he was new in the school and therefore she did not know anything about him. She does not get killed by Fabian or Jorge, but they could well have been the culprits. In fact, in many representations, there is a theory that the culprits are rich, young men who have a fascination with raping and killing young women. Juanita, the dark-skinned woman in *Traspatio,* also puts herself at risk, for she goes out with Cudberto shortly after she had just met him. However, neither Juanita's case nor Paloma's are sufficient to conclude that there is a rearticulation of ethnicity and class in the films analyzed here. Both women put themselves are risk unintentionally; they both went out with unknown people, and they both got killed. Two conclusions can

be drawn: 1) young women are being killed in Juarez despite their skin color and class, and 2) potential victims are either in the adolescence or young-adulthood stage of their life cycle - as described by Erikson (122) – and are therefore naturally curious and eager to explore and experiment despite the dangerous environment sorrounding them.

Juanita, nevertheless, does more than going on a date with the recently-met Cudberto; she also initiates an intimate relationship with him which she does not intend to respect. Furthermore, she provokes Cudberto's jelousy and anger by making it clear that she wants to "meet" other men (Figure 2.8). Thus, there are two factors here that indicate a difference between Juanita and Paloma: First, Juanita wants to enjoy her sexual freedom in the land of sexual crimes – she tells Cudberto "mi cuerpo es mi cuerpo" – and second, she intentionally challenges Cudberto´s "man pride," creating a conflict that potentially points to domestic violence.

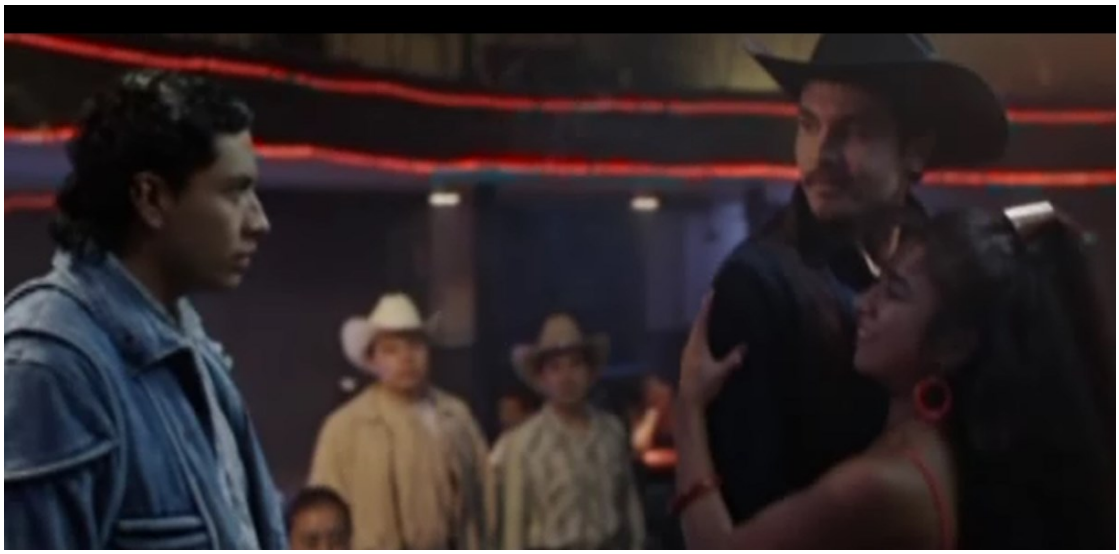

Fig. 2.8 Juana dancing with another man when Cudberto arrives. © 2009 *Traspatio*.

This aspect of Juanita's personality cannot be extrapolated to all dark-skinned women in the films, for Eva and Margarita, for example, do not seem to have the same desire for sexual freedom. Another common denominator in the films analyzed here is that Karen, Eva, Juanita, and Hilda were maquiladora workers at the time they were abducted. Julia Monárrez-Fragoso argues that in the 1993-2001 period only 20 percent of the murdered women worked in the maquilas and that murder and exploitation are not closely related in this context (Volk and Schlotterbeck 128). However, Volk and Schlotterbeck contend that "the murders cannot be understood without recognizing the specific ways that maquila developement has shaped both the political and the sexual economy of the border […]" (128). Regardless of these statistics and arguments, one thing is unquestionable: most of the representations of the Juarez femicides portray the victims as maquiladora workers. Furthermore, Volk and Schlotterbeck not only note the frequency with which cultural producers emphazise women´s active incorporation into wage labor but they even argue that in many representations, it is suggested that it was in fact the integration of women into the wage economy what generated the "disorder" in Juarez and that "order" can be restored only when female passivity is reasserted (122). Evidently, Volk and Schlotterbeck observed a strong correlation between maquiladora workers and the Juarez femicides in the representations they analyzed. It is interesting that in the representations they analyzed, women's passivity is suggested as the solution to the femicides. In contrast, in *Bordertown* as well as some of the documentaries discussed in chapter 1, women's passivity is suggested as a factor that initiated the femicides, for it is alleged that one reason why the maquila industry prefers to hire women over men is that women are more docile, less likely to complain, less

demanding, and less prone to initiate a union. In fact, in most representations, maquiladora workers are depicted as passive. Eva in *Bordertown* and Margarita and Juanita in *Traspatio*, for example, are shown working in maquilas giving no sign of a desire to depart from established rules.

On the other hand, Juanita does embody a maquiladora worker whose attitude could lead to "disorder." As mentioned above, Juanita has liberal ideas and is eager to start a new, permissive lifestyle, earning her own wages and controlling her own time, money, and body. Kathleen Staudt explains that, once employed, female maquiladora workers start spending their wages on night-time entertainment, such as discotheques, dance halls, bars, etc., they are soon depicted by patriarchal society as "maqui-locas" (116). Evidently, Juanita and Margarita exemplify the maquiladora workers as urban consumers, for they both go to dancing clubs after work. However, in *Traspatio*, the maquiladora worker who enjoys night-time entertainment is not necessarily portrayed as a woman who creates "disorder" around her. Margarita, for example, seems to work hard (she is a production-line supervisor), she takes responsibility for her own house and car, she is aware of and cautious about her sorroundings, and apparently urban entertainment has been part of her lifestyle in Juarez for a considerable time. Unfortunately, Juanita's actions and murder have far more emphasis in the film than Margarita's apparently orderly existence, in such a way that the viewer is more liable to establish a connection between the maqui-loca and the woman who sows "disorder" and ultimately contributes to her own awful end.

On the other hand, the case of students like Paloma in *Espejo retrovisor* and the schoolgirl in *Traspatio* support the argument that not all the victimes were maquiladora

workers. As Tabuenca states, "*Espejo retrovisor* disarticulates the stereotype that has been assigned to most victims of femicide – that they are prostitutes, exotic dancers, or *maquiladora* workers" (98). But such cases are unusual in films and novels representing the femicides.

Another characteristic shared by the Juarez femicide victims is the fact that many of them came from other parts of Mexico, where they could potentially have remained alive, had they not come to Juarez. Clearly, the femicides are correlated with the geography of the targeted city, which is a contested zone where gender identitites and the concept of life are rearticulated. For example, Eva was born in Oaxaca, where her family had a piece of land, but because they could not pay taxes, the government expropriated it. With no other means to survival, they did what many other poor people from the provinces did: move to Juarez to work in the maquila. Shortly after they got to Juarez, Eva's father crossed the border to the US to look for a job and they never heard from him again. Eva, her mother, and her younger sister went through a major transition when they moved to Juarez; they had to get used to the urban environment of a border city, they had to adjust to life without the presence of the father, Eva had to work to support the family, and they had to get used to living in poverty and sub-standard conditions of hygiene, for Eva's salary was insufficient to allow a better lifestyle. She complains: "there is no money here, the government and the factories takes [take] everything."

Juanita is another clear example of identity reformulation as a function of geography. When she lived in Chiapas, she used to take care of her widowed, ageing father and do the chores of a housewife, and like every other woman in the province, she was

expected to marry, have kids and remain a housewife. Once in Juarez, however, Juanita goes through an important identity re-structuration which begins with a haircut. Pnina Galpaz-Feller explains that a haircut is

> A universal symbol in initiation ceremonies that indicate the passage from the world of childhood to that of adults, and from the world of mature adults to that of old age, from a world of renunciation back to the circle of life, from a world of mourning back to routines, and the like. (193)

With the music of Tex-Mex star Selena in the background and the star's posters as a reference for looks, Margarita tells Juanita "te voy a quitar lo india" as she cuts Juanita's hair bangs to mark the initiation of a new lifestyle. In this film, it is suggested that the reformulation of the geography-related ethos identity experienced by Juanita is typical of young women coming from the provinces to Juarez. For example, in the scene where Juanita is being examined by the maquila doctor prior to starting her employment, he gives her some contraceptives and explains: "Mira Juana aquí las muchachas cambian sus costumbres, se liberan, como dicen, tienen su dinero y toman sus propias decisiones, sobre todo cuando sus padres no están aquí." Juana responds defensively: "pues sí, pero yo no me voy a embarazar nomás a lo buey." Juanita's answer shows that she is going to change her lifestyle just as the doctor is indicating but she is planning to be cautious. This is subsequently confirmed when she has sex with Cudberto.

As noted above, the reformulation of the potential victims' geography-related *ethos* involves adjustment to a new environment. Some of the victims in the films are portrayed as women who are aware of and prepared for some of the changes they will

experience upon their arrival in Juarez. However – as noted by Esther Chávez Cano – they are not prepared for all the dangers that await them: “These women have been taught to work. But they haven´t been taught to live in a violent city with problems like this one [the high rate of femicides]. They come here very trusting, because in rural areas customs are much different” (Quinones 146). These films also suggest that women are not only unprepared to live in such a dangerous environment but also that once they have a sense of the danger, they know that the only way to avoid it is by leaving the city, which is unfeasible in most cases. Chapter one discussed Marilyn Nissim-Sabat’s theory about the important role that social pressure and naïve empiricism play in decisions made by potential victims of natural disasters. In the representations analyzed in this chapter, it was noticed that these two factors plus the lack of economical resources are frequently portrayed as the reasons why some potential victims and survivors of the Juarez femicides do not leave the city. Eva, for example, after surviving the horrible experience of being raped, tortured, lashed, and left for dead in the desert, stays in Juarez. She attempts to illegally cross the border to the US but to no avail. As for Hilda, after surviving a horrific experience similar to the one Eva suffered, she tells Sara and Blanca that she will continue working in the maquila “como siempre.” Although it is not explained why these survivors decided to stay in Juarez, a strong possibility is that they think they will not be able to “survive” economically somewhere else. This is ironic, for they barely survived the violence of Juarez. On the other hand, for Paloma and other people in Juarez, naïve empirisicm seems to be the main reason for staying in Juarez despite the violence: after so many years of hearing about the murders and disapearances of young women, they have

grown accustomed to the femicides; therefore, they underestimate the danger. But fear, denial, and lack of economic resources may also have influenced their decision.

The last aspect that will be mentioned is the constant reference to the victims' religious inclination in the films. Scenes where the victims or their families are praying or talking about God and evil, shots of crucifixes, and images of Our Lady of Guadalupe are vibrant theological indicators of their faith. Literature dealing with theology and film frequently begins by refreshing our notions of the objective of cinema and the effects it produces in the viewer. For instance, William Telford, in *Cinéma Divinité: Religion, Theology and the Bible in Film,* contends that film is not only a source of entertainment or escapism, but that it also represents the complexity of human life and human values (16). Furthermore, it is argued that cinema is an important means of transmitting religious beliefs. Margaret Miles in *Seeing And Believing: Religion And Values In The Movies* explains that the reason why cinema became pivotal to religion is that it affected so many more people than any other media, "that it began to challenge 'the interpretive monopoly of religious and state authorities' […] in a way that newspapers and books had not" (3). She argues that film, like ancient Greek theatre, identifies and explores a central question: How should human beings live? In other words, films describe and define characters' orientations and attitudes, and evaluate the adequacy of their values. In the films analyzed here, it was found that the values and beliefs of the characters representing the victims tend to be scrutinized more (although unjustly) than those of other characters. This is due either to the negative image that some media or the Mexican police have constructed of victims or because of the inherent stigma attached to victims of sexual crimes. In analyzing the representations of the Juarez femicide

victims in the work of Julián Cardona and Octavio Paz, Volk and Schlotterbeck noted that these authors emphasize a Mexican-Catholic binary which divides Mexican womanhood between the “Virgen de Guadalupe” and “La Chingada” (the “violated woman”) (136). This observation fits with the dualism that is frequently used in the reconstruction of the victims’ identity. In this light, it is not surprising that the victims in these films are presented either as well-behaved Catholics or else as women who are not living under “God´s rules.” Three victims clearly follow the Catholic faith: 1) Hilda, a Catholic femicide survivor, refuses to abort the baby she is expecting. This pregnancy was a result of her being repeatedly raped by the “Cheros” gang. Blanca and Sara offer Hilda the option of aborting the baby, but she responds: “yo no quiero tenerlo pero Dios si quiere.” Blanca reproaches Hilda: “lo vas a dejar amarrado con cinturones a una cuna mientras trabajas como hacen las otras?” For Blanca, Hilda´s decision to have the baby does not make much sense even though Hilda is following “God´s will.” For Blanca, it is more human to abort the baby than to bring it up to suffer the same conditions of poverty, violence, and insecurity that Hilda is facing. 2) Paloma was also raised Catholic and attended a Catholic school run by nuns. When she was little, her mother told her that in order to achieve her goals in life, she needed to be a good girl and to believe in God. Despite Paloma´s religious inclination, she nonetheless becomes a victim of a sexual crime. 3) Eva was also brought up in a Catholic home and is devoted to Our Lady of Guadalupe. In order to protect Lauren when the journalist disguises herself as a maquila worker to entrap Eva´s attacker, Eva gives her a medal with an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Furthermore, Eva says that she was abducted, raped, tortured, and almost murdered by “el Diablo.” This statement creates confusion among the people

who listen to her testimony, for they believe that her fanaticism prevents her from distinguishing the real from the imaginary. However, she is not referring to the devil as a satanic figure but rather as something that – judging by the atrocities he is capable of committing - cannot qualify as human anymore. She thinks of her attacker as a devil in the sense of an unscrupulous, unprincipled, and unethical being. Hector Domínguez-Ruvalcaba explains: “The incomprehensibility of violence, expressed as it exceeds the line of senses (what makes sense, what is meaningful, what is sensual), reaches the level of the unspeakable. It poses the idea of ‘Evil as ethical […]” (72). From this perspective, Eva, Lauren, and Blanca can be regarded as saviors, for they defeat evil and they risk their lives for the sake of others. This role of the liberator is one in which Jennifer Lopez has been cast before, for example in *The Cell* (2000), and *Enough* (2002).

Despite the – at times - persistent references to the religious inclinations of the characters analyzed here, their faith is not portrayed as fanaticism, which might have added confusion and uncertainty to the already contentious subject. Miles notes:

> Religion is sometimes used as a foil to demonstrate the greater seriousness of "real" issues, such as sex, power, and possessions. At other times, film characters may adhere to religious belief passionately and mindlessly, usually causing personal and social mayhem and damage. (17)

One example of the fanaticism described by Miles can be found in *The Virgin of Juarez*, where a victim-survivor of the Juarez femicides exhibits stigmata and later acquires the status of a saint. Especially after surviving the atrocious sexual torture and

attempted murder, Mariela is regarded as a virgin whom not even the devil was capable of profaning. The whole plot develops in a context of religious excess which diverts attention from the femicides. Dennis Schwartz describes this film as “A volatile mixture of religious drama and crime story that doesn't mix well and in the end the film implodes” (Rotten Tomatoes).

Going back to the dualism of the victims’ identity, Juanita represents the opposite of Eva, Hilda, and Paloma. She does come from a Catholic family, for when she arrives in Juarez she gives Margarita a crucifix and a picture of her Dad, both presents from her dad to Margarita. However, Juanita does not have a traditional Catholic sense of morality when it comes to sexual relationships. Not only does she have non-committed sex with Cudberto but she flirts and seems to be planning to have sex with other men. Based on Volk and Schlotterbeck’s argument, Juanita embodies “La Chingada.”

Summarizing, these films include two victims whose religious inclination was not determined (Karen, who got killed by her boyfriend, and the schoolgirl who survived Santos’s attack), one victim who followed the Catholic way but nevertheless got killed (Paloma), two victims who had a religious inclination and survived the femicides (Eva and Hilda), and one victim who did not follow God´s will and got killed (Juanita). It is concluded therefore that these films do not point to a strong correlation between women´s religious beliefs and their status as victims of the femicides. Instead these films suggest that religion has become an obsolete means of governing people’s actions. In her analysis of *The Day After* (1983) and *Testament* (1983), Miles concludes that these films depict religion as “helpless and ineffectual in the face of human suffering and social chaos” (20) and show that “ethical decisions affecting institutions,

national and global politics, and business are seen to require a more complex frame of reference than traditional religious principles offer" (20). This statement also applies to the films analyzed here, for perpetrators are portrayed as not making any distinction between bestiality and civilization in the most basic and natural sense of the words, let alone understanding and honoring rules made by humans based on more complex criteria, notably religious rules. In other words, religion is portrayed as ineffectual in ruling human behavior. Lastly, it is suggested here that in these representations of the Juarez femicides, just as in Hitchcock's films – according to Paul Giles - the culture of Catholicism promotes the representation of a "world out of control, propelled as it is by the vertiginous desires of sex, crime, and metaphysics, all of which transgress the boundaries of small-town decorum and innocence" (330).

In order to write a conclusion about the representation of the victims in fiction film, the questions posed at the beginning of the section will be recalled. Based on Erik Erikson´s theory, which states that identity is formed by the egos and the ethos identity, it was decided in chapter 1 that even though documentaries provide valuable material for the reconstruction of the ethos or group identity of the victims, the ego or self-identity was the missing piece of information that only the victims themselves (if anyone) could have been able to provide in order to complete their identity formation. In this chapter, I concluded that the fictional victims constructed in films are purely representative and that their identity can therefore be fully constructed. In other words, fictional victims are merely cinematographic images; they do not have an egos or self-identity. For its part, their ethos or collective identity is reconstructed by means of the groups they represent: maquiladora workers, women, the poor, the young, migrants from the provinces, etc. In

spite the similarities with real victims, fictional victims are nobody in particular. In this sense, fiction is a more evocative genre for portraying the victims' group identity than non-fiction. However, fictional and non-fictional representations are inter-connected, for fictional victims are partly created based on the testimony of victims' family and friends as well as authorities and other witnesses, as recorded in media accounts, documentaries, etc. This chain of intertextualities, as theorized by Riffaterre, will be amply discussed in an upcoming chapter.

In summary, the victims represented in *Bordertown* and *Traspatio* physically fit the profile described by the majority of police reports, media reports, and family and friends blogs; they are young and slim and have dark skin and dark, long hair. They also fit the average social group; they are maquiladora workers, they come from other parts of Mexico, and they are poor. Of course the exceptions are represented in *Espejo retrovisor*, for the victim is white, has light brown hair and blue eyes, she is not a maquiladora worker, and she does not come from a Mexican province. In the majority of cases represented in these films the victims did not do anything to contribute to their awful destiny therefore they are portrayed like powerless in the hands of their perpetrators.

