

# An Interpretation of Femicide in Mexico: Violence and Human Rights

Mariamne Crippa Méndez, Adriana Rodríguez Barraza

Instituto de Investigaciones Psicológicas, Universidad Veracruzana, Veracruz, Mexico

Email: Mariamne.crippa@gmail.com, Arbarraza@hotmail.com

**How to cite this paper:** Crippa Méndez, M., & Rodríguez Barraza, A. (2022). An Interpretation of Femicide in Mexico: Violence and Human Rights. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 12, 11-28. <https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2022.122002>

**Received:** October 14, 2021

**Accepted:** February 6, 2022

**Published:** February 9, 2022

Copyright © 2022 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

---

## Abstract

This paper studies the problem of femicide in Mexico, through three axes: violence, femicide and human rights. We interpret this phenomenon using Johan Galtung's theory of violence as a framework, paired with concepts from Bourdieu, Segato, Lagarde and Russell, with whom he agrees in regards of the multiplicity of elements, levels and scopes of violence, but that also complement the voids in his original theory. We seek to unveