

Ciudad juarez essay



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From above, it looks like a city in a valley between two dry mountain ranges, a city all-alone in the desert. But if you look closely, you can see where a river runs along the bottom of the valley, cutting the city in half. On the northern side is El Paso, Texas, and to the south is Ciudad Juarez, in the Chihuahua state of Mexico. Two cities, two countries, with a combined population of 2.5 million people; it's the largest border community on the planet. Americans pay just 25 cents to walk over the bridge crossing the Rio Grande into Mexico.

Writer Charles Bowden calls it an "ecotone" — a concept borrowed from the science of ecology, meaning a place where two habitats meet (Bowden 3). To the south is a Third World nation and to the north is the greatest industrial power on the planet. At the El Paso-Ciudad Juarez border, both worlds meet in a gritty, sometimes violent, collision. There has been an epidemic of dumped, tortured, raped and burned bodies in the Ciudad Juarez. According to Valerie Martinez, author of *Each and Her*, "over 450 girls and women have been murdered in or near the cities of Juarez and Chihuahua, Mexico, along the U. S. -Mexico border since 1993.

Some were students; many were workers in the maquiladoras" (Martinez 1). For the past 18 years in Ciudad Juarez, women and girls have been targeted based on their gender and acts of violence have been committed towards them with no clear motive other than gender discrimination. Gender crimes are incidents of violence targeting women exclusively, not because the victims are a particular religion or race, but because they are women. Gender based violence against women has a long, tragic history. Social

conflict and societal change have been and continue to be waged on many fronts, particularly through violent acts against women's bodies.

Such violence has taken the form of sexual torture, rape, disappearances and murder (Pineda-Madrid 3). The reason for these brutalities is unclear but the damage caused is inconceivable. The term femicide has been used to refer to the murder of females, by males, solely based on the fact of gender. It is believed that the femicides began in 1993. In April 2009, the El Paso Times reported that " over the past 16 years more than six hundred girls and women have been tortured, raped and murdered, most between the ages of ten and thirty.

Many more have gone missing. Nearly all of the victims have been poor, young, and slender, with dark flowing hair and warm, reddish brown complexions" (Pineda-Madrid 11). Trends show that over half the women in Ciudad Juarez fit this description. Many women move there to make more money by working in the maquiladoras or to get an education, but what they are really doing is walking into a trap with no ammunition and no protection. Maquiladoras are manufacturing plants with workers who produce parts and products for the United States.

On the border there are over 3000 maquiladoras with over a million workers (more than half are women), getting paid on average fifty cents an hour (Martinez 6). The murders are linked by evidence of torture, sexual violence, and mutilations (Martinez 1). Ciudad Juarez is a place with few rules; there is a growing poverty rate and a corrupt police force that cannot be trusted. "

Anything could happen to you and no one would do anything about it and not because you are an American, because you are a human" (Bowden 56).

Many police officers in Juarez were accused of committing acts of femicide. One officer even admitted that he was involved in these horrific acts of violence. Life in Ciudad Juarez is anything but pleasant. The living conditions are poor and the jobs that people move there for do not pay nearly enough. "A typical maqui work schedule consist of a 60 hour work week with a daily wage of \$8. 29. After union dues (4%) the net weekly pay is about \$47. 74. Typical rent or contribution to family income is \$45. 71, leaving \$2. 3 for food, clothes, shoes, and medical attention" (Martinez 36). That is not enough to provide for a family. People move to Ciudad Juarez because making barely enough is better then making absolutely nothing. Along with these poor living conditions, women must worry about being raped, beaten and murdered. The working conditions are unfair and invasive. Some job applications ask women if they are pregnant or sexually active, and if so, what kind of contraceptives they use and when they last menstruated.

Some workers are turned away for being as little as three minutes late (Martinez 38). There is no real significance to this other then invading personal privacy. One of the most frightening things is that women begin and end their night shifts without security or protective assistance in this dangerous city. The females that are targeted are usually brown-skinned and economically poor. Not only are these girls and young women brutally murdered, but also several of the bodies revealed a severed right breast and left nipple bitten off. Other bodies were dismembered.

The bodies of these victims are often left in public places as if to make an intentional statement. This just adds to the monstrosity of Ciudad Juarez. These women are targeted and slaughtered and the murders continue without restraint because there are a sufficient number of officials at every level of the government that has been corrupted. A possibility of why these girls and women are killed was found during an interrogation. Many perpetrators kill the girls and women as a sport, a competition to see who can rape and kill the most females.

It is also a way for drug cartels to “celebrate” successful drug runs across the border. “Sometimes, when you cross a shipment of drugs to the United States, adrenaline is so high that you want to celebrate by killing women!” (Martinez 29). These killings are a way for asserting control. Men are upset because the women occupy most of the jobs in the maquiladoras and the men want to feel empowered. It is important to these men to vindicate their dominance by murder. But, these women and girls are not simply murdered.

Their corpses reveal that they have been violently raped, that their breasts and genitalia have been mutilated. Although hundreds of men are murdered in Ciudad Juarez every year, the men’s bodies are rarely mutilated or raped like the women. Most often a male’s death is linked to drug violence. The state views the subject matter not in terms of protecting its female citizenry from extreme gender violence but in terms of deflecting responsibility. When the state no longer could deny the growing number of these horrific murders, they took on a “blame the victim” strategy.

The state argued that the victims (women) were engaged in irregular sexual behavior but what they were really claiming was the women were leading a *doble vida* (“double life”). They claimed that women were prostitutes and the victims brought the femicide upon themselves because of their “immoral behavior”. Thus they are held responsible for the violence against them. Under Mexican law, if injuries inflicted during violent acts heal within fifteen days, the woman cannot file charges; if the injuries heal after fifteen days but are not permanent, the aggressor is merely fined (Pineda-Madrid 27).

Not only were men able to commit these crimes, but they were able to get away with it. Many men get away with these crimes because the women who were attacked were either dead or law enforcement hinders women from stepping forward because no action will be taken. What has transpired and continues is not the murders of a few females here and there. This is not even the possible work of serial killers, but rather the ongoing ritualized killing of hundreds of poor women and girls over the past 18 years.

The truth is, no one really knows the exact number of women and girls that have been murdered or have disappeared in Ciudad Juarez in the past 18 years. The motives for their killings are unclear, and there is no concrete evidence that support the atrocious behavior in Ciudad Juarez. These terrible crimes were committed in a place where both the fabric of society is in tatters and the state has failed to provide basic security for its citizens by failing to enforce the law. These crimes are an unfortunate indication of how far Mexico really is from enjoying the rule of law.