2.2 Indirect Victims

Inarguably, victims' families and friends are the other victims of the femicides, but in these films the absence of the victims' families is remarkable. In the previous chapter, it was concluded that in documentaries the victims' mothers were the family members who usually testified about the disappearances of their daughters. It is thus remarkable

how in fiction films all the victims' mothers are absent, with two exceptions: Eva and Paloma. Eva's mother appears at the beginning of *Bordertown* when she takes Eva to see Díaz, but for the rest of the film she is mostly gone. In *Traspatio*, the mothers of Hilda, Karen, and the schoolgirl are never mentioned or shown. Juanita´s mother has passed away, and all we know beyond this is that her father is too old to take care of her. In *Espejo retrovisor*, on the other hand, Paloma grows up with a palpable maternal presence. In fact, Paloma's sister complains that her mother has a preference for Paloma. This film remarks an important point about the suffering of the victims' families which is not emphasized in the other films due to the absence of these characters. It is suggested that victims' families besides having to deal, of course, with the horrible experience of having a relative subjected to the most dehumanizing acts (abduction, mutilation, rape, strangulation, burning, and murder), they have to deal with their own feelings of guilt, wondering if they could have done something to prevent the murder. This is shown in the scene where Paloma's mom, in mourning, calls her "mi niña" and "mi chiquita." Deborah Spungen explains that this is usually a sign of self-blame:

> When told of the murder of their child, irrespective of the victim´s age, parents cry out, "My baby! My baby!" Many parents have reported seeing the image of their newborn or very young child in their arms, rather than a picture of the child at the time of the murder. To many parents, the vision of the baby symbolizes the responsibility they felt, often in the form of a silent or whispered promise to care for and keep the child safe from harm. This can lead to self-blame and guilt. (66)

This is particularly interesting for in other representations, the victims' families are shown sad and angry with other people but not with themselves.

Further analysis of the victims' family and friends is difficult because the films do not focus on them. One reason may be that fiction films, unlike documentaries, have the magical capacity to bring the victims to life so that testimony from friends and family is not necessary.

3. The causes

One of the main objectives of reading about or watching a representation of the Juarez femicides is to try to understand a paramount question: Who is committing these crimes? These representations point to several culprits and to several factors which contribute to the insecurity of the city, the corruption of the system, and the impunity following the crimes. Each film focuses on a few theories by means of the cases examined. Whether they are the strongest theories, or those that the director believes in, or those that suit the producers' political agendas is unknown. In *Bordertown* the perpetrators are two: first, Aris, a man whose family is extremely wealthy and who has strong links with the government and the maquiladora industry in both Mexico and the US; and second, a bus driver who works for the maquiladora personnel transportation and who is in charge of abducting women for Aris. The ostensible reasons for assaulting women in this film are money and sexual pleasure for the driver, and sexual pleasure in raping a woman while strangling her for Aris. Eva identifies Aris as her attacker at a party. He is chatting with a group of similarly wealthy and powerful people, and nothing indicates that he is not integrated into that group, for he seems to blend in perfectly well.

R.W. Connell explains that men who attack and harass women "are unlikely to think of themselves as deviants. On the contrary, they usually feel they are entirely justified […]. They are authorized by an ideology of supremacy" (Tabuenca-Córdoba 95). So at no moment is Aris portrayed as a perpetrator who repents of his actions. In *Traspatio* the culprits are: 1) "El Sultán," an Egyptian man with a history of sexual offenses in both Mexico and the US. He is the main suspect in Karen's murder, since he was involved in a physically abusive relationship with her when she died. In spite of Karen's accusations about domestic violence, the police never arrested him, allegedly because the local police chief received money from him to cover his crimes. This character has been repeatedly portrayed in fictional as well as non-fictional representations of the femicides. 2) Mickey Santos is the owner of bars, clubs, and other profitable businesses in Juarez. He met "El Sultán" in a jail in El Paso, in the section for sexual offenders. He pretends that he is a clean and serious businessman and insists that "El Sultán" is responsible for the killings of all these women. In reality, Santos also pays the police chief to cover for his crimes; this is why he has a clean criminal record. At least one of his motivations seems to be a sexual fascination with schoolgirls, for he is seen scrutinizing them and is ultimately caught and killed while abducting one of them. 3) Another culprit is Cudberto, who wanted to start a relationship with Juanita but was frustrated by her desire to "meet" other men. Out of jealousy and anger, Cudberto is pressured by a gang to abduct her (to "teach her a lesson"). In the end, they force him at gunpoint to kill her. In a way, this case could be classified as domestic violence. However, I argue that it is not, since regardless of his jealousy and anger, Cudberto is clearly manipulated by the gang. In fact, he holds feminist opinions regarding the femicides, as can be seen in this

sequence: The gang members complain about the police organizing raids to apprehend women's murderers. They say that more men than women are killed every day and that nobody seems to care. Cudberto objects:

> Los muertos hombres casi siempre traen fusca [a gun], son narcos una parte grande y se mueren en broncas [fights] de fuego cruzado. En cambio a las muertas no, les caen nomás porque sí, para ponchárselas [to rape them] y les cortan un seno o un pedazo de piel entre las piernas o las muerden. Si por lo menos tuvieran una pistola, tendrían la oportunidad de defenderse.

Here, two opposite sides of the male figure are portrayed. On the one hand, Cudberto represents an individual who is part of a patriarchal society which has been targeted in many representations as the main factor triggering the femicides. For example, in some representations, male resentment against women is triggered when women are employed by maquiladoras, for that challenges pervasive notions of the male as the primary wage earner. In other representations, men resent women for becoming urban consumers and for enjoying night-time entertainment. However, Cudberto, despite being part of that "hateful" patriarchal society, clearly does not resent Juanita for having a job or going to dancing clubs. He is angry because Juanita did not respect their relationship. Of course, he tries to control Juanita´s decisions, and he even invades her space and body, but in spite of his rage, jealousy, and frustration, he did not have the intention of killing her until threatened with death. In short, Cudberto does not embody the man whose resentment against independent women leads him to kill one.

On the other hand, the members of the gang are angry at women because the police are investigating the femicides and organizing raids to capture suspects. This has had negative consequences for them. Unlike the “Cheros” gang, this gang does not seem to kill women on a regular basis, for they do not mention having killed women before, and they do not leave traces on Juanita’s body corresponding to previously observed patterns for the murders (for example, cuts related to Satanic cults, bitten nipples, etc.). Of course, the cold-bloodedness with which they rape her and oblige Cudberto to kill her might suggest they have done it before. But it might also suggest that they do it because of a combination of the following motivations: They resent Juanita’s attitude, they take advantage of Cudberto’s anger, they want to get even because they were detained during the raid, and they want to have extra fun while drinking and getting high. Above all, they do it because they can, because for them Juanita is just another type of entertainment. They see her as nobody, and killing her means nothing to them. Probably the impunity surrounding the femicides also encourages them to act, for it has been said that in Juarez anyone can kill a woman for whatever reason and not get punished. Sergio González Rodríguez in *The Femicide Machine* notes that these murders “imply a misogynistic furor that escalated from an isolated crime to a collective ravaging; especially in terms of the ‘copycat effect,’ in which imitators stalk victims and replicate the femicide machine´s efficiency. Impunity is the murderers’ greatest stimulant” (72). Juanita’s case is not representative of domestic violence because the assassin was obliged to kill her. However, it does illustrate how an unintentional or irregular killer might progress to being a perpetrator slaughtering women on a regular basis.

4) The other culprits in *Traspatio* are the “Cheros.” They abduct women, mainly maquiladora workers, and keep them captive in basements to rape, torture, and kill. The objective is to experience sexual pleasures that can only be obtained when having sex with a woman who is being strangled in the act. Hilda, a survivor of these horrors, testifies:

> ‘El manjar del ángel’ le llaman: Te violan diario pero guardan el manjar porque ese es pa´ cuando ya te van a matar. Te lo cuentan ellos mismos. Es que en la última violada te asfixian y entonces aprietas mucho con el sexo, pos´ porque ya te estas muriendo. Se lo rifan entre ellos y el que lo gana lo goza.

When arrested by the police, the “Cheros” claim that they killed women following orders from “El Sultán” in order to “prove” him innocent, for the crimes continued even though he was in jail. Allegedly, they got paid 1200 dollars for every woman they killed. Once again, money and sexual pleasure are the perpetrator’s motivations.

Evidently, the various causes for the femicides represented in this film have a connection. This is illustrated in a scene where four vehicles meet at a crossroad. One vehicle is the governor’s car. He is coming to Juarez to give a speech in which he intends to divert the public´s attention away from the femicides. He says that the media should focus on the good things that are happening in Juarez rather than on publicizing a negative image of the city. This first road represents denial and impunity for the sake of political and economic interests. The second car is the one in which Blanca and other women are traveling as they come back from the desert, where they found a clandestine industrial refrigerator. Presumably women´s bodies were kept fresh there

while their internal organs were carved out (this theory is mentioned but not fully explored in the film). This road suggests organ-trafficking. The third one is Santos´s car; he is driving to Juarez to "take care of his businesses." He also has the intention of abducting, raping, and probably killing a girl. This third road brings in the sexual motives of wealthy and powerful people. The fourth car is where Cudberto and the gang are transporting a sedated Juanita. This road represents either domestic violence or the violence of "copycats."

In *Espejo retrovisor,* the assassin is a young man who was abandoned as a child and grew up on the streets. At the start of the film, a radio announcer explains:

> Los niños indigentes son personas olvidadas por un sistema de gobierno que no ha logrado integrarlos a la sociedad. Al contrario, estos niños se convierten en delincuentes por la deshumanización de las clases sociales que no hacen nada por ayudar, ni exigirle al gobierno que actúen en consecuencia.

This statement not only gives the viewer a clue about what is going to happen but it also transmits the film's point of view. Clearly, it is established that abandoned kids are resentful beings who are likely to become criminals. In her analysis of *Espejo retrovisor,* Tabuenca notes that "the killers are presented as the product of a more complex societal problem rather than solitary psychopaths or monstrous 'others' […]" (98). By developing Paloma´s case, the film confirms that the "niños indigentes" play a big role in the femicides. This theory is rarely mentioned in other representations. In fact, it is not fully explored in the film, for there are many questions that are left unanswered. For example, how do the silence and impunity which are constantly brought up in most

representations fit in this theory? Why have these criminals not been caught and punished? Do the police have an interest in protecting these criminals? What would that interest be? In the most general terms, every significant character should guide the audience through his or her story, helping them to understand the plot. In the case of Paloma's perpetrator, we do not know enough about him to understand the plot through his story. Anston and Savona argue that in order to understand a character, "we need to take account of her/his relations to all of the others and to the many functions and modes of signification" (41). Once again, this is impossible, for not much information is provided about the killer. It is known that he was abandoned as a child and that he burglarized houses and robbed people, but his character needed to be developed more in depth.

Another point is made in the film by means of Fabián and Jorge. These kids are the children of wealthy and influential people who do not lack money or anything it can buy. However, just like indigent kids, they lack attention from their families. Fabián´s father is a narco–trafficker who is too busy to even scold his son for dropping out of school or for crashing a brand-new car. Jorge´s parents are busy having affairs outside their marriage. They do not even bother to hide their infidelities from their son. In a way, these kids are also abandoned. They think very little of life, and to attract attention, they keep on breaking rules, in school, at home, and on the streets. In spite of the similarities between wealthy and indigent kids, rich kids are portrayed in the film as merely "naughty," whereas underprivileged kids are portrayed as criminals. Rich teenagers can write graffiti and express their anger that way, they can break chairs at school to show their "power," they can go to a bar and drink when they are underage, they can race

their cars and put themselves and other people at risk by doing so, but the film suggests that they are not murderers. On the other hand, teenagers who were “niños indigentes” are to be blamed for the femicides. Evidently, this film contradicts the theory that wealthy and powerful people are behind the killings, which has frequently been illustrated in films, novels, and documentaries such as *Bordertown, Traspatio, Desert Blood, 2666,* and *Silencio en Juarez,* among others. The “niños indigentes” are victims of parents who abandon them, of a government and society that ignore them, and some of them remain victims of a system that points to them as the murderers of the women in Juarez.

In the three films analyzed here, other theories are mentioned but not fully developed. For example, in *Bordertown,* Díaz explains to Lauren: “Women are being used for snuff films, people are killing women and taking their organs, serial killers are coming from everywhere. You want to kill a woman for any reason, you come to Juarez.” In *Traspatio,* based on Hilda´s testimony, Blanca speculates that there is a serial killer who freezes the victims´ bodies (possibly for organ-trafficking) in an industrial refrigerator and disposes them in the desert after a few months. In the same film, the radio announcer mentions the following hypotheses: narco–Satanism, snuff films, organ-trafficking, and copycat killing as a recreational activity. In *Espejo retrovisor,* a radio announcer mentions that a young woman was attacked by a bus driver who worked for personnel transportation. Also, in a newspaper displayed in the same film, the headline reads: “Mentor acosó a 14 alumnas.” Some of these theories have been explored in other representations. In *The Virgin of Juarez,* for example, narco-Satanism is presented as one of the dominant causes for the femicides, whereas *Juarez, Mexico*

focuses on organ-trafficking. In *Bajo la sal*, the case of a professor who kills some of his female students is at the center of the plot.

Just as important as the causes of the femicides is the role in these representations of Mexican institutions such as government, police, media, and human resources organizations. It has been speculated that the Mexican government and the Mexican police are responsible for the Juarez femicides. These establishments have been accused of denying the murders, destroying evidence, blaming the victims and their families, protecting the perpetrators, and even participating directly in the killings. To a greater or lesser extent, these allegations are exemplified in each one of these films. In *Bordertown,* it is Lauren who clearly and directly denounces the actions not only of the Mexican government but also of the US government and transnational corporations. In her newspaper article, she asserts:

> The screams of the women of Juarez are silent because no one would listen, not the giant corporations who make their profits from the labor of these women, not the governments of Mexico and the United States who benefit from the Free Trade Agreements. No one would listen. All the evidence points to the fact that there are many killers, a whole culture of murders that just gets worse and worse the more it is denied and covered up. You see, covering it up is less expensive than protecting these women.

Also, in this film, Marco (a corporate executive and the perpetrator´s friend) tells Lauren that he, like many other people in his social circle, knows that Aris is a murderer. However, he says that Aris will not be arrested and will continue being protected by the

authorities because “there are two senses of law, the laws for people with money and the laws for everybody else.” Marco thus suggests that Mexican laws are not respected by wealthy people; therefore, they can do whatever they please and never be punished. Furthermore, he says that in the US things are not any different. He clarifies to Lauren: “Do not think it is different in the United States because I buy politicians on both sides of the border all the time.” Also in this film, insinuations about the police not being a trustworthy establishment but rather accomplices of the perpetrators are latent. For example, in one scene, Eva says she is afraid to tell the police about her horrifying experience and to accuse her aggressors; she says that she would rather talk to the newspaper journalist Díaz. There is a scene, however, that can be regarded as a counter-theory: When Lauren, disguised as a maquiladora worker, is being “hunted” by the criminals, the police surround the area and seize one of the offenders in a perfectly planned operation, timed to rescue Lauren before she gets hurt. Díaz explains that there are indeed some good elements in the police, who do want to stop the killings.

In *Traspatio,* the social worker Sara tells Blanca that Karen had already filed a report with the police about the physical and mental abuses she suffered from her boyfriend “El Sultán.” According to Sara, the police never did anything to stop him; consequently, he killed her. The reason why the police never arrested “El Sultán” is indirectly revealed in the following sequence: The governor is pressured by the federal government to come up with “results” to show the public that they are working to solve the femicides, so he orders the police chief to do something quickly. The chief organizes a raid to capture some suspects. After the raid, a cop named Fierro is badly beaten by men who are angry at the police chief for not warning them about the operation.

Obviously, Fierro deduces that the police chief is involved with the “Cheros,” for some of them were detained during the raid. Fierro confronts his boss, who admits the fact and explains that there is a juicy business operation going on and that he should know about it and become a part of it. The “negocio” basically consists of covering up the crimes of rich and influential people and getting paid for doing so. The film then suggests that the police in Ciudad Juarez are indirectly responsible for the femicides committed by “Sultán,” the “Cheros” gang, and Mickey Santos. While Blanca and Fierro´s actions might be considered as a counter-theory - for they are both police officers, and they both collaborated to annihilate Santos - their contribution is portrayed as an exceptional and one-time event, for Blanca abandons Juarez and Fierro becomes the police chief but inherits the “negocio.” Consequently, neither of these characters embodies the honorable, honest, trustworthy police officer. Based on her experience, Blanca reflects: “En Juárez matas una mujer, la tiras al desierto y es como si tuvieras tu licencia de impunidad. El asesinato se va a perder en la lista de crímenes, la policía no va a investigar o va a investigar muy poco, no se va a levantar un cargo bien hecho y seguramente ningún juez va a dictar sentencia.”

As far as the governor, he is portrayed in *Traspatio* first as somebody who tries to prevent the femicides from happening, for he asks a US congressman and the transnational corporations for help in protecting female maquiladora workers. But then he tries to avoid giving explanations about the silence and impunity surrounding the femicides. Furthermore, he indirectly blames the victims for being “out in the streets looking for trouble.” Thus, he represents three different aspects of the government: wanting to protect potential victims, denying the problem, and blaming the victims.

Although not directly responsible for the killings, here the government is indeed being accused of not doing anything to prevent them. The governor´s point of view is summarized when he tells his assistant: “Esto de las muertas es un avispero y entre menos le meneemos, mejor.”

In *Espejo retrovisor,* as mentioned above, the Mexican government is accused of not being able to integrate abandoned, indigent kids into society. According to this film, the consequences are devastating, for these kids later become resentful criminals. It is also suggested that the police cannot do their job because powerful people prevent them from doing so. In the scene where Fabián and Jorge illegally race and crash their cars, the police come to arrest them, but the kids call their parents, who threaten and order the police to release the kids immediately.

Evidently, another important group portrayed as responsible for the femicides in Juarez is the transnational factories or maquiladoras. In the three films analyzed here, at least one victim is linked with the maquiladoras: In *Espejo retrovisor,* the radio informs listeners about the case of a female victim who was assaulted by a bus driver who transported maquiladora workers. In *Bordertown,* many of the victims mentioned were maquiladora workers, and in *Traspatio,* except for the schoolgirl, all the cases presented were of maquiladora workers. In this last film, Hilda explicitly states: “De la General Electric, de la Toshiba, de la Esparza, Maderas Nacionales, de la Ford, había obreras de varias maquilas. Los ‘Cheros’ nos tenían encerradas en distintos sótanos, del centro creo que todos.” Inarguably, the Juarez femicides are tightly linked to the maquiladoras; therefore, some aspects of the link will be highlighted next.

To start with, maquiladoras are depicted as the beginning of a nightmare for female workers. In *Bordertown,* for example, immediately after the opening credits, there is a foreground super which reads: “The ‘maquiladoras’ hire mainly young women because they work for lower wages and complain less about the long hours and harsh working conditions.” However, the position of transnational corporations and the US government is that, on the contrary, Juarez benefits from the maquiladoras because they bring jobs and pay workers more than in other countries. This is illustrated in a scene in *Traspatio* where the governor of Chihuahua asks the congressman and the corporate leaders for help in protecting female maquiladora workers from getting killed. The congressman says that Juarez will not receive money from the US government or from transnational companies because already the labor of a Mexican woman is more expensive than the labor of a woman from China, Bangladesh, or Thailand. Then he threatens to move the maquiladoras to other countries. But low wages, harsh working conditions, and long shifts are not the only irregularities reported. In these representations, maquiladoras are also accused of permitting sexual harassment against female workers, of organizing beauty contests to target potential victims, of tracking their menstrual periods to make sure they are not pregnant, and of firing them if they do get pregnant, among other things. In *Traspatio,* for example, the doctor warns Juanita that if she gets pregnant she will be fired. The way director Carrera evokes the violation of female workers´ privacy in *Traspatio* is by following Juanita into the bathroom when she urinates; once Juanita starts working in the maquila, the maquila invades her completely, and she loses control of her intimacy, of her body.

The US and Mexican governments, the police force, and transnational corporations all have a paramount part in these films, which aim to represent a reality: the Juarez femicides. Sergio González Rodríguez refers to these establishments´ interactions as “The Femicide Machine.” According to him, with the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Mexico, and Canada, the maquila industry expanded, and Juarez became a “city-machine whose tensions entwined Mexico, the United States, the global economy and the underworld of organized crime.” González explains that this machine

> is composed of hatred and misogynistic violence, machismo, power and patriarchal reaffirmations that take place at the margins of the law or within a law of complicity between criminals, police, military, government officials, and citizens who constitute an a-legal old-boy network. Consequently, the machine enjoys discrete protection from individuals, groups, and institutions that in turn offer judicial and political impunity, as well as supremacy over the State and the law. (11)

Whether or not González´s view of the interaction among these institutions is accurate, what is certain is that González - as well as the directors of the films analyzed here and many others who have attempted to represent the femicides - has an evident urge to expose social vices and criticize the aforementioned establishments. Although the “reality” of the “real” Juarez femicides is difficult to uncover, the represented Juarez femicides are a product of a conspiracy of powerful institutions led by dehumanized individuals.

Media, in these films, are not presented as being complicit in the femicides. However, the films do raise the question of their possible complicity in covering up the femicides: whether they publicize or hide the femicides, minimize or exaggerate the number of victims, describe the murders graphically or sketchily, blame the government and the police or applaud their solutions, link or distance transnational corporations to the killings, and more. With this much room for controversy, the role that media have in this particular social problem is vital for public opinion, for usually media representations reach the masses sooner and with broader dissemination than other genres' representations.

Media, as represented in *Bordertown*, has limited freedom of expression: in one sequence, for example, the newspaper is being delivered in Juarez, but after a few minutes, the police confiscate all the copies. Evidently the newspaper is publishing something that is not convenient for the police, the government, or somebody powerful enough as to give orders to the police. The assassination of the journalist Díaz is also a palpable sign of the consequences of expressing oneself freely. Marcos explains to Lauren that her friend Díaz got killed because "he was reporting things that should not be reported." It is clear then that this newspaper is committed to the truth and that the people who work there suffer the consequences. In contrast, in the same film, the *Chicago Sentinel* illustrates the kind of newspaper that is manipulated by individuals with political and economic interests, as shown in the following sequence: Lauren realizes that the *Chicago Sentinel* will not publish the article she wrote about the femicides. Her boss, George, explains that her article cannot be published because she is inculpating the governments of Mexico and the United States as well as NAFTA for

the femicides. Among other objections, George says that it is not convenient to create negative publicity about NAFTA because there are plans for expanding this trade agreement to other countries in Latin America. George summarizes his viewpoint by saying that the article will not be published because "it is a matter of corporate responsibility." Furthermore, George argues that media is not what it used to be: "The news isn't news anymore. That is as dead as the typewriter I used to write it on. Corporate America is running the show now and their news agenda is free trade, globalization, and entertainment. That's our glorious future." Lauren is disappointed that the *Chicago Sentinel* puts "corporate responsibility" above the truth and quits her job there. In *Traspatio*, the media seem largely free to say what they want. The radio announcer, for example, freely criticizes the actions of the police and the government with respect to the femicides. At one point, Blanca even threatens the police chief with going to the media; she tells him that if she is fired, she will make public – by means of the radio announcer - what she knows about the Juarez police, including the "negocio" he has with some of the perpetrators. The police chief is angry at Blanca, but the radio announcer is never chased or threatened, and certainly he does not get killed. However, in another scene, it is implied that newspapers are manipulated by the government and ultimately by corporations: A representative of the maquiladora Kikai tells the governor to instruct newspapers not to mention that a recent femicide victim worked for Kikai, and the governor obeys. In *Espejo retrovisor,* there are signs implying that the radio and newspapers are freely publishing information about the femicides. For example, the newspaper used to clean the cage of Paloma´s parrot reads "otra muerta más." Also, a

radio announcer talks about the femicides; however, the information released is very limited.

Clearly, in *Bordertown,* a special emphasis is placed on the role newspapers play, not only in Juarez but in the US as well. A major theme of the film is the commitment of newspapers to truth and the risks that journalists face when trying to report on contentious subjects. In the other two films, the role of media is not portrayed in such a controversial light.

Overall, the presentation of the femicides' causes is more similar in *Bordertown* and *Traspatio* than in *Espejo retrovisor*. In the first two films, the emphasis is on the femicides as a product of a conspiracy among rich and powerful people in Mexican and US society. In stark contrast, *Espejo retrovisor* suggests that the femicides are due to poverty within Mexico. In a way, all three films analyze the femicides along lines associated with the political left, but the message of *Bordertown* and *Traspatio* is that US and Mexican society require revolutionary change to rectify the problem of the femicides, whereas the message of *Espejo retrovisor* is that the implementation of better social services for the poor in Mexico might help significantly in reducing the femicides.

4. Violence in the films

Because of the nature of the events these films represent, violence is an inescapable and ubiquitous theme. To a greater or a lesser degree, verbally or visually, subtly or graphically, violence is omnipresent in the three films. In the previous chapter it

was noted how frequently the actions of perpetrators are emphasized in non-fiction films through violent scenes which raise the status of the perpetrators to that of stars and reduce the voices of the victims to something of minor importance. With the objective of convincing the viewer that what is being shown is "real and the truth," non-fiction films over-use archival photos and footage showing signs of violence. In fiction, however, a film's objective varies with the filmmaker's style, the genre they choose for the film, the focus of the film, etc. Therefore, the manner in which violence appears in the films varies. The director Peckinpah, for example, remarked that his preference was to deglamorize movie violence in order to show how ugly and awful real violence is (Prince 13). The awfulness of the femicides supports Peckinpah's position, for it has been said that the reality of these crimes is worse than anything any fiction film could represent. Interestingly, the techniques used to portray violence in these three films vary significantly. Nava and Carrera selected graphical shots to show the dehumanizing way in which these women were raped, dismembered, and murdered, whereas Molinar chose to portray the murders in a more symbolic way. Whatever decision each filmmaker made to represent the femicides, violence against women was the one element that had to be highlighted. According to Steven Prince, a trend of filmic portrayals of violence against women started with Brian De Palma's *Dress to Kill* (1980). The popularity of these films demonstrated that moviegoers were fascinated by violence; despite ongoing social controversies about the unhelathy effects of viewing ultraviolence, the film industry kept on making such films. As might be expected, feminist groups of the 1980s started complaining about these films. The *Chicago Tribune* noted, "The public would not tolerate this kind of eye-ball gouging sadism if it

were directed against animals instead of women. But in these new films, the fact that the horror is inflicted on women appears to be the very point" (*Chicago Tribune* 6). Sadly, the making of the films dealing with the Juarez femicides was not only a consequence of moviegoers' preference for violent movies but also of a need to denounce real, current, ultraviolent social events. However, these three films cannot themselves be categorized as ultraviolent. In spite of representing hundreds (maybe thousands) of femicides, the films present tolerable violence, in such a way that they do not make the viewer withdraw from watching them. *Bordertown,* for example, has some violent scenes, which provide powerful and intense experiences for spectators: when Eva and Lauren are attacked by the bus driver, and when Eva is raped and strangled by Aris. These scenes are composed of takes from various angles; some of these are from the perpetrators' point of view as they attack the victims. These shots are violent in the sense that, as Prince notes, they seem "to invite viewers to accompany the killers and to participate in their savage rituals" (16). However, what makes these scenes tolerable to the audience is their elaborate design and special effects, which create consciousness of the editing process. Awareness of artificiality in a scene, produced by changing camera positions and lighting, editing scenes, adding a musical score, and devising special effects, elicits a different reaction on the viewer. Schlesinger *et al.* argue that such artificiality generates "significant aesthetic pleasure and emotional distance for viewers, who can use these cues as a means of insulating themselves from the depicted violence" (41). In other words, the viewer is aware that what s/he is watching "is not real."

Another strategy used to render violence tolerable is to prevent the viewer from witnessing the victims´ pain. Blanchard *et al.* (45) suggest that the presence or absence of indications of a victim's pain and the severity of the pain both tend to affect a viewer's reaction; the more indications of pain, the less the viewer is able to detach. In one scene in *Bordertown,* for example, Lauren displays on her laptop a series of photos of dead women who were raped, tortured, mutilated, and abandoned in the desert. While disturbing, the experience of seeing these images is less intense because the viewer does not witness the pain of the victims. A similar scene is the one in which Lauren discovers a mass grave with highly decomposed bodies of women. Various scenes in *Traspatio* are designed the same way, as when Blanca inspects victims´ bodies as they are found. In contrast, viewers do become witnesses to the victims' pain in some scenes, which include visible and audible signs of suffering. In *Traspatio*, examples include the scenes where Juanita is being tortured, raped, and killed, where Hilda is thrown in the middle of the desert after being raped and tortured, and where Santos abducts a schoolgirl. Similarly, in *Bordertown,* there are the scenes where Eva and Lauren are attacked by the bus driver and where Eva is raped and strangled by Aris. The signs of suffering in these scenes make the films more violent in one sense, yet, as mentioned above, they are tolerable because of artificiality, which is cued by the editing process.

Another, related aspect of these films is the violence inflicted on the perpetrators. In *Bordertown* there is a scene where Eva kills Aris, the man who had previously tried to kill her and Lauren. She hits Aris while an uncontrollable fire is consuming her house, and Aris falls and is burned to death. Despite Aris's evident suffering, the experience for

the viewers is opposite to their experience with a victim's pain, for they have already morally condemned the villain for his horrendous actions. Therefore, viewers feel justified in hating the perpetrator and can gladly applaud his execution when it finally happens. Zillmann (202) has termed this process of enjoying a villain's fate as "counterempathy." Similar scenes occur in *Traspatio* when Blanca arrests Cudberto and when she kills Santos.

Another means by which filmmakers suggest violence in these films is by emphasizing the scandalous number of victims of the Juarez femicides. Vivian C. Sobchack has argued that in fiction films, showing a large number of dead bodies and the careless devaluation of human flesh is both

> a recognition of the high-tech, powerful, and uncontrollable subjects we (men, mostly) have become through technology – and an expression of the increasing frustration and rage at what seems a lack of agency and effectiveness as we become increasingly controlled by and subject to technology. (122)

Unfortunately, in the case of the films representing the Juarez femicides, the salient and persistent effort of every filmmaker to emphasize the huge number of "wasted" bodies is not recognition of the viewer's subjectivity and dependence on technology. Instead, it is an attempt to portray a reality: a staggering number of young women were controlled and subjected to the sickness, inhumaneness, and brutality of their perpetrators. It is appalling to consider the victims' bodies as mere flesh. However, it is even more appalling to know that this is not just a cinematographic strategy but rather the representation of a reality. Considering the inevitable violence in these films,

the question is, how effective is it to use graphic violence to offer a message against violence? It has been said that sometimes the medium subverts the goal. Prince explains that the aesthetic contract that the filmaker must honor with viewers entails that screen violence be made to offer sensory pleasures. But it is still unkown if these pleasures are implicated in aggresion reponses. He argues that “the problem is esencially serious due to the phenomenon of divergent audience responses, but the reality is that filmakers cannot control the reactions of the viewers” (29).

The director Molinar in *Espejo Retrovisor* chose to stay away from graphic violence and recurred to symbolic scenes to represent the femicides, for example, when pink crosses are shown all over Juarez´s streets, and when the radio or the newspaper mention the femicides. However, in the scene where Paloma is abducted, the spectator experiences a different kind of pain, the pain of “knowing” and “liking” the victim, for as mentioned before, this film is by far the one that focuses most on the victim rather than on political, economic, and social problems in Juarez or the violence implicated in the femicides. The film aims to make the viewer become acquainted with Paloma and discover her dreams, her philosophy of life (“a leaf represents a beautiful moment in your life”), her eagerness to live, and also how uninvolved she was with her perpetrator. The randomness of her abduction puts the viewer in a position similar to that of Paloma, for no matter how uninvolved we may be, we are all potential victims of an accident. Thus, *Espejo Retrovisor* reflects a fear for our lives. According to Sobchack, this type of film reflects our fears but also allays them, for “the very presence of random and motiveless violence on the screen elevates it, creates some kind of order and meaning from it; accidents become Fate” (118). Although Paloma died for no apparent reason,

she created her own purpose and reason as she died; the audience's recognition gives her senseless death significance and meaning.

5. Americanization or Universalization of the Subject.

Films dealing with a real-life event obviously develop a plot that focuses on that event. However, that plot frequently touches on other social problems which might or might not be intimately associated with the original event but which nevertheless are appealing to the audience. Judith E. Doneson (6) terms this strategy "diluting the event." In her analysis of films dealing with the Holocaust, Doneson, concludes that this dilution has become an issue both in terms of authentic memory of the Holocaust and for those concerned with the aesthetics of film. It is clear then that despite the filmmaker's altruistic intentions, there is still an eagerness or commitment to deliver an entertaining plot. One of the strategies used to appeal to the viewers in the three films analyzed here is the Americanization or universalization of the femicides. This phenomenon occurs when a plot aims to widen the social problem which it presents, so that it appeals not only to viewers who relate to the original premise but also those viewers who relate to the expanded premise. For example, though at first sight foreign to American experience, the Holocaust has succeeded in penetrating the American imagination through film. In fact, American films dealing with the Holocaust have been extraordinarily successful at bringing the event to the attention of an international audience. The reason these films were able to thoroughly penetrate the American imagination is that they drew on American symbols and language to convey an American perception of the Holocaust. Doneson argues that the Holocaust then became

the symbol for the suffering not just of the Holocaust victims but of other people struggling with different issues around the world at the time.

A similar broadening of focus can be detected in *Bordertown,* where two themes distant from the Juarez femicides are presented: 1) the feeling of rejection of some Mexicans (or Latinos in general) in the US, and 2) the identity struggles of people who have roots in more than one country. These two themes are portrayed by means of Lauren's character. When Lauren's boss asks her to go to Mexico to cover the femicides for the newspaper, she refuses and states: "nobody gives a shit about Mexico." She also gets irritated when her boss implies that she speaks Spanish; she clarifies angrily: "I do not speak Spanish; I do not know anything about Mexico." As the film progresses, we learn that Lauren resists being linked to Mexico partly because of her childhood memories of her birth parents being killed, and partly because she refuses to see herself as Mexican. She confesses: "I´ve been running away from who I am my whole life ´cause you don´t want to be Mexican, not in this country." We see then that the problem the film is portraying is not just the femicides but also an identity struggle of people belonging to a minority. In this way, the film opens up an additional possibility for the viewer to relate to a character. If the viewer does not relate to a femicide victim or a co-victim, s/he might relate to the character struggling with identity.

In the process of helping Eva, however, Lauren comes to the realization of who she really is and accepts her identity. The film tries to establish a parallel between Lauren's struggle with her identity and the fate of the femicide victims, for she ultimately decides to go back to Juarez and help publish the truth about the crimes. Toward the end of the film, her boss insists that she drop the idea of publishing something about the

femicides and asks her to detach herself from that problem. Lauren refuses to do that; she admits: “I am one of these women…. When I met Eva [the victim], I saw myself.” Thus, Lauren´s background serves to get more viewers to identify with her, especially viewers with Latino roots who have lived for a long time in the US and still feel confused about their identity. The femicides may seem distant and foreign to such viewers, but they can still find something to relate to in the film, for the problem is not just the femicides but also issues of identity, belonging, and self-discovery.

Contrasting with this negative image of the US as a place to live for Mexicans is the image of the US as a safe haven for Mexicans: in *Espejo Retrovisor*, Fabián´s father is being followed by drug dealers, and he and his son Fabián are soon going to move to the US to escape. In *Traspatio*, Blanca crosses the border after she kills Santos, for she knows she needs to escape from the Mexican police. In *Bordertown*, Eva finds herself being afraid after Lauren returns to the US and decides to go there as well to escape from her attackers. Hence, whether viewers see the US as a place where they feel trapped or as a place of safety and freedom, the plot brings the issue into the film, an issue not directly related to the femicides but one that would appeal to a wider audience.

Another peripheral theme that is brought into *Espejo Retrovisor* is that of the indigent kids who later in life become vandals and even murderers. In *Espejo Retrovisor*, the suffering of the femicide victims is symbolized but so too is the suffering of the indigent kids, who have been rejected by their families, the government, and society, as well as the suffering of those people who happened to cross the paths of

these indigents. Therefore, the plot calls for more viewers to identify themselves with the characters in the film.

As can be seen, distortions are bound to occur in films representing a real-life event with an attempt to universalize a problem. Doneson (228) explains that this effect is not peculiar to the Holocaust but is simply part of American society. According to her, US society places special emphasis on freedom of speech and is steeped in commercial traditions. Inarguably, film is an important part of commercial culture, and Hollywood provides a great way to express and expose realities.

6. Conclusions

The intention of this chapter was to examine the way the directors of the three films analyzed here define the femicides, how they treat the subject, what aspects they focus on, and how they represent the victims. The director Nava in *Bordertown* presents the femicides by means of an action-adventure film where journalist Lauren is the main focus of the plot, whereas the director Carrera in *Traspatio* places the emphasis on the police officer Blanca in a plot where events have some connection, but do not have a strong cause-and-effect relationship. Finally, the director Molinar in *Espejo retrovisor* presents an episodic plot in which most of the actions contribute to the viewer´s understanding of victim Paloma. It is probably true that in a film dealing with the Juarez femicides a victim is expected to be the main focus of the plot, as is the case in *Espejo retrovisor*; however, in *Bordertown* and *Traspatio*, the focus is on a journalist and a police officer respectively. Whereas a plot focusing on one victim can indeed do justice by giving full attention to that victim, it is thereby prevented from representing the

hundred (maybe thousands) of cases of Juarez femicides. Thus, cinematographic strategies were exercised to represent the magnitude of this social problem. Nava selected a journalist who would be assigned to write a newspaper article about the femicides and would therefore have to be involved with as many cases as possible and have to gather as much information as possible. Carrera, for his part, chose a police officer whose job would directly involve her with the murders. Thus, these two characters are the focus because they facilitate an overview of the femicides and because their actions set them apart from ordinary people, for they are heroines who produce potent fantasies of female empowerment. This trend to cast beautiful, well-qualified women in action films responds and contributes to changing gender representations and relationships and also exemplifies the fact that movies are made for and marketed to the broadest possible demographic. In this case, they aim to appeal to young men who want to have the action-babe in their fantasies, and to young women who in their fantasies want to be the action-babe. Another characteristic shared by the heroines is that they are Latino. This strategy succeds in two respects: to establish a parallel between the heroines and the victims, and, in the US, to present protagonists appealing to an increasingly Latino audience.

Almost by definition, these films develop a plot that focuses on the femicides, but they also touch on other social problems which are not intimately associated with the murders but are nevertheless designed to be appealing to more viewers. This strategy is known as the Americanization or universalization of the problem. Struggles with identity and with life principles and objectives are some of the problems brought into the films in order to reach more viewers who do not relate with the femicides.

The three films present theories pointing to different culprits by means of their plots, but they also portray the Mexican and US governments, the Mexican police, and the maquiladora industry as parts of a conspiracy of powerful institutions which is directly involved with the femicides. Evidently, in these fiction films, just as in the non-fiction films, attention to the social, economic, and political aspects of the situation is inescapable. Violence is another indispensable element present in the films; various strategies are used to represent the inhumanity which characterizes the femicides, yet others tactics are utilized to make violent scenes tolerable for the viewer.

As for the representation of the victims, I conclude that fictional victims constructed in films are purely representative and that their identity can therefore be fully constructed. In other words, fictional victims are merely cinematographic images and do not have an egos or self-identity. So when their ethos or collective identity is reconstructed, their identification is complete. In this sense, fiction is a more evocative genre for portraying the victims' group identity than non-fiction. However, fictional and non-fictional representations are inter-connected, for fictional victims are partly created based on the testimony of victims' family and friends as well as authorities and other witnesses, as recorded in media accounts, documentaries, etc. This chain of intertextualities, as theorized by Riffaterre, will be amply discussed in an upcoming chapter.

CHAPTER 3

NOVELS

In the preceding chapters, fictional and non-fictional cinematographic representations of the Juarez femicides were analyzed. This chapter is an analysis of three novels dealing with the same subject: *Desert Blood, 2666,* and *Las muertas de Ciudad Juárez: El caso de Elizabeth Castro García y Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif*. Alicia Gaspar de Alba´s *Desert Blood* was selected because it was written from the perspective of a Chicano woman whose identity parallels in many ways that of the victims and co-victims of the femicides. In contrast, Gregorio Ortega´s *El caso de Elizabeth* was written from the perspective of a male journalist from Mexico City. Roberto Bolaño´s *2666*, for its part, is undoubtedly the best-known novel dealing with this subject. It is written from the perspective of an outsider and unidentified witness.

Extensive works analyzing the content and format of *2666* and *Desert Blood* have been and continue being written. For example, Ángeles Donoso Macaya argues that in *2666*, Bolaño presents the devastating story of the Santa Teresa femicides by means of a systematic repetition of the heterogeneous. The repetition illustrates the way Bolaño incorporates violence into the construction and organization of fiction. At the same time, he reproduces in the structure and the plot of his novel the serialization of the crimes he narrates. For Donoso, the recurrence of violence as a subject in Bolaño has to do with an ethical issue, which she connects with esthetics. This is to say, in Bolaño, the reader encounters art and politics in an esthetic territory. Donoso as well as Juan Villoro contend that the notion of commitment in *2666* is manifested with the elaboration and exhibition of the “metodología del mal.” This methodology makes visible and speakable the form and sense of violence. For her part, Patricia Espinosa proposes that Bolaño establishes a realist style and history from the perspective of a protagonist

or narrator who is framed or besieged by history. At the same time, the protagonist removes himself from that history by means of the continuous exposition of its extreme precariousness.

As for *Desert Blood,* Irene Mata argues that the novel provides an oppositional narrative that demonstrates the opportunities divergent thinking offers in the analysis of transnational systems of power. In her analysis of the main protagonist of *Desert Blood,* Mata concludes that Ivon Villa "embodies the strategy of reading signs and symbols that Chela Sandoval identifies as a 'methodology of the oppressed' by employing a transnationalist feminist analysis of global networks of oppression" (15). Isela Ocegueda, in her analysis of *Desert Blood,* focuses on the relationships between the city, its inhabitants, memory, and haunting. She proposes that the city functions as the medium by which the protagonists are haunted by memory but sometimes by an actual spectral figure. She argues that from a spatial perspective, the novel helps us to recognize that urban spaces are at work in producing the social and vice versa.
In this chapter, different elements of the novels are analyzed: the narrator, the plot, the characters, and theories regarding the femicides. Also, scrutiny of content and format will prove that each novel, besides denouncing the cruelty and injustice of the Juarez femicides, calls attention to other conflicts: *Desert Blood* deals with the need for the recognition of a Chicana culture and literature, *2666* exposes the absurdity of life and death, and *El caso de Elizabeth* questions the objectives of the media and of life itself.

1. Narrator

"La parte de los crímenes" ("The Part about the Crimes") is the fourth chapter of Roberto Bolaño´s novel *2666.* This chapter chronicles the murder of 111 women in fictional city of Santa Teresa from 1993 to 1998. It also recounts various entangled stories about some of the victims, their families, policemen, and other people involved in the femicides. In the narrative, there is an omniscient third-person narrator who gives a panoramic view of the story and looks into the broader background of it. The identity of this narrator is not specified. In "Notas a la primera edición," included in the 2004 Anagrama edition, Ignacio Echevarría explains that in some notes written by Bolaño *à propos* of *2666,* the author indicated: "El narrador de *2666* es Arturo Belano" (1125). However, in "La parte de los crímenes," it is never mentioned who the narrator is.

Most of the narrative is presented from an omniscient point of view (zero focalization). However, the use of complex focalization strategies is evident as well, such as the alternation of external and internal focalization, and the alternation of internal focalization through different characters. For example, in the scene where a female journalist gets shot, the narrator relates:

> Mientras el técnico se perdía calle abajo Isabel se dirigió hacia donde estaba su coche. Al sacar las llaves para abrirlo una sombra cruzó la acera y le disparó tres veces. Las llaves se le cayeron. Un viandante que estaba a unos cinco metros de distancia se echó al suelo. Isabel intentó levantarse pero sólo pudo apoyar la cabeza sobre el neumático delantero. No sentía dolor. La sombra se acercó hacia ella y le disparó un balazo en la frente. (447)

Up until the moment when the victim rests her head on the car's wheel, the narrator's point of view is that of a "camera lens," which only records the observable actions. He does not interpret them; nor does he communicate the feelings of the victim. But then the narrator switches to an "over the shoulder" perspective, for he describes information only known by the victim: "No sentía dolor." The story reads as if the victim was narrating it. Dramatically, this is very similar to a first-person narration in that it allows in-depth revelation of the feelings of the victim in her last moments.

Similarly, in another scene, the policeman Pedro Negrete visits the site where the body of another victim was found:

> Recorrió el lugar donde encontraron a la muerta. Después dejó la falda y empezó a subir hasta lo más alto del cerro. Entre las piedras volcánicas había bolsas de mercado llenas de basura. Recordó que su hijo, que estudiaba en Phoenix, una vez le había contado que las bolsas de plástico tardaban cientos, tal vez miles de años en consumirse. Éstas de aquí no, pensó al ver el grado de descomposición a lo que todo estaba abocado […]. Luego siguió bajando hasta llegar a su coche. Desde allí, pensó, todo se veía diferente. (452)

Once again the perspective goes from "camera lens" to "over the shoulder" in the moment when the narrator describes Negrete´s memories about what his son told him once about plastic bags. In this case, the internal focalization point of view allows an in-depth revelation of Negrete´s identity and perception of facts. First, he momentarily witnesses the decomposition of the material and realizes, from that perspective, that a human body is not any different from all the other decaying matter as he observes

things from the top of the Estrella mountain. And later, when he is back in his car, it is as if he detaches himself from what he has just witnessed and now he does not feel as involved as he felt before. Of course, the reader does not gain awareness of this information through Negrete himself, but rather from the unidentified third-person narrator.

There are also instances where free indirect speech is observed. This style of third-person narration uses some of the characteristics of third-person narration along with the essence of first-person direct speech. One example can be found when the narrator reveals the feelings of two girls, who have just witnessed the abduction of their two older sisters and of their neighbors while waiting to hear from the girls' parents what happened to the abducted girls:

> Las cuatro experimentaron lo que era estar en el purgatorio, una larga espera inerme, una espera cuya columna vertebral era el desamparo, algo muy latinoamericano, por otra parte, una sensación familiar, algo que si uno lo pensaba bien experimentaba todos los días, pero sin angustia, sin la sombra de la muerte sobrevolando el barrio como una bandada de zopilotes y espesándolo todo, trastocando la rutina de todo, poniendo todas las cosas al revés. […] La vecina pensó (para matar el tiempo y el miedo) que le gustaría tener un revólver y salir a la calle. ¿Y luego qué? Pues aventar unos cuantos tiros al aire para des encorajinarse y gritar viva México […]. (660)

Through indirect speech, the reader gets to know the feelings of these women as if they were expressing them themselves using a first-person narration: They feel

scared, angry, powerless, and desperate, for they know that once a young woman goes missing in Juarez, nothing can be done to prevent her murder. The one neighbor also expresses resentment towards the Mexican system; she says that she feels like screaming "¡Viva México!" but evidently in the temporal-spatial context of the novel, that can only be done out of anger, sorrow, and cynicism. Interestingly, in this paragraph, the unidentified narrator also exhibits his own feelings when he says that what the four co-victims experienced was familiar, "algo que si uno lo pensaba bien experimentaba todos los días." This could be a reference to fear of the unknown, but in the case of the co-victims, their fear is not based on uncertainty but rather on the certitude of that will happen to their missing female relatives.

While the focalization strategies analyzed above assist the reader in understanding the point of view of different characters, it also creates more distance between him/her and the story, and reduces a possible identification with or attachment to the characters. This is also strategic, for the reduction of emotional appeals to the reader leads to a judgment of the socio-political situation that is not biased by sentiments. Bertolt Brecht called this effect the "Alienation Effect." Brecht explains that this method of alienation was used in Germany

> for plays of a non-aristotelian (not dependent on empathy) type as part of the attempts being made to evolve an epic theatre. The efforts in question were directed to playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a

> conscious plane instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious. (Willett 91)

Many other elements are included in Bolaño´s novel which contribute to the Alienation Effect as described by Brecht, such as constant fragmentation of the plot, frequent nonsense situations, incoherent scenes where language is insufficient, etc. Certainly, the variation of the focalization in the narrative contributes to a fragmentation of the plot, and so does the inclusion of a voice of a non-fictional narrator. This voice is heard especially when a detailed description of how, where, and who found the victims´ bodies is given. For example, the murder of Andrea Pacheco is narrated as follows:

> Del caso se encargó la policía judicial y la municipal. Cuando la encontraron, dos días después, su cuerpo mostraba señales inequívocas de muerte por estrangulamiento, con rotura del hueso hioides. Había sido violada anal y vaginalmente. Las muñecas presentaban tumefacciones típicas de ataduras. Ambos tobillos estaban lacerados, por lo que se dedujo que también había sido atada de pies. Un emigrante salvadoreño encontró el cuerpo detrás de la escuela Francisco I, en Madero, cerca de la colonia Alamos. (490)

This non-fictional voice works as a way to make the reader aware of the “making” of the novel, and therefore contributes to the Alienation Effect also. Evidently, this passage is not a representation of the series of femicides, but rather of a police file or a media report; thus the referent is where the artificiality is located. It is possible that this referent is the work of Sergio González, *Huesos en el desierto,* which is a chronicle where the Juarez femicides are described and commented on in detail. Bolaño himself

disclosed that he got “technical” help from González for the writing of “La parte de los crímenes.” In *Entre paréntesis* he recounts: “hace algunos años, mis amigos que viven en México se cansaron de que les pidiera información, cada vez más detallada, además, sobre los asesinatos de mujeres de Ciudad Juárez, y decidieron, al parecer de común acuerdo, centralizar o pasarle esta carga a Sergio González Rodríguez” (Bolaño, *Entre Paréntesis* 23).

The last alienating element discussed here is the use of a meta-diegetic narrator. An example can be found in the scene where the narrator reports how Reinaldo tells Sergio González the story of a famous Televisa presenter who was in love with Reinaldo´s lawyer, José Patricio. The narrator says:

> Reinaldo contó entonces que ese presentador estuvo enamorado de José Patricio […] Una noche, dijo Reinaldo, el famoso presentador me llevó a su habitación […] y me suelta que aquella noche probablemente va a hacer la última noche de su vida. Como comprenderás, me quedé helado, porque pensé: este puto primero me mata a mí y luego se mata él, todo con tal de darle un disgusto póstumo a José Patricio. (Risas.) (706)

The three narrative levels described by Gérard Genette in his work *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* can be identified here: 1) the level at which the telling of Reinaldo’s story occurs, 2) the level at which the primary extra-diegetic narrator’s discourse occurs, and 3) the level of the narrative act situated outside the spatiotemporal coordinates of the primary narrator’s discourse. Interestingly, in this paragraph, there is a discursive element that makes the narration even more complex, which is the word *risas* printed in parentheses. This parenthetical direction gives the

reader the impression that a screenplay is being read and that a direct message is being sent to him/her directly, but it is unclear whose message it is. It could be a playful way of indicating that Reinaldo laughs at the thought of the TV presenter giving José Patricio posthumous displeasure, or it could be the extra-diegetic narrator laughing at Reinaldo´s story, or it could be Bolaño´s own laughter at the idea of doing something posthumously, for according to his comments in *Entre parenthesis,* he knew that most probably his novel would be published that way. If this last interpretation is correct, Bolaño becomes a second extra-diegetic narrator and thus gives the narrative a fourth diegetic level, for he is still on a different level from the first narrator but is no longer outside the spatiotemporal coordinates of the primary narrator's discourse. At any rate, the parenthetical direction serves, if we think in theatrical terms, to break the fourth wall and ultimately to distance the reader from the characters.

In short, by releasing and making obvious these manipulative devices in the narrative, the text alienates the reader from any passive acceptance and enjoyment of the text as mere "entertainment." Instead, the reader is forced to make a critical and analytical judgment on the issues represented. These devices also contribute to the absurdist aspect of the narrative, which will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

In *Desert Blood*, as in *2666,* there is an omniscient, extra-diegetic, third-person narrator. The novel starts with a focalized narration from the perspective of a femicide victim who was tortured, beaten, and mutilated. She is being dragged in the desert by her aggressors and she is about to die, but she is still conscious. The narrator recounts:

> The rope tightened around her neck, and she felt her belly drag over sand and rocks, the wound on her breast pricked by sage-brush. She was numb

> below the waist, and her face ached from the beating. One of them had given her an injection, but she could still move her arms and wedge the tips of her fingers under the noose. They´d stuffed her bra into her mouth, and the hooks in it hurt her tongue. (1)

In other segments of the novel, the perspective of the narrator is externally focalized. Here as in *2666,* there are variations in the perspective. However, there is also a remarkable difference between these two novels; in *Desert Blood,* despite the fact that the perspective of the narrator switches focalization from external to internal (within different characters), this does not result in an alienation effect as it happens in *2666*. The reason is that in *Desert Blood* the narrator becomes an intimate companion only to a limited number of people: the femicides victims and co-victims. The feelings and thoughts of these characters are revealed in detail; therefore, the crimes are recounted from their point of view. For example, the narrator closely follows Cecilia, the young maquiladora worker who was tied up, beaten, and stabbed until she and her unborn baby were killed. He also follows Irene, a young US citizen who goes to a fair in Juarez and becomes a femicide victim. She is held captive by snuff movies-makers for days, tied up, beaten, tortured, and forced to witness the killing of other women. The narrator shares:

> She doesn´t want to hear any more, but her hands are tied behind her back and she can´t cover her ears. The stench of panic is thick in her nostrils. Even as she mutters the words to “Black Dove” over and over – “she never let on how insane it was in that tiny kinda scary house by the

> woods by the woods by the woods" – she can hear the shrill cries of the coyotes. (268)

Inarguably, the intimate narration focalized on the victims and co-victims causes the reader to develop emotional sympathy exclusively for these characters. Yet the detailed description of the atrocious acts to which these young women are subjected gives the narrative overtones of horror literature. Evidently, Gaspar de Alba, in *Desert Blood,* introduces the reader to the issue of the Juarez femicides, but with her detailed narration of the horrific crimes, she also remarks on the current crisis of the human condition. Julia Kristeva, in her analysis of the *Powers of Horror*, argues that this kind of literature "represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our most intimate and most serious apocalypses" (208). Thus, the voices of the victims and co-victims denounce the dehumanizing abjection of the female body. They also censure other oppressions to which women are unjustly subjected, such as abuses at their workplaces, domestic violence, judgements about their actions and sexual preferences, etc. Kristeva contends:

> If "something maternal" happens to bear upon the uncertainty that I call abjection, it illuminates the literary scription of the essential struggle that a writer (man or woman) has to engage in with what he calls demonic only to call attention to it as the inseparable obverse of his very being, of the other (sex) that torments and possesses him. (208)

As will be discussed later, Gaspar de Alba, with the narration of *Desert Blood,* calls attention to the condemnation of women either because of their sexuality or because of their reluctance to follow an imposed traditional patriarchal lifestyle.

Another strategy used to encourage the reader to focus on events from the point of view of the victims and co-victims is that, unlike *2666*, *Desert Blood* generally only switches between different narrators' points of view at the start of a scene, so that intimacy is not divided among several characters in the same scene. This permits the reader to focus on one character at the time.

The narrative also contains multiple diegetic levels. One example can be found when the extra-diegetic narrator reports that Pete, a US detective, tells his friends how his father used to tell the story of how his name was chosen and even how he was conceived. The levels detected her are: 1) the level where Pete's father is telling Pete the story, 2) the level where Pete is telling this story to his friends, 3) the level where the extra-diegetic narrator reports that Pete is telling a story, and 4) the level of the narrative outside the spatiotemporal coordinates of the primary narrator's discourse.

Another characterisic of the *Desert Blood* narrative is that it is more mimetic than diegetic; Gaspar de Alba makes more use of direct speech and dialogue than Bolaño. But the two modes are used tactically: the mimetic to introduce the reader more directly to the story and the diegetic to quickly reveal the thoughts and feelings of strategic characters.

In *Las muertas de Juárez: El caso de Elizabeth Castro García y Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif*, there is an intra-diegetic narrator who speaks in the first person. He is a journalist named Rogelio Salanueva who describes imaginary interviews with people who in real life were involved with the Juarez femicides, such as the victim Elizabeth Castro García, the Egyptian man who was accused of murdering Elizabeth, and another suspect of the Juarez femicides called "El Diablo." The inclusion of these real people´s

imaginary testimony results in a complex and ambiguous narrative which goes from uncertainty in the chronology of events to the absence of an objective “reality” and the impossibility of distinguishing the ”real” from the oneiric. Undoubtedly, this format brings to mind works like Carmen Martín Gaite´s *El cuarto de atrás*. The difference, however, is that in *El cuarto* there is a vacillation with respect to the existence of other characters like the man in black and the woman who calls the protagonist on the phone, whereas in *El caso de Elizabeth*, the narrator-character is clear and honest about the interviews with real people being imaginary or oneiric. Because Salanueva himself imagines or dreams the interviews he reports, the narrative is then an interior monologue in need of the “other” so that the dialogue can be enabled and the discourse can be externalized. Consequently, the character-narrator Salanueva is both the reporter and the receptor, and the one cannot exist without the other. Tsvetan Todorov, in his analysis of Fyodor Dostoevsky´s *Notes from Underground,* affirms that the underground man, who addresses an imaginary audience, does not exist apart from his relation with the other, or without the other's gaze. Salanueva needs the existence of the “other” to answer the questions he exposes by means of an imaginary dialogue. With respect to the femicides, the questions are: Who is committing the crimes against women? Is Abdel Latif indeed Elizabeth´s murderer? Is “El diablo” responsible for some of the femicides? What are the motives of the perpetrators? In a more personal context, Salanueva wishes to find answers to questions like: What is the real purpose of journalism? Can journalism be objective? Can a journalist be both objective and well remunerated? This issue is set forth at the beginning of the novel with Agustin Granados’s reproach to Salanueva:

> Mira Rogelio, estás fregado. No de ahora, empezaste a estarlo cuando decidiste creer tus propias mentiras. No eres sino un periodista mediocre. Te has dejado inducir por lo peor del poder. No investigas, no haces reportaje, nada escribes sino lo puesto en tus manos para servir intereses ajenos a tu propia condición social, a tu esencia de ser humano. Con cada nota entregada a la redacción contribuyes a la impostura construída desde el gobierno. (11)

Evidently, one of Rogelio's conundrums in the novel is to find out whether journalism is about writing according to certain people's interests and making money or whether it is about reporting real-life events objectively to fulfill a moral purpose. In fact, objectivity and freedom of the press are questions with which Gregorio Ortega has dealt in other works such as *Crimen de estado* (2009). In this novel, the same character, the journalist Rogelio Salanueva, investigates the assassination of the Mexican journalist Manuel Buendía. Manuel Buendía was in real life an acclaimed Mexican journalist who won national awards for his work. Allegedly he was assassinated because he was writing a report exposing links between the Mexican Army and the drugs cartels. After the publication of Gregorio Ortega´s novel, the writer was fired from his position at the General Direction of Social Communication of the Federal Jurisdiction. The Mexican magazine "El Economista" makes reference to this fact as an indication that Ortega was punished for exposing the truth via a fiction novel. Here, two cases of the impossibility of objectivity in journalism are illustrated, Manuel Buendía´s death and Gregorio Ortega´s dismissal. Thus, personal safety and job security are other important factors playing a role in whether or not objective journalism is possible.

On a much larger scale, Ortega in *El caso de Elizabeth* questions the meaning of the human condition. Here, there is a parallel with the struggle of Dostoyevsky´s underground man in *Notes from the Underground,* for this man also struggles with the very conception of man and his psychic structure. In his novel, Dostoyevsky talks about the difference between the man of action and the man of consciousness: when the man of action acts, he possesses no image of his own action, whereas for the conscious man every action is accompanied by its image, arising in his consciousness. Todorov explains that the man of nature and truth, the simple and immediate man imagined by Rousseau, is not only inferior to the conscious underground man but that he does not even exist. A unified, simple, and indivisible man is a fiction. The very simplest man is already dual; the human being has no existence prior to the other or independent of him (240).

Extrapolating this concept, an answer to some of Salanueva´s question can be formulated: the man of action, represented as the biased journalist, cannot exist without the conscious man represented by the objective journalist. As a result, there is a duality within the supposedly unified and indivisible man. First, there is Salanueva, the journalist who writes (according to Agustin Granados) to please others and with the aim of making money and/or conserving his job and his life. Then, there is Salanueva, the moralistic journalist who wants to write a more objective report about the femicides in order to accomplish an ethical duty. But these two men cannot exist independently from each other. The acts of the man of action have already been performed; he wrote a biased report about the femicides and got paid for doing so. The conscious man, on the other hand, needs to write a report obeying moral principles. To do this, Salanueva

needs the direct testimony of some of the people who were involved in the crimes in reality. Obviously, given the fictional nature of the character, the only way to accomplish this goal is by reporting imaginary or dreamed interviews with them. In this manner, Salanueva no longer quiets these characters but instead gives them voice. With this action Salanueva, the conscious man, emerges.

In *El caso de Elizabeth*, just as in *Notes from Underground*, two different problems are addressed, one having to do with the nature of man (ideas), and the other having to do with language (form). The concept of man as simple and autonomous is rejected, for the man of action does not exist without the man of consciousness. Likewise, a man alone cannot express his ideas, for he needs the presence of the "other" to externalize them.

In conclusion, in *2666,* Bolaño represents the Juarez femicides by means of a novel where an extra-diegetic narrator varies the points of view from which he re-counts the crimes. Focalization strategies are used to give the reader a panoramic view of the circumstances (external focalization), as well as to see the events from the perspective of different characters (internal focalization). Internal focalization would normally serve to develop an attachment between the reader and a particular character. However, in *2666* the intention is exactly the opposite; the constant alternation of perspectives in a single scene and the large number of characters from whom the point of view is been narrated create a division in the attention of the reader, in such a way that an emotional attachment never occurs (alienation effect). Other strategies are also used to achieve reader-character alienation, for example, the multi-diegetic narration, the parenthetical notes, and the inclusion of representations where the referents are not the femicides;

these elements constitute a sign to remind the reader of the "making" or artificiality of the text. Bolaño´s alienation strategies have a single aim: to instill in the reader a judgment of the problem of the Juarez femicides that is not biased by emotional attachments. This explains why the narrator´s voice speaks from the perspective of victims, family and friends of the victims, policemen, politicians, reporters, etc. without spending too much time or emotional energy with any of them.

In *Desert Blood,* there is also a third-person, extra-diegetic narrator who also switches between external focalization and internal focalization. However, unlike *2666,* the internal focalization is limited to revealing the feelings and thoughts of victims and co-victims of the femicides. Gaspar de Alba tries to give every focalized character time and attention by narrating from "over the shoulder" of only one character per scene. This is done with the objective of encouraging the reader to sympathize with the victims and their families. Thus, this text presents and represents the crimes against women in Juarez from the perspective of the victims and their families. Other strategies are used in this novel to give more content to the plot, such as the multi-diegetic narration. Another characteristic of *Desert Blood* is that with the detailed narration of the horrendous suffering of the victims and co-victims given via the internally focalized perspective of these characters, the novel displays overtones of horror literature. Arguably, this type of fiction is very powerful, for it works as a mirror to ourselves; it measures our imaginative lives, projections, beliefs, desires, and fears. In short, it conveys the crises within an individual as well as the crises of human nature in general.

Gregorio Ortega, in *El caso de Elizabeth*, includes a first-person intra-diegetic narrator who is a fictional journalist. The novel is composed of a chain of imaginary and

oneiric interviews that the journalist conducts with people who were, in real life, involved with the femicides. The monologue that is externalized by means of these illusory interviews brings forth the issue of the objectivity of journalism. The text itself is a signifier of the subject, for it shows how a "reality" can be constructed to protect the interests of the people involved in that "reality." The imaginary interviews also show that in order to externalize his ideas, the reporter needs the presence of "the other," who will act as the receptor so that the "conversation" can take place. In short, in *El caso de Elizabeth*, two different problems are addressed, one having to do with the nature of man (ideas), and the other having to do with language (form).

2. Plot, Characters and Theories

Bolaño´s novel *2666* is divided into five chapters but this analysis only focuses on the "La parte de los crímenes"; so consequently, whenever the novel is mentioned here, it refers to this chapter alone. The reason why the other chapters are not included is that the aforementioned chapter is the only one that deals with the femicides in its entirety. In fact, apart from the geographical common denominator (the fictional town of Santa Teresa), the five chapters do not share much. This could be an influence of the American author Jerome David Salinger, for his work is mentioned in the conversation between Reinaldo and a radio producer in Chicago in "La parte de los crímenes": "¿No has leído a Salinger? dijo el chicano. Pues no, dijo Reinaldo. Una enorme laguna en su vida, carnal, dijo el chicano" (632). As explained by John Updike, the short stories of J. D. Salinger show "how you can weave fiction out of a set of events that seem almost unconnected, or very lightly connected" (Ossen). Allegedly, Salinger utilized digression

to make his novels less manipulative and more authentic. This could have been Bolaño´s objective, for dis-connectivity is in fact one of the most salient characteristics of *2666*. For example, the German novelist Benno von Archimboldi, the professor of philosophy Oscar Amalfitano, and the American journalist Oscar Fate, characters that are crucial in the other chapters are never mentioned in “La parte de los crímenes.”

In "La parte de los crímenes", Bolaño documents 111 cases of murdered women in Santa Teresa. The statistics of the reported crimes are: 66% of the bodies were identified, 21% of the identified victims were maquiladora workers, 8% were prostitutes, 60% of the women whose body could be medically analyzed showed indications of being raped, and 34% of being strangled, 15% of the identified women were victims of domestic violence, and in 75% of the cases the crime motive was not specified. Finally, 72% of the bodies were abandoned in deserted places. The average age of the victims was 21 year old. As mentioned before, the forensic-like description of these murders is given by an extra-diegetic, third-person narrator. Entangled in the narrative, unfinished stories appear and disappear continuously without a strong cause-and-effect relationship. Interestingly, the great majority of these stories do not concern the femicide victims directly. For example, there is the story of a man who is a church profaner and who has a fascination with urinating in altars. There is also the story of the static and uncommitted love between the policeman Juan de Dios Martínez and the director of a mental institution, Elvira Campos. Then there is the story of the young man who has just joined the Juarez police force and witnesses the liaisons between the police and narco-traffickers. It is argued here that the discontinuity of these stories and their – at first sight - banal and inconsequential subjects, along with other elements in the novel, categorize

“La parte de los crímenes” as absurdist fiction. This genre of literature focuses on situations where an essential purpose in life cannot be found. Dark humor, satire, incongruity, denigration of reason, and controversy regarding the philosophical condition of the human being are common elements in this type of fiction. It is important to emphasize that while absurdist fiction may be humorous or incongruent in nature, it does not represent comedy or nonsense, but rather, the examination of human behavior under circumstances that appear to be purposeless and philosophically absurd. Absurdist works, as noticed in "La parte de los crímenes," do not necessarily have a traditional plot structure (i.e., rising action, climax, falling action, etc.). The reason is that absurdist fiction, just like Theatre of the Absurd, according to Martin Esslin, “has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being – that is, in terms of concrete stage images” (Cornwell 128). Evidently, with the format and other elements of his novel, such as monotony, repetition, and certain techniques of farce and comedy, Bolaño tries to emphasize that life is philosophically absurd. This vision is of course influenced by an implicit message sent by both the perpetrators by means of their sexual crimes and by their accomplices by means of covering up for and impeding punishment for the perpetrators. The message is: life is meaningless and purposeless. This work then illustrates the conflict between the human tendency to seek an essential value and meaning in life and the human inability to find one.

Another element of the absurd in "La parte de los crímenes" is monotony, which is represented for example with the relationship between Juan de Dios and Elvira, who cyclically get together, make love, contemplate the mountains and the stars, and say

goodbyes. Their tedious relationship does not advance or recede emotionally; it remains unalterable until the end of the chapter. The fact that Juan de Dios is a policeman and Elvira is the director of a mental hospital is very significant in light of Albert Camus´s notion of the absurd, as described in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. He defines the absurd human condition, on the one hand, as the confrontation between man's desire for significance, meaning, and clarity, and on the other hand, the silent, cold universe. According to Camus, with this confrontation, the individual faces the following choices: suicide, a leap of faith, or recognition. He concludes that recognition is the only secure option. Elvira then represents the conscious side that looks for significance and clarity, and Juan de Dios represents the impulsive side of the human condition. Their static relationship indicates that there is recognition of consciousness and impulsivity in human behavior, but they cannot fuse to act as a unity in the strict sense of the word.

As for the repetition factor, the genealogical tree of Olegario Cura Expósito (Lalo Cura) is a clear illustration: In 1865, an unnamed 15-year-old orphan girl was raped and had a baby girl who was named María Expósito. When María E. was 15, she was raped and had a baby girl who was named María Expósito Expósito. María E.E. learned the "oficio de la hierbería" when she was raped at age 16 and had a baby girl who was named María Expósito. María Expósito was very shy and behaved like a little girl, but when she was 16, she was raped and had a baby girl who was named María Expósito Expósito. Then something unusual happened, María E. had a second baby, but this time it was a baby boy who was named Rafael, so María E.E. and Rafael were brother and sister. But Rafael got killed when he murdered the man who had raped her sister. As for María E. E., she had a baby girl who was named María Expósito. This girl was

remarkably tall. When María E. was 18, she was raped and had a baby girl who was named María Expósito. In 1976, María E. got acquainted with two students from Mexico City and had sexual relationships with both of them. She got pregnant and had a baby boy whom – despite the reproaches of her family - she named Olegario Cura Expósito. Undoubtedly, this repetition brings to mind García Márquez´s *Cien años de soledad,* where the members of a family of several generations have the same names, Úrsula, Aureliano, and José Arcadio. There is thus a similarity between the Expósito family and the family of José Arcadio Buendía, and between Macondo and Santa Teresa: they both outline the universe and its history from their own spatial-temporal coordinates. However, there is an important difference between these two microcosms: in *Cien años de soledad,* as noted by Enrique Giordano, a macrocosm exists outside the microcosm of Macondo. Giordano explains:

> The truth is that Macondo, while it may embody the Spanish-American history, is never set as sole center of the universe. Throughout the text the existence of an outside world to which Macondo has no access and from which it is excluded is stressed. The Buendías conceive of that unknown expanse as a chimerical world; even further away lies the world where history transpires and important events take place, the world of great and early discoveries. The constant allusions to Riohacha imply the existence of another-centered space. (220)

In "La parte de los crímenes," the microcosm of the Expósito family is not much different from the microcosm of Santa Teresa, for in both universes young women are alone and they are being raped. The big difference is that in the Expósito microcosm the

rapes result in the multiplication and perpetration of that universe, whereas in the Santa Teresa microcosm women are raped and killed and nothing results, except questions about the nature of humanity and the meaning of life. This is symbolized with the name of the descendent of the Expósito family: Olegario Cura = Lalo Cura = la locura = craziness. The absurdly quick repetition of the fate of the Expósito women mirrors the absurdly quick repetition of femicides in Santa Teresa:

> Cuatro días después del hallazgo del cadáver de la niña Guadalupe Guzmán Prieto se encontró en el cerro Estrella, en la ladera este, el cuerpo de Jazmín Torres Dorantes, también de ocho años de edad. […] Dos días después de hallarse el cadáver de Jazmín, un grupo de niños localizó en un baldío al oeste de Parque Industrial General Sepúlveda el cuerpo sin vida de Carolina Fernández, de diecinueve años de edad, trabajadora de la maquiladora WS-Inc. […] Tres días después del hallazgo del cuerpo de Carolina, en el aciago mes de marzo de 1997, se localizó a una mujer de entre dieciséis y veinte años, en unos pedregales cercanos a la carretera a Pueblo Azul. […] En la última semana de marzo se descubrió el esqueleto de otra mujer, a unos cuatrocientos metros de la carretera a Cananea, en medio, podría decirse del desierto […]. (682)

The narrative goes on to report 111 femicides. Simultaneously, Santa Teresa mirrors a macrocosm: in the present, Ciudad Juarez, and in a futuristic and apocalyptic vision, Latin America. This was unquestionably Bolaño´s vision, for when he describes Sergio González´s book, in which the Mexican journalist documents the Juarez femicides, Bolaño states:

> *Huesos en el desierto* es así no sólo una fotografía imperfecta, como no podía ser de otra manera, del mal y de la corrupción, sino que se convierte en una metáfora de México y del pasado de México y del incierto futuro de toda Latinoamérica. Es un libro no en la tradición aventurera sino en la tradición apocalíptica, que son las dos únicas tradiciones que permanecen vivas en nuestro continente, tal vez porque son las únicas que nos acercan al abismo que nos rodea. (*Entre paréntesis* 24)

Another latent aspect of "La parte de los crímenes" appears in the constant reminders of the corporeal needs of the characters, such as eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, having sex, etc. This of course brings to mind Mikhail Bakhtin´s analysis of François Rabelais' work. The persistent mention and exaggeration of the body´s needs in "La parte de los crímenes" parallels the hyperbole of the Rabelaisian world, where human necessities are excessive and superabundant. That is the case in the narration when “El penitente,” the profaner who has a fascination with urinating and defecating inside the churches of Santa Teresa, urinates inside the San Tadeo church: “La iglesia olía a incienso y a orina. […] ¿Te has dado cuenta?, le dijo Márquez. ¿Qué?, dijo Juan de Dios Martínez. Este cabrón debe de tener una vejiga monstruosa. O se aguanta todo lo que puede y espera hasta estar adentro de una iglesia para soltarlo” (458). And in another scene describing what happened in the church of Nuestro Señor Jesucristo:

> Y luego más gritos y más curas y voces que avisaban a la policía y un revuelo de camisas blancas y un olor a ácido, como si alguien hubiera trapeado las piedras de la vieja iglesia con un galón de amoníaco, olor a

> meados, según le dijo el judicial Juan de Dios Martínez, demasiada orina para un hombre solo, para un hombre con una vejiga normal. (463)

These scenes recall those in Rabelais´s work: in the “Extraordinary Chronicle” Gargantua urinates for three months, seven days, thirteen hours, and forty-seven minutes, thus giving birth to the river Rhone and to seven hundred ships; in the Second Book, all the warm medicinal springs of France and Italy are generated by the hot urine of the sick Pantagruel; and in the Third Book, there is an allusion to the antique myth in which the urine of Jupiter, Neptune, and Mercury gave birth to Orion. In his analysis of these scenes in *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin explains:

> For the correct understanding of these carnivalesque gestures and images we must take into consideration that all such gesticulations and verbal images are part of the carnival as a whole, infused with one single logic of imagery. This is the drama of laughter presenting at the same time the death of the old and the birth of the new world. […] Through its participation in the whole, each of these images is deeply ambivalent, being intimately related to life-death-birth. This is why such images are devoid of cynicism and coarseness in our sense of the words. But these images, such as the tossing of excrement and drenching in urine, become coarse and cynical if they are seen from the point of view of another ideology. (149)

In "La parte de los crímenes," these two conditions are fulfilled: the images are part of a carnival as a whole, and they are also ambivalent and intimately related to life-death-birth; therefore, their interpretation could be that of regeneration, fertility, and renewal. Bakhtin explains that Rabelais was aware that in his time the image of God combined with the act of urination was not a sacrilege; instead it was interpreted as a sign of fertility and blessing (Bakhtin 149). However, the fact that the acts of urination and defecation are performed inside the church in "La parte de los crímenes" calls for an interpretation from a different perspective. It could be read as a sign of a refusal to see God as the source of regeneration and renewal or simply as a statement against God. G. R. Evans in his book *The Church in the Early Middle Ages* explains that in that era, propaganda literature tried to demonize the Muslims by accusing them of committing acts like defecating on altars:

> The *Gesta Francorum* describes the Turks as howling like demons in their unknown language. It calls them “a barbarous nation” and “enemies of God.” There was strutting and posturing. Colorful accusations were apparently made against Muslims by Urban II preaching the First Crusade, that they practiced magic, were given to sexual excesses, to defecation on Christian altars, to brutal cruelty to captives. (100)

Therefore, it is possible that the inclusion of the story of “El penitente” is an indication of the impossibility of fertility and renewal by means of faith and the values imposed by the Catholic Church. It could also represent the profanation of the highest female figure in Mexican culture, “La Madre Iglesia,” as the ultimate and extreme case of femicide in Santa Teresa.

As for the mention of the other corporeal needs, like eating, these are some examples:

> Pero Erica no tenía hambre y se limitó a escuchar lo que el sheriff tenía que decirle: que el cuerpo de Lucy Anne sería expedido a Huntsville al cabo de tres días, que la policía mexicana se había comprometido a capturar al asesino, que todo aquello olía a mierda. Después el sheriff pidió huevos revueltos con frijoles y una cerveza y ella se levantó de la mesa y fue a comprar más cigarrillos. (514)

> Mientras uno de ellos, el joven, daba desde la radio de la ambulancia el parte a la policía, el que tenía más edad se internó a pie por las calles de tierra de la colonia Las Flores hasta un sitio en donde vendían tacos y cuya propietaria lo conocía. Pidió seis de carnita, tres con crema y tres sin crema, los seis bien picantes, y dos latas de Coca-Cola. (533)

> La cena con que los agasajo el general consistía en tacos de carnita extra chilosos y tequila La Invisible. Cualquier otra cosa que se echara al buche de noche sólo conseguía provocarle agruras. (669)

Bakhtin remarks on the connection between food and the grotesque body in Rabelais´s work and explains that those images are also related to fertility, growth, and birth. The act of eating is also the encounter of man with the world, for he tastes it, introduces it into his body, and makes it part of himself. Furthermore, “man´s encounter

with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself" (281). Interestingly, in "La parte de los crímenes," the images of food are mostly of men eating. Readjusting Bakhtin's interpretation in Bolaño´s work, this can be read as the triumph of man over the world but not "man" as a human being incarnating both men and women, but rather men within a phallocentric system.

Bakhtin also explains that the image of food in Rabelais often symbolizes the entire labor process (581). It is true that many of the images of people eating in "La parte de los crímenes" are of men eating while taking a break from work. In the first example included above, the sheriff eats after reporting what he has found out about Lucy Anne's death. In the second example, the ambulance driver and his assistant eat tacos during a break while they are waiting for the police and the forensic team to arrive and perform the customary procedures on the female body they are guarding. In the third example, the General is about to give a speech about the femicides in Santa Teresa to the media reporters, but before doing so, he offers them a meal. Norman Wirzba, in *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*, makes a connection between food and death: "We eat to live, knowing that without food we still starve and die. But to eat we must also kill, realizing that without the deaths of others – microbes, insects, plants, animals – we can have no food" (111). Extrapolating this interpretation to the three situations described above, in the context of the plot, we can read them as indicating that, as sad as it might be, some people unintentionally survive at the expense of the femicide victims. That is the case of the sheriff whose work is to investigate the death of Lucy Anne, the ambulance drivers whose job is to pick up the bodies of the victims, and

the General whose job is to report on the femicides. Within the context of the Juarez femicides, the multiple images of people eating and of food can be interpreted as "people devouring people." That is to say, the scenes may be a way of describing the causes of the femicides, for some theories explain them as a conspiracy where people get paid for horrific and cruel assignments such as selling the victims´ internal organs, selling the victims for the making of snuff movies, selling the victims for orgies where they end up getting tortured, raped, mutilated, and killed. In sum, there are three different interpretations of the images of men eating: as a sign of growth (which would be an ironic reading), as a sign of men as triumphant over the world (in a phallocentric sense), and as a sign of the condition of the human being who lives through the death of others.

The last aspect that will be highlighted here as part of the format and content that contribute to the categorization of "La parte de los crímenes" as absurdist fiction is the inclusion of long arguments about - at first sight - banal subjects. For example, the extensive conversation between Elvira and Juan de Dios about different phobias:

> Otro clásico: la claustrofobia. Miedo a los espacios cerrados. Y otro más: la agorafobia. Miedo a los espacios abiertos. Ésos los conozco, dijo Juan de Dios Martínez. Otro clásico más: la necrofobia. Miedo a los muertos, dijo Juan de Dios Martínez, he conocido gente así […]. (478)

This discussion goes on for three pages. Another example is the detailed lecture by the clairvoyant, Florita Almada, about the scope and importance of botany, its sub-disciplines, human nutrition, the difference between white and black magic, etc:

> La botanoscopia, que se basa en las formas, movimientos y reacciones de las plantas, subdividida a su vez en la cromiomancia y la licnomancia, cuyo principio es la cebolla o los capullos de flores que germinarán o florecerán, la dendromancia, vinculada a la interpretación de los árboles, la filomancia […]. (536)

Other examples are the recounting of sexist and super cruel jokes at the expense of women by a policeman, which goes on for almost three pages, a pastoral poem, and the analysis of a shepherd´s feelings and thoughts, among others. These digressions in the novel are undoubtedly unities which differ in style and content from other unities in the novel. Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* explains that the novel as a genre "is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice" (261). Thus, in the novel, the reader is confronted with several heterogeneous stylistic unities such as moral, philosophical, or scientific statements, oratory, ethnographic descriptions, memoranda, and so forth. It is argued here that in "La parte de los crímenes," Bolaño orchestrates all these units with the objective of showing, within the totality of his novel, the totality of the world and the absurdist aspect of it. Once again, the absurd aspect of the novel does not indicate absurdity on the subject with which the novel deals: the terrible crimes against women. It rather reflects the absurdity surrounding the crimes. For example, the absurd tactics used by the Mexican police, the Mexican government, and the maquiladora industry to avoid recognizing and taking responsibility for the femicides, such as denying the real number of victims, denying that many of them were maquiladora workers, rejecting the fact that the bodies presented similarities in the way

they were tortured, mutilated, and killed, attributing the crimes to domestic violence, blaming the victims for their own destiny, etc.

The novel then portrays how, when these institutions are confronted and asked to give explanations and solutions, they go off on tangents by giving irrelevant speeches. The absurdity is also in the conception of life that the perpetrators and other people involved with the abduction, killing, and covering up of the crimes of these young women have. For them, the life of these women is meaningless, but not for the victims' family and friends or for people who have a more rational and humane conception of life.

In "La parte de los crímenes," the frequent use of independent stylistic units and intertextuality inarguably confirms Michael Riffaterre´s theory about representation. For him, the reference on which mimesis is based is not reality but rather other texts. For Riffaterre, intertextuality is the agent both of the mimesis and of hermeneutic constructions upon that mimesis ("Intertextual Representation" 142). Evidently, Bolaño´s novel is not a representation of the femicides, but it is a representation of representations of the femicides. In other words, the literary language of "La parte de los crímenes" endeavors not to represent reality, but to establish a unified, coherent system of signification. When reading the novel, the reader is aware of the multiplicity of representations that the text imposes on him, so that he then has to keep on "pushing the meaning over to a text not present in the linearity" (*Semiotics* 12).

Of course, as expected, there are some mimetic utterances or clichés that create, according to Riffaterre, "a possibility" such as the mentioning of a large number of femicides that occurred in one place in a relatively short period of time, the physical

and socio-demographic profile of the victims, the violence inflicted to the bodies, the location in a desert city bordering on the United States, etc. These utterances mimic reality thus integrate one of the poles forming a dyad, as explained by Riffaterre (*Text Production* 7). The opposite pole is composed of unities which frustrate the "possibility." This is to say, in the text, the reader encounters incongruous elements that come in and disrupt it, in such a way that it no longer accurately represents reality. This phenomenon allows the reader to jump from mimesis to semiosis and thereby gain access to the significance of the text. Some of the incongruous elements are: the stories dealing with the profaner who loves urinating inside churches, the failed love between a policeman and the director of a mental institution, the description of Lalo Cura's predecessors, the constant – and at times detailed - references to people eating, drinking, vomiting, etc.

The contrast between the cliché descriptions and the incongruous elements (the two opposite poles) results in a "*stylistic effect*" (Riffaterre, *Text Production* 7). This effect confronts the reader with an obvious distortion of mimesis; for him, the text now refers to nothing and loses its meaning temporarily. The reader then tries to superimpose his own interpretation on the text, an interpretation that will change as it progresses.

Now, directing the attention to the characters in the novel, it is evident that they are somewhat developed but they are abandoned in the story; just like the multiple stories that appear and disappear, so do the characters. It was mentioned before that this is a strategy for preventing the reader from getting attached to the characters and getting distracted from the sociological problem under scrutiny. However, there are two

stories that are crucial for the explanation of the femicides: the story about a missing woman named Kelly and the story of Klaus Haas, the man accused of killing Estrella Ruíz Sandoval. Haas was the owner of a computer store in Santa Teresa´s downtown; he knew Estrella but denied this fact in his first interrogation. Traces of blood were found in his basement, and he had a history of sexual crimes outside Mexico. All these facts triggered his apprehension. His guilt is not confirmed, but he does release the names of two young men as the murderers. These men are members of rich and influential Mexican families.

As for Kelly, she was a wealthy young woman whose job consisted of organizing orgies for famous and powerful people in different cities in Mexico. Apparently, she first hired models for the parties, but since that was very expensive, she opted for bringing in local young women who ended up being killed in the sexual rituals she organized. Allegedly Kelly was also assassinated by her clients.

The theory exposed in the novel by means of these two stories is that the many young women of Santa Teresa were killed by powerful, wealthy, and untouchable people for sexual pleasure. The novel undoubtedly denounces the horrendous and unjust murders of a large number of young women in a relatively short period of time, the obscurity of the investigations, and the impunity surrounding the killings. It also analyzes the deficiencies of the Mexican police force and the Mexican government in the past and the present, and it envisions the future not only of this country but of Latin America in general. Furthermore, the text, with its stylistic units, encourages the reader to decipher the system of symbols which it contains. It is argued here that the novel emphasizes the absurdity of the human condition, which arises from the fundamental

disharmony between the individual's search for meaning and the meaninglessness of the universe.

Unlike Bolaño, Gaspar de Alba in *Desert Blood* represents the Juarez femicides by means of a more traditional plot: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The fictional story develops in 1998. Ivon Villa returns to her native El Paso, Texas to adopt the baby of a maquiladora worker in Ciudad Juarez, México. Soon she learns that over the last five years, more than a hundred raped and massacred bodies of poor, young women have been found dumped in the Chihuahua desert outside of Juarez. Ivon experiences this issue very closely, first because Cecilia, the young woman whose baby she was going to adopt, turns up strangled and disemboweled in the desert. Then, shortly afterward, Ivon's younger sister gets kidnapped in Juarez. Ivon fears that her sister will become a femicide victim and resolves to find her and bring her back home, whatever it takes. Soon Ivon realizes that there is a conspiracy covering up the crimes, one that implicates everyone from the Maquiladora Association to the Border Patrol.

The novel deals with the covering up of the Juarez femicides by the US media, for until 1998 no information had been published about the killings. When the newspaper the *El Paso Times* published Irene´s case, they distorted the facts and did not publish Ivon´s testimony. For the media, it was less important to publish the truth than to protect the image of the Border Patrol, the maquiladora industry, and influential and rich people who were involved with the abduction, torture, rape, and killing of young women.

The novel also points out the abuses that female maquiladora workers were subjected to. Among other things, they had to prove monthly that they were menstruating by showing their used feminine pads to a maquiladora doctor; they got fired if they became pregnant; they got paid very little; they worked long hours, until they could not feel their fingers; and they had to participate in beauty pageants (allegedly, this is how they were selected to be prostitutes or "actresses" in snuff movies). The novel also criticizes the actions of the maquiladora industry, the Mexican government, and the Mexican police force. For example, it is mentioned that these institutions are run by unscrupulous, rich individuals. It also notes how out of despair, family, friends, and sympathizers of the victims had to conduct their own searches for bodies, for the police did not seem to do anything to find the missing women or their bodies. The police was not pleased with these searches because, according to them, the civilians "were contaminating evidence," but the police were also accused of destroying important evidence themselves. The police treated victims and co-victims without respect. Among other things, they blamed the victims for their own fate and they made co-victims wait for long periods of time to file a report about the disappearances.

The novel also shows how the terror did not stop with the femicides: members of support groups for family and friends of the victims received death threats if they continued spreading information about the killings. In addition, the fact that some people make money at the expense of the femicide victims is brought out in the novel. For example, a reporter wants to broadcast the search for bodies conducted by the civilians to raise her TV show rating. Evidently, the subject of gender equality is highlighted as well.

The novel represents the femicides by means of three cases. Two of them (Cecilia and Mireya) illustrate the fact that many of the victims were poor “muchachas del sur” and were also maquiladora workers. In contrast, the case of Irene, an American student who came to a fair in Juárez, which is at the center of the plot and is recounted in the most detail, shows that not all the victims were maquiladora workers from the south of Mexico. The case of Eva represents another type of femicide; this maquiladora worker was not abducted, raped, and killed like most victims. Eva was artificially inseminated by the maquiladora´s doctor without her even knowing. Also without her knowing, she was used as Guinea pig to test contraceptives that were just being developed. All these chemicals caused cancer in her body and ultimately her death.

With the cases of femicides represented in the novel, some theories are offered about the identity and purposes of the culprits. As mentioned above, there is the theory that an Egyptian chemist made his own contraceptives and, with the factories´ consent, was testing them on maquiladora workers without their consent. The need to test the effectiveness of the contraceptives once a woman was pregnant led the Egyptian to perform artificial inseminations on some of the workers. The products caused the victims to have babies with malformations or/and fatal illnesses themselves, including cancer. Another theory is that the victims were obliged to participate in the making of pornography and snuff films and that they were killed during the filming. Allegedly, the Egyptian was involved in these acts, as well as the young sons of wealthy and influential people, members of the Border Patrol, the owner of a newspaper, members of the Mexican federal police, and even co-workers of the victims from the maquiladoras. After being raped, tortured, mutilated, and killed, the victims were given

to savage dogs as a treat. Other theories are mentioned but not fully developed, for example the theory that sexual offenders from El Paso crossed the border to kill women, and the one that there is a black market for human organs and young women are targeted because of their good health.

Denouncing the femicides is evidently one of the main objectives of the novel. However, a closer view of *Desert Blood* reveals that it works as sort of meta literature, for the novel uses form and content to draw attention to itself as a work of art, while setting forth the reality of a story. It draws attention to the existence of a culture that challenges borders: Chicano culture. *Desert Blood* is a bilingual narrative, which features characters with a bicultural background - some of them are homosexual - and it takes place in a land that is politically divided and yet, in many ways, borderless. These elements confirm the existence of a culture that aims for the eradication of boundaries related to geography, gender, and race. Thus, the text itself (*Desert Blood*) confirms the existence of the text (Chicana literature).

The need to rescue and to differentiate a culture and literature that is unique to Chicanas was greatly remarked on by Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldúa. In *Borderland/La frontera: The New Mestiza,* she challenges the notion of a border as a simple division and describes the US/Mexico border as an unnatural measure that brought pain to the mestizos by both dividing their culture and fencing them in. Anzaldúa also breaks down the linguistic division by using both English and Spanish in her writing. In so doing, she demonstrates that Chicano literature is tied to both cultures; therefore it cannot be expressed in only one language. In her book, Anzaldúa also explores the borders of gender, for she comes to terms with her Chicana homosexual

identity to recognize the components of her existence. Evidently, there are many similarities between Gaspar de Alba´s work and Alzaldúa´s work; they both represent the “New Mestiza” consciousness. Alma García explains:

> The Mestiza consciousness is about allowing for contradictions. It is the "borderlands" of the Chicana. She exists monolingually and bilingually. She exists in an indigenous, Mexican, and American culture. It rejects the sections as race, class, and gender as separate identities and sees them intertwined, all connected to each other. It is about multiple identities and accepting these identities for oneself. It is being queer, being multiracial, being multicultural, being multilingual. It is about challenging what is the status quo and embracing ambiguity. (21)

In the process of confirming itself, *Desert Blood* counters the image of the “old” Chicana, who is perceived to be a submissive, passive, woman under the command of the Chicano. Her roles are “typically in the home and she is isolated from and ignorant to the world surrounding her” (García 93). This contrast between the old and the new Chicana is illustrated with Ivon and her mother. Ivon challenges the conception of the Chicana that would make her family proud, first because she went away from El Paso, which means away from her family and her culture. Her mother reproaches her:

> Worst mistake we ever made was letting you follow your cousin Mary to that Iowa college. Your poor uncle Joe never knows where that girl is these days, *vagabundiando* around Mexico on a train, writing embarrassing stories about the family. You two should have stayed right here. UTEP´s a good school. All of Fátima´s kids went to UTEP, and they

> all stayed in El Paso, close to their family, where they belong. You, you go off to college and turn into one of those women libbers, *o lo que sea*, and then you move to Los Angeles, and I never see you again. (65)

This fragment clearly establishes what was expected from Ivon as a Chicana. Obviously, she was considered by her mother "a failure," first because she left El Paso, but mostly because she is homosexual and plans to have a baby with her partner. Ivon´s mom reprimands her:

> *Es una verguenza*. That´s all you do: embarrass me in front of the whole family. It´s not enough that you went away to college and turned into a *marimacha* with that Women´s Studies degree, or that your father took up drinking again because of you. Now you want to bring a child into that … that immoral lifestyle of yours? (66)

Ivon´s younger sister Irene comes in the novel as the individual who will give Ivon the opportunity to show her mother and others that being a new Chicana, although contrary in many ways to the old Chicana, is to be determined, courageous, and successful. The new Chicana also cares deeply about her family and culture as long as she maintains her right to choose her way of living.

Irene confronts her mother:

> I thought you were proud of Ivon. You are always showing off about your daughter the Ph.D. who lives in Los Angeles. Now you´re suddenly ashamed of her because she wants to have a baby in her life? What´s wrong with that? Who cares what the family thinks? I don´t care. Ivon´s not hurting anybody, Ma. (66)

Also, with Irene´s disappearance, it is clear that the new Chicana attitude is needed to find her. Irene´s mother stays at home, crying, regretting, and blaming Ivon for what happened to Irene. In contrast, Ivon investigates and looks for her sister, risking her own life:

> From the living room, her mom was shouting, “Don´t even think of coming back here without your sister!”
>
> I´m never coming back here, Ivon wanted to yell back, but instead she hurried to the truck. She was going to find Irene, bring her home, and never set foot in her mother´s house again. (131)

Ivon´s mother continually criticized Ivon for her choices and actions, but she did not analyze her own actions, as a mother and as a wife. If she had stopped judging other people like her husband or Ivon, she probably would have realized that Irene, in spite living with her, was feeling lonely. This is revealed in the latter’s diary: “She [Ivon] found her sister´s diaries under the mattress and read them all in one sitting. It made her eyes sting to read how lonely Irene felt, how much she missed her big sister and her dad, even though she´d been only eight when he died” (164).

Two other concepts that the new mestiza consciousness challenges are the role of women according to major religions and faith in God, particularly in the homosexual community. Norma Alarcón in *Chicana Critical Issues* explains: “One cannot fully participate in religion and be a lesbian. Lesbianism disrupts the male dominance. It gives women power and control outside her typical role of wife, daughter, sister, and girlfriend” (117). As for faith in God, it is questioned in *Desert Blood* in the scene where Ivon is at the police office in Ciudad Juarez reporting the disappearance of her sister.

She sees other people whose young female relatives have also disappeared holding their rosaries and praying. She talks to some of these people and then reflects: “every single woman I spoke with knows that God will help her family, God will make things right for them. God will bring back the missing girl in their lives. I want to ask them if they have ever wondered why God did this to them in the first place” (167). Furthermore, the crucial clue that helps Ivon find her sister is a riddle with reference to God: *Poor Juarez, so far from the Truth, so close to Jesus.* The unused factory near the limestone statue of Jesus is where the snuff movies were filmed and where the victims were kept:

> Was it just this morning that she´d been staring up at the statue´s face from Lomas de Poleo? That impassive limestone face that offered nothing but … wait a minute … that impassive limestone face of *Jesus. Poor Juarez, so far from the Truth, so close to Jesus. Es una fábrica cerca de Jesús,* the voice had said on the phone. A factory close to Jesus. Close to Cristo Rey. (285)

Of course, the theological interpretation of the riddle is problematic. On the one hand, if Juarez is far from the truth, then it means that it is close to a lie, and if Juarez is close to Jesus, then the lie and Jesus are in the same place. On the other hand, when Ivon reflects on the fact that Jesus has done nothing to save the femicide victims, it is precisely then that everything falls into place and she figures out the place where she can find her sister, close to Jesus, and she does find her.

Lastly, the novel denounces the oppression of women, which arises from a multitude of domineering means. The poor, young maquiladora workers of Juarez were

victims even before they were abducted, tortured, and killed. They suffered because of limitations that curtailed their lives in one way or another. For example, Cecilia had to hide her pregnancy because if she did not, the maquiladora where she worked would have fired her. She would have given her baby up for adoption, had she and the baby survived, because with her salary at the maquiladora, she would not have been able to support the baby. Cecilia´s life was oppressed because her human rights were not being respected. Eva is another case of abuse of human rights, for they were testing products on her without her consent. Mireya, a 14-year-old victim, was targeted by older people who took advantage of her inexperience and youth. Ariel, her co-worker at the maquila and an accomplice of the killers, tried to persuade Mireya, as she did other young maquiladora workers, to practice prostitution with Americans, for "they pay more and in dollars." Because of Mireya´s refusal to become a prostitute, Ariel managed to convince her to go dancing with the Lone Ranger, a femicide perpetrator. Once in the dancing club, Mireya is induced by the Lone Ranger to go to the house of a friend of his "to buy cosmetics very cheap." Irene, for her part, was repressed because of her class and culture. When she went to *la feria* in Juarez, she was hanging out with girls her age but "she felt like everyone was staring at her, thinking she was a *vendida* or something, because she was from the other side. She looked like them, same color of skin, same Mexican features and, yet, she didn´t belong. She was an American. To a lot of people that meant sell-out" (104).

Evidently, *Desert Blood* is another palpable example that the referent of a mimetic work is not reality but rather other texts. The case of the victim Irene is partly a

compilation of data of other cases extracted from sources like police files, media reports, blogs, etc.

The expected congruous elements or clichés encountered in the text are: the mentioning of a large number of femicides that occurred in one place in a relatively short period of time, the physical and socio-demographic profile of the victims, the violence inflicted to the bodies, the city of Juarez, etc. These utterances mimic reality and thus constitute "the probability" pole of the dyad. The incongruous elements which frustrate "the probability" are: the attention given to other issues brought up by means of the main protagonist, Ivon, such as the acceptance of lesbians and their rights, the recognition of Chicana culture as an independent unit, the reception of Chicanos as Chicanos rather than Americanized Mexicans or Mexicanized Americans, etc. Other elements challenging reality are the fact that the victim on whom the plot is centered does not completely fit the profile of the Juarez victims, the fact that Ivon approaches dangerous people to inquire about the femicides and does not get killed, the ending in which the victim is rescued by her sister, etc. These elements come in and disrupt the text, in such a way that it no longer accurately represents reality. This phenomenon allows the reader to try to superimpose his/her own interpretation on the text. Here it is argued that *Desert Blood* is a clear statement of the agenda that Chicana feminists pursue: a revolutionary change for those women who suffer from racial discrimination, as well as for those who suffer from patriarchy, age, and class exploitation.

In *El caso de Elizabeth*, Ortega tells the story of a journalist who wants to redeem himself by writing a more objective report on the Juarez femicides than the one he had previously written. In order to do so, he documents imaginary or dreamed interviews

with people who were – in real life - involved with the femicides. For example, he has an imaginary meeting with the victim Elizabeth Castro García, and he also has an oneiric encounter with Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif, the man who was accused of Elizabeth´s murder, among other unreal events. Interestingly, the novel lists the murder of 32 girls and young women who were murdered in real life. Of these women, only 12 were identified. It is mentioned that 8 of these women were raped, but this does not mean that the remaining 24 were not. It is confirmed that two women were maquiladora workers, but this does not mean that the remaining 30 were not. The names of the victims and the year they disappeared coincide with the names of and information about the victims on the site *Nuestras hijas de regreso a casa A. C.* created by family, friends, and sympathizers of the victims.

One subject highlighted in the novel is its criticism of the Catholic church. Right from the start, Salanueva describes the streets of Tapachula, Chiapas and reflects:

> La iglesia de *San Agustín.* Desnuda, seguramente vandalizada durante la Revolución, o por los traficantes de arte colonial. Nada que invite a la devoción, mucho menos que ratifique el poder de la Iglesia que se equivoca, porque pide sumisión y a cambio nada entrega. (11)

The text also describes Juarez as the border where aberrations find their nest:

> Ciudad Juarez y El Paso del Norte, poblaciones antagónicas. Al recordarlas se hace presente el lugar común: juntaron el hambre con la necesidad. De este lado, del nuestro, las consecuencias de la voraz rapiña de los políticos corruptos y corruptores, la voracidad propiciada por la economía de mercado, la mano de obra barata que facilita la

> instalación de las maquiladoras y permite el ensanchamiento cultural y económico entre las diversas clases sociales. Del otro lado, en Estados Unidos, el bienestar confundido con el permiso para matar, consentido por la ley, protegido por la Asociación Nacional del Rifle. (21)

Evidently, this is a criticism of the Mexican government and of the right of Americans to bear arms. The novel also evokes an alleged complicity between the Mexican government and the media to give "answers" to the public about the femicides. For example, this paragraph is a segment of a letter that was initially sent to the president and director of the Mexican newspaper *Reforma* to protest against the allegedly distorted information that *Reforma* published in 1998. This letter was published in the newspaper *Página uno*:

> Consecuencia de lo anterior [the fact that only the testimony of the State of Chihuahua Attorney, Arturo Chávez Chávez, was taken into account to publish an article about the femicides] es la publicación de errores y falsedades que sólo contribuyen a desinformar y confundir a la opinión pública, lo cual, cabe señalar, se ha convertido en estrategia de la actual administración de gobierno en Chihuahua. Esta innovación, litigar a través de la prensa, montando primero espectacularidad y suspenso, después filtrando información, y más tarde presentando culpables por decreto, permite al gobierno disfrazar la ineficiencia de que tanto adolece la procuración de justicia, ineficiencia que después tratan de traslapar a los jueces y magistrados que se atreven a actuar conforme a derecho, y a

> desechar las débiles y/o inverosímiles consignaciones que el Ministerio Público les consigna. (94)

This last issue is the one that serves as the main focus of Ortega´s work. In *El caso de Elizabeth,* a considerable number of pages are dedicated to proving the innocence of Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif and to showing how a conspiracy between the Mexican government, the Mexican authorities, and the media led to his apprehension.

Theories about the femicide perpetrators and their motives are offered in the novel by means of a mental analysis of Salanueva:

> La respuesta se me dificulta, sobre todo si acoto la dimensión del problema al ámbito político y social de Ciudad Juárez, a las más de cien muertas allí sacrificadas, a la supuesta inocencia de Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif, a la ineficiencia de la procuración de justicia, a la complicidad de las Organizaciones No Gubernamentales. ¿Podría, acaso, desmentir que conviven opulencia y miseria, y que esta da como resultado la prostitución de todos los niveles y en todos los sentidos: infantil, hetero y homosexual, zoofilia dirigida, necrofilia pagada? ¿Tendría los elementos suficientes para desmentir que hay crímenes rituales, o asesinatos contratados para filmar películas "snuff," o uno o varios asesinos seriales, divertidos en burlarse de la justicia mexicana? (22)

As can be seen, the format in which the theories are presented follows the uncertainty of the imaginary and the oneiric. This aspect of the novel will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

The novel is not the story of the victim Elizabeth; instead, it is a detailed examination of her case, meant to expose the role of media and Mexican institutions in the femicides. However, there is an imaginary interview between Elizabeth and Salanueva, where Elizabeth´s features are described, as well as her dreams, her ideals, and her plans. She confides:

> Por eso no quiero quedarme en la maquiladora, no deseo permanecer como obrera. Por eso voy a las clases de computación, - dice queriendo mostrar fuerza de voluntad, ser vivaz, estar atenta a las oportunidades para no dejarlas pasar. Después habla deshilvanadamente de lo que ha de tomar de su salario para asistir a una escuela "patito", de la imposibilidad de que una mujer como ella pueda acceder a una educación universitaria, de su esfuerzo por evitar que la ninguneen, o por poner un hasta aquí a los acosos sexuales de los capataces y los patrones. Es entonces cuando me doy cuenta de que esta más o menos bien hecha, de que el hambre no hizo mella en un cuerpo prometedor, cuyos únicos requerimientos eran el ejercicio, una alimentación balanceada y los afeites de belleza adecuados para su cutis, para suavizar más esa piel que la vida dura no había logrado descomponer. Si, Elizabeth Castro García es una pieza apetecible, no solo por la promesa de un cuerpo turgente, sino por esos modales muy suyos que la convierten en algo más que una lolita, por estar más allá de la ingenuidad sexual, por estar parapetada en una inocencia que únicamente perdería al entregar su virginidad. (138)

The image of maquiladora workers represented in this interview is contradicted by the image given by “El Diablo” - a man who was accused of killing young women in Juarez - in the oneiric interview conducted by Salanueva. The journalist recounts:

> En este tema de la prostitución [“El Diablo”] fue cínicamente explícito, y quizá tenga razón. Aclaró que el hambre evita la violencia, vence los pudores, derrota las resistencias morales. Cuando las jovencitas se dan cuenta de que lo ganado en las maquiladoras es insuficiente para mantenerse y para enviar dinero a sus casas, solas buscan la alternativa de la putería, sin importarles a quién han de cederle la virginidad. (38)

These two images are contradictory. On the one hand, the “testimony” of the victim portrays a young woman who is conscious that the salary she receives in the maquiladora is not going to take her anywhere, so that she decides to find a way to open new paths to prosperity: to learn how to run computers and aspire to a better job. On the other hand, “El Diablo” sees prostitution as the only path maquiladora workers can follow to prosperity.

Clearly, the plot of *El caso de Elizabeth* also exemplifies how the reference of this mimetic work is not the reality of the Juarez femicides but rather the representation of the crimes in the media, particularly newspapers. The clichés in this novel are more direct than in the other two. For example, the names used are of real people, the victims mentioned are real, the scenario is Juarez, Mexico, the obscurity and impunity surrounding the femicides are emphasized, etc. These descriptive systems make the text understandable and coherent, but there are other elements in the novel, which break coherence, thereby distorting the mimesis. Perhaps the most incongruent

element is the oneiric and imaginary aspect of the text; this element modifies the structure of the text, in such a way that it no longer represents reality. This evident distortion puts an end to the mimesis and results in a semiosis, thus giving the reader access to the significance of the text.

The hermeneutic reading of the text offered here is described next. Salanueva´s interviews in the text are not real; they were a creation of his imagination. Therefore they are used as strategic elements to avoid a monologue. Consequently, one can infer that *El caso de Elizabeth* is a text that has another objective besides the denunciation of a socio-political problem and determining the purpose of journalism and of life itself. The text also exemplifies potential literary problems that are fundamentally communicative.

It was mentioned above that in order to externalize his thoughts, Salanueva needs the presence of “the other.” In "La búsqueda del interlocutor," Carmen Martín Gaite highlights the fact that the receptor is the crucial element needed to enable communication: "La del interlocutor no es una búsqueda fácil ni de resultados previsibles y seguros, y esto por una razón fundamental de exigencia, es decir, porque no da igual cualquier interlocutor" (19). Salanueva needs to give equal opportunities to both perpetrators and victims to talk so that he can achieve objectivity in his report. The implicit reader is looking forward to listening to the testimonies of those who were directly involved in the Juarez femicides. Consequently, the need for a clear, organized, and precise dialogue calls for both an ideal interviewer and an ideal interviewee. The ideal interviewer would ask the questions that the interviewee was expecting to hear and is prepared to answer, whereas the ideal interviewee would answer the questions in a clear and organized manner, so that with their dialogue the implicit reader would be

able to perceive the message without interference. Transferring a message is not an easy and automatic task, but when the channel is cleared from interference, the message will be clearly delivered. Literature permits the creation of an interference-free channel, for in writing, there is freedom to create ideal interlocutors.

Salanueva puts his own words in the mouths of both the interviewee and the interviewer. As a result, he can communicate his own point of view and nothing else. Thus, there is a parallel between the rhetorical message the implicit author sends to the implicit reader and the rhetorical message Salanueva sends to his friend Agustín Granados. The struggles of Salanueva to convince Granados of the innocence of Sharif, for example, represent the struggles of the implicit author to convince the implicit reader of the power of media to recreate a "reality." This can be inferred through the use of such clauses as: "Asi pienso que Agustin Granados y la sociedad tienen que saber que …" (63). Granados in turn explains that the word *desmentir* "implica no sólo mostrar una verdad diferente, apoyada en hechos, sino modificar la verdad anterior, enquistada en la conciencia popular, para que acepte lo real y no la ficción que ha decidido elegir como compañera de viaje durante su vida" (143).

Salanueva is honest and clear about the fact that the interviews with these key people are not real, but he also challenges his friends, asking why nobody denies the truth of what he has written if they have doubts about his imaginary/oneiric report:

> Al narrarles lo soñado en mi entrevista con Sergio Armendariz Díaz, "El Diablo," y con Elizabeth Castro García; al mencionarles los encuentros imaginarios con Eunice y su madre, al describirles el féretro y la funeraria, al reconstruirles mis conversaciones con Maximino Salazar, con Abdel

> Latif Sharif Sharif, con Irene Blanco, con Oscar Máynez Grijalva y lo recuperado del trabajo periodístico de José Pérez-Espino, me tildan de loco, de ineficiente, de impreparado, porque nadie desmiente. (141)

Here the text becomes a circle without any exit. First there is the assertion that the ideal journalist is one who is objective, but then it is argued that if nobody contests what is written, it may continue to have the status of truth. In accordance with Johan Huizinga´s concept of freeplay, journalism, as represented in *El caso de Elizabeth*, can be regarded as freeplay. For, with supra-logical dynamics within its delimited and autonomous space, it creates another level of reality which differs from the quotidian domain. This structure and its dynamics bring to mind freeplay in Julio Cortázar's "Las babas del diablo," where the photographer creates a "reality" based on the loose clues he observed even though he does not know what really happened with the people he is observing on the street.

This also exemplifies Derrida´s notion of freeplay, which is the different arrangements of elements within the totality of a structure. Ortega - like Cortázar - has clues to the femicides, and he also possesses the freedom to arrange them in an infinite number of combinations, creating different "realities" with every combination. Following Derrida, we see that in *El caso de Elizabeth* - just as in "Las babas del diablo" - the center of the structure is inside as well as outside the structure itself. The center inside the structure is the story that Salanueva recounts by means of imaginary/oneiric interviews: his reality. Whereas the center outside the structure is the objective reality, what really happened with the Juarez femicides.

3. Conclusions

In this chapter, it is concluded that the novels dealing with the Juarez femicides analyzed here clearly demonstrate Riffaterre's theory concerning representation. He contends that a representation of reality in literature is not a mimesis of reality but instead a mimesis of intertexts; it is a semiosis. These novels represent previous representations of the Juarez femicides. This is to say their reference is from texts to texts: police files, newspaper reports, blogs, human rights documentation, etc. Thus, intertextuality is the agent both of the mimesis and of hermeneutic constructions on that mimesis. Consequently, the reading of the three novels cannot be complete or satisfactory without going through the intertext; the novels do not signify unless as a function of a complementary intertextual homologue.

Of course, one cannot deny the reality which exists outside of the text and preexists to it; the Juarez femicides are a reality and they obviously preexisted any representation. Thus, the point here is not to debate the veracity of the crimes and the circumstances surrounding them but rather to examine the reference that is at the center of the texts representing this reality and at the center of the hermeneutic reading of these texts.

It was observed that each novel has incongruous elements which distance them from a descriptive content, in such a way that their object cannot be analyzed or rationalized in sensory terms. Yet, as Riffaterre points out, "these texts not only lend themselves to interpretation but they are especially apt to trigger and control the reader's hermeneutic behavior" ("Intertextual Representation" 141).

As for the significance of the texts, it is concluded that “La parte de los crímenes,” with its stylistic units, highlights the fact that there is an absurd aspect to the chain of happenings preceding and following the Juarez femicides. It is important to clarify that the novel does not indicate absurdity in the subject with which it deals - the terrible crimes against women - but rather, it illustrates the absurdity of the circumstances surrounding these terrible events. For example, the absurd tactics used by the Mexican police, the Mexican government, and the maquiladora industry to avoid recognizing and taking responsibility for the femicides. It portrays how, when these institutions are confronted and asked to give explanations and solutions, they go off on tangents by giving irrelevant speeches. The text also illustrates how the crimes re-create a conception of life, one that is conceived by the perpetrators and all the people involved with the abduction, killing, and covering up of the killings of these young women, one that is in its entirety absurd.

For its part, *Desert Blood,* with the vicissitudes experienced by the main character, exposes the agenda pursued by the Chicana feminists: a revolutionary change for those women who suffer from racial and gender discrimination, as well as for those who suffer from patriarchy, age, and class exploitation.

A hermeneutic reading of *El caso de Elizabeth,* in which the oneiric and imaginary dominate, reveals that the text brings forth two different issues, one having to do with the nature of man (ideas): The concept of man as simple and autonomous is rejected, for the man of action does not exist without the man of consciousness. And the other has to do with language (form): A man alone cannot express his ideas, for he needs the presence of the “other” to externalize them.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the main goals of this dissertation was to compare the way directors and writers represent the victims of the Juarez femicides to determine if – as some allegations assure - they perpetuate their victimization. First, by compromising their identity and second, by placing them in a secondary level of importance which comes after the hyper-violence linked to the crimes and the socio-political circumstances of Juarez which contributed to these events. It was noted that in the documentaries, a dichotomy that identifies the victims as either “good” or “bad” is emphasized. On the one hand, the Mexican government and authorities try to portray the victims as women who somehow contributed to their own awful fate. On the other hand, the family and friends highlight the positive assets of the victims. In order to prove that neither of these two visions is accurate, I rely on Erik Erikson´s theory, in which he contends that the construction of an individual’s identity is formed by the ethos or group identity and the ego or self-identity. The documentaries with all the valuable material they present contribute to the viewer´s understanding of the ethos; the identity of the groups to which the victims belonged, such as the maquila workforce, the immigrants from the south of Mexico, the young women, and the underprivileged. However, the ego part of the identity is a piece of the puzzle that cannot be put in, for according to Erikson, women at the age at which the victims died are at a stage where their ego identity is still developing. By leaving these blanks, we are giving the victims the right to keep their identity formation inconclusive, like that of any living human being or like that of any other human being who died under different circumstances. By leaving these blanks, we also set the femicide victims free from the good / bad dichotomy and do not compromise their memory.

As for the representation of the victims in fiction films, the audience has more "contact" with them, for the victims can be "observed" on the screen. This, of course, does not happen in the documentaries. The majority of the victims as portrayed in the three films are not in any way involved with the perpetrators; therefore they do not contribute to what happened to them. This view is in agreement with Laura Mulvey´s feminist theory, who proposes that regardless of their behavior, female figures are doomed to be controlled and objectivized by the "gaze" of the male protagonists in the film and by the "gaze" of the male viewer.

In the novels, the large number of fictional victims listed in "La parte de los crímenes" and the large list of real victims included in *El caso de Elizabeth,* work like congruous elements or clichés – as described by Riffaterre – which link the representations with the femicides but do not provide a vision of their identity because there is not an internal focalized narration from their perspective. By contrast, *Desert Blood* speaks partly from the perspective of the victims in a way that the ethos part of their identity is exposed; therefore their complete identity is revealed.

I conclude that the victims in fictional representations are purely "representative" and that their identity can therefore be fully constructed. In other words, fictional victims are merely a literary discourse or a cinematographic image and do not have a "real" egos or self-identity. As a result, when their ethos or collective identity is reconstructed, their identification is complete. In this sense, fiction is a more evocative genre for portraying the victims' group identity than non-fiction.

As for the attention given to the social, economic, and political aspects of the situation and the violence in the representations, it was noted that documentaries are

the genre which lavish the most attention on the socio-political circumstances surrounding the femicides. Whereas for violence, the novels seem to emphasize human suffering and violence more than either of the other genres, partly because they can imagine the victims' final moments in a way that documentary-producers are not allowed to, and partly because they are not captive to restrictions on violence that come with big-budget movie-making.

It is concluded here that fiction films are the genre that gets closest to a representation of the femicides that neither over-emphasizes nor ignores the social, economic, and political circumstances under which the femicides took place and the hyper-violence inflicted on the bodies, for they make a balanced use of material dealing with these aspects of the femicides and they portray every victim as individually as possible.

The figure of the heroine is the counter image of the victims. The heroine is represented as the woman who comes from afar to put a stop to the crimes, and she also fights for her ideals. Ivon, Blanca, and Lauren revolt against a phallocentric system, and for that they are punished by the male characters who experience "castration" anxiety and who, in order to escape, recur to sadistic measures such as physical and mental aggression toward these women.

Consequently, the female figure in general is portrayed in the representations as someone whose destiny is partly affected by external misogynistic forces just like the Barbie dolls in *Bajo la sal.*

In all the representations incongruent elements were found which disrupt the structure of the mimesis. In the documentaries, it is the ironic aspect, in the fiction films

is the fast-paced, problem-solving plot, and in the novels it is the absurd in Bolaño, the oneiric and the imaginary in Ortega, and the focus on other social issues in Gaspar de Alba. These elements modify the structure of the novels, in such a way that they no longer accurately represent reality. Thus, these elements allow the conversion from mimesis to semiosis and thereby they give access to the significance of the texts. By identifying the various stylistic units and finding their common structure, the novels´ mechanisms could be deciphered and their significance could be grasped. For example, "La parte de los crímenes" highlights the fact that there is an absurd aspect to the chain of happenings preceding and following the Juarez femicides. The text also illustrates how the crimes re-create a conception of life, one that is conceived by the perpetrators and all the people involved with the abduction, killing, and covering up of the killings of these young women, one that is in its entirety absurd. It is important to clarify that the novel does not indicate absurdity in the subject with which it deals - the terrible crimes against women - but rather, it illustrates the absurdity of the circumstances surrounding these terrible events. For its part, *Desert Blood* exposes the agenda pursued by the Chicana feminists: a revolutionary change for those women who suffer from racial and gender discrimination, as well as for those who suffer from patriarchy, age, and class exploitation. Finally, *El caso de Elizabeth* brings forth two different issues: One rejects the concept of man as simple and autonomous and proposes that the man of action does not exist without the man of consciousness; the other contends that a man alone cannot express his ideas, for he needs the presence of the "other" to externalize them.

As for the causes of the femicides, nearly all of the representations in the different genres concur on their complexity. Perhaps the most simplistic representation

of the causes comes in *Espejo retrovisor*, which blames the government for not offering indigent kids more opportunities and society for not accepting these kids. In all the other representations, the cause seems to be a complex combination of a corrupt police system in Mexico, a conspiracy among rich and influential people in Mexico and the US, and sexual predators. Obviously, all of these representations come with a pre-investment in the situation, for none would have been produced if the director or writer had not felt that there was indeed a problem and that it merited extended treatment. In a way, all three films analyze the femicides along lines associated with the political left, but the message of *Bordertown* and *Traspatio* is that US and Mexican society require revolutionary change to rectify the problem of the femicides, whereas the message of *Espejo retrovisor* is that the implementation of better social services for the poor in Mexico might help significantly in reducing the femicides.

In view of the changed circumstances in Juarez in the past few years, in which men are being murdered as much as women, it would be interesting to compare the results of this study with a study of representations of current violence in Mexico. More generally, it is hoped that the material of this study can contribute in a comparative way to the study of representations of other instances of violence toward women elsewhere in the world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alarcón, Norma. *Chicana Critical Issues*. Berkeley: Third Woman, 1993. Print.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands = La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987. Print.

Aston, Elaine, and George Savona. *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance*. London: Routledge, 1991. Print.

Auerbach, Erich. Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. Rutgers, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953. Print.

Bakhtin, M. M. *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968. Print.

---, and Michael Holquist. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas, 1981. Print.

Bajo Juarez. Dir. Alejandra Sánchez. Conaculta México, 2006. DVD.

Bajo La Sal. Dir. Mario Muñoz. Perf. Humberto Zurita and Plutarco Haza. Maya Entertainment, 2009. DVD.

Barrera, Mario. "Story Structure in Latino Feature Films." *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992. 218-40. Print.

Barthes, Roland. *Le degré zéro de l'écriture*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972. Print.

---. *S/Z*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974. Print.

Becker, Udo. *Enciclopedia de los símbolos*. Barcelona: Robinbook, 2003. Print.

Beltrán, Mary. "Más macha: The New Latina Action Hero." *Action and Adventure Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2004. 186-200. Print.

Biemann, Ursula, dir. *Performing the Border*. Women Make Movies, 1999. Print.

Blanchard, D. Caroline, Barry Graczyk, and Robert J. Blanchard. "Differential Reactions of Men and Women to Realism, Physical Damage, and Emotionality in Violent Films." *Aggressive Behavior* 12.1 (1986): 45-55. Print.

Boggs, Joseph M., and Dennis W. Petrie. *The Art of Watching Films*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1991. Print.

Bolaño, Roberto. *2666*. Barcelona: Anagrama, 2004. Print.

---, and Ignacio Echevarría. *Entre Paréntesis: Ensayos, artículos y discursos (1998-2003)*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2004. Print.

Booth, Wayne C. *A Rhetoric of Irony*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975. Print.

Bordertown. Dir. Gregory Nava. Perf. Jennifer Lopez and Antonio Banderas. Velocity / Thinkfilm, 2006. DVD.

Brecht, Bertolt, and John Willett. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1964. Print.

Bruzzi, Stella. *New Documentary*. London: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Carroll, Amy. "'Accidental Allegories' meet the 'Performative Documentary': *Boystown*, *Señorita extraviada*, and the Border-Brothel Maquiladora Paradigm." *SIGNS* 31 (2008): 357-96. Print.

Casi Divas. Dir. Issa Lopez. Perf. Julio Bracho and Patricia Llacas. Maya Entertainment, 2009. DVD.

"Chicago Tribune Blasts Gory X-Films in R-Rated Clothing." *Variety,* 12 November 1980: 6. Print.

Christianson, Eric S., Peter Francis, and William Telford. *Cinéma Divinité: Religion, Theology and the Bible in Film*. London: SCM, 2005. Print.

Cirlot, Juan Eduardo. *A Dictionary of Symbols.* New York: Dover Publications, 2002. Print.

The City of Dead Women. Dir. George Avgeropoulos. Exandas, 2004-05. DVD.

The City of Lost Girls. Dir. Rodrigo Vazquez. Journeyman Pictures, 2003. DVD.

Colebrook, Claire. *Irony*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Cook, Pam, and Claire Johnston. "The Place of Woman in the Cinema of Raoul Walsh." *Feminism and Film Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1988. 25-45. Print.

Cornwell, Neil. *The Absurd in Literature*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2006. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play." *The Structuralistic Controversy*. Ed. Richard Macksey and Eugene Donato. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972. 247-64. Print.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Trans. A. Bass. London: Routledge, 1978. Print.

Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, Hector. “Death on the Screen.” *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, 2010. 61-80. Print.

Donoso Macaya, Ángeles. "Estética, política y el posible territorio de la ficción en *2666* de Roberto Bolaño." *Revista hispánica moderna* 62.2 (2009): 125-42. Print.

Ellis, Jack C., and Betsy A. McLane. *A New History of Documentary Film*. New York: Continuum, 2005. Print.

Erikson, Erik H. *Identity and the Life Cycle*. New York: Norton, 1994. Print.

Espejo Retrovisor. Dir. Héctor Molinar. Perf. Géraldine Bazán and Manuel Ojeda. Bci / Eclipse, 2002. DVD.

Espinosa, Hernández Patricia. "Entre el Silencio y la estridencia." *Territorios en fuga: Estudios críticos sobre la obra de Roberto Bolaño*. Providencia, Santiago: Frasis Editores, 2003. 13–32. Print.

Evans, G. R. *The Church in the Early Middle Ages*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007. Print.

Fontana, David. *The Secret Language of Symbols: A Visual Key to Symbols and Their Meanings*. San Francisco: Chronicle, 2003. Print.

Fourez, Cathy. "*2666* de Roberto Bolaño: 'Santa Teresa, la ville du dire de l'horreur.'" In *Mémoire et désenchantement chez Juan Gelman et Roberto Bolaño*. Ed. Jacqueline Bel. Boulogne-sur-mer: Centre d'études et de recherché sur les civilizations, 2007. 181-93. Print.

Galpaz-Feller, Pnina. *Samson: The Hero and the Man*. New York: Peter Lang, 2006. Print.

García, Alma M. *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

Gaspar de Alba, Alicia. *Desert Blood: The Juarez Murders.* Houston: Arte Público Press, 2005. Print.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1980. Print.

Giordano, Enrique A. "Play and Playfulness in Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*." *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 42 (1988): 217-29. Print.

Giró, Xavier, *et al.* "Documentaries on Femicide in Ciudad Juarez." *Materials of Peace and Human Rights* 18 (2010): 1-44. Web. 9 Nov. 2011.

<http://www10.gencat.cat/drep/binaris/MPDH-18_%20ANG_web_tcm112-135103.pdf>.

González, Rodríguez Sergio. *Huesos en el desierto*. Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2002. Print.

González, Rodríguez Sergio. *The Femicide Machine*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2012. Print.

Huizinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens*. *A Study of the Play Element in Culture.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1950. Print.

Hunt, Leon. “The Hong Kong/Hollywood Connection: Stardom and Spectacle in Transnational Action Cinema.” *Action and Adventure Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2004. 269-83. Print.

"Internet Movie Database." *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d. Web. 01 Oct. 2012. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0445935/externalreviews>.

Juarez, Mexico. Dir. James Cahill. Perf. James Cahill and Carmen Perez. Maverick Entertainment, 2008. DVD.

Kristeva, Julia, and Leon S. Roudiez. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia UP, 1982. Print.

Ledbetter, Mark. *Victims and the Postmodern Narrative, or, Doing Violence to the Body: An Ethic of Reading and Writing*. Houndsmill, UK: Macmillan, 1996. Print.

Martín Gaite, Carmen. *La búsqueda de interlocutor y otras búsquedas*. Madrid: Nostromo, 1973. Print.

Martínez, Adriana. “*Mujer constante más allá de la muerte*, or, the Overpowering Constructions of Feminicide in Ciudad Juárez.” *Tiresias* 3 (2009): 91-113. Print.

Mata, Irene. "Writing on the Walls: Deciphering Violence and Industrialization in Alicia Gaspar De Alba's *Desert Blood*." *Melus* 35.3 (2010): 15-40. Print.

Meléndez, Priscilla. "The Body and the Law in the Mexico/U.S. Borderlands: Violence and Violations in *El Viaje De Los Cantores*." *Modern Drama* 54.1 (2011): 24-44. Print.

Mendoza, Carlos. *La invención de la verdad: Nueve ensayos sobre cine documental*. México: UNAM, Centro Universitario De Estudios Cinematograficos, 2008. Print.

Miles, Margaret R. *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies*. Boston: Beacon, 1996. Print.

Missing Young Woman [Senorita extraviada]. Dir Lourdes Portillo. Xochitl Films Productions, 2001. DVD.

Mora, Sergio de la. "Terrorisme de genre à la frontière Mexique-USA: Assassinat de femmes et justice dans *Señorita extraviada (Demoiselle perdue).*" *Cinémas d'Amerique latine* 12 (2004): 116-32. Print.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Feminism and Film Theory*. New York: Routledge, 1988. 57-68. Print.

Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2001. Print.

Nissim-Sabat, Marilyn. *Neither Victim nor Survivor: Thinking toward a New Humanity*. Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009. Print.

"Nuestras Hijas De Regreso a Casa." *Nuestras Hijas De Regreso a Casa*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Nov. 2012. <http://nuestrashijasderegresoacasa.blogspot.com/>.

Ocegueda, Isela. *Specters in the Sand: The Urban Hauntings in Alicia Gaspar de Alba's Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders*. UC Los Angeles: UCLA Center for the Study of Women. Web. 27 Nov. 2012. <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/34t7f9sm>.

O'Day, Marc. "Beauty in Motion: Gender, Spectacle and Action Babe Cinema." *Action and Adventure Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2004. 201-18. Print.

On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juarez. Dir. Steev Hise. Illegal Art, 2006. DVD.

Ortega, Gregorio. *El caso de Elizabeth Castro García y Abdel Latif Sharif.* México: Distribuciones Fontamara, S. A., 1999. Print.

---. *Crimen De Estado*. México: Plaza Y Janés, 2009. Print.

Osen, Diane. "Interview with John Updike." The National Book Foundation. 2007. Web. 27 Nov. 2012. <http://www.nationalbook.org/authorsguide_jupdike.html.>.

Pantaleo, Katherine. "The Maquiladora Murders: Gendered Violence and Narrative Conflict." MA dissertation. Duquesne University, 2008. Print.

Portillo, Lourdes. Interview with Lourdes Portillo. POV. PBS 2010. Web. 5 Feb. 2013. <http://video.pbs.org/video/1724098690/>.

Quinones, Sam. *True Tales from Another Mexico: The Lynch Mob, the Popsicle Kings, Chalino, and the Bronx*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2001. Print.

Rhodes, Gary Don, and John Parris Springer. *Docufictions: Essays on the Intersection of Documentary and Fictional Filmmaking*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland 2006. Print.

Riffaterre, Michael. *Semiotics of Poetry*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978. Print.

---. *Text Production*. New York: Columbia UP, 1983. Print.

---. "Intertextual Representation: On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse" *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984): 141-62. Print.

Rodriguez de Arce, Ignacio. “Una primera aproximación a 2666 de Roberto *Bolaño*.” In *Dal Mediterraneo l'America: Storia, religione, cultura*. Ed. Clara Camplani *et al*. Rome: Bulzoni, 2006. 175-211. Print.

Rosen, David. “Crossover: Hispanic Specialty Films in the U.S. Movie Market.” *Chicanos and Film: Representation and Resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992. 241-60. Print.

Saunders, Dave. *Documentary*. London: Routledge, 2010. Print.

Schlesinger, Philip, Richard Haynes, and Raymond Boyle. *Men Viewing Violence.* N.p.: Great Britain, Broadcasting Standards Commission, 1998. Print.

Silencio en Juarez. Dir. Sol Colom. Discovery Channel, 2008. DVD.

Sobchack, Vivian C. "The Violent Dance: A Personal Memoir of Death in the Movies." *Screening Violence*. New Jersey: Rutgers University, 2000. 110-24. Print.

Spungen, Deborah. *Homicide: The Hidden Victims: A Guide for Professionals*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998. Print.

Staudt, Kathleen. “Economic Change and Ideological Lag in Households of Maquila Workers in Ciudad Juárez.” *The Social Ecology and Economic Development of Ciudad Juárez*. Boulder: Westview, 1986. 115-25. Print.

Tabuenca Córdoba, María Socorro. “Femicide in Border Cinema.” *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona, 2010. 81-101. Print.

Todorov, Tzvetan. "Notes from the Underground Fyodor Dostoevsky - Tzvetan Todorov (essay date 1978)." Short Story Criticism. Ed. Anna Sheets Nesbitt. Vol. 33. Gale Cengage, 1999. eNotes.com. 29 Nov, 2012 <http://www.enotes.com/notes-from-

underground-criticism/notes-from-underground-fyodor-dostoevsky/tzvetan-todorov-essay-date-1978>.

Traspatio. Dir. Carlos Carrera. Perf. Ana De La Reguera and Jimmy Smits. Maya Entertainment, 2009. DVD.

The Virgin of Juarez. Dir. Kevin Dobson. Perf. Ana Claudia Talancón and Minnie Driver. First Look Pictures, 2006. DVD.

"The Virgin of Juarez (2005)." *The Virgin of Juarez*. N.p., n.d. Web. 05 Oct. 2012. <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/virgin_of_juarez/>.

Vilanova, Núria. “Memoria y anonimato: Representaciones discursivas de las muertas de *Ciudad Juárez.” Discursos sobre la pobreza.* Ed. Martin Lienhard et al. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006. 145-58. Print.

Villoro, Juan, and Andrés Braithwaite. "La Batalla futura." *Bolaño por sí mismo: Entrevistas escogidas*. Santiago, Chile: Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales, 2006. 9-20. Print.

Volk, Steven S., and Marian E. Schlotterbeck. “Gender, Order, and the Femicide: Reading the Popular Culture of Murder in Ciudad Juárez.” *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*. Austin: University of Texas, 2010. 121-53. Print.

---. "Gender, Order, and Femicide: Reading the Popular Culture of Murder in Ciudad Juárez." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 32.1 (2007): 53-86. Print.

Wirzba, Norman. *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2011. Print.

Zillmann, Dolf. “The Psychology of the Appeal of Portrayals of Violence.” *Why We Watch: The Attractions of Violent Entertainment.* New York, NY: Oxford University, 1998. 179-211. Print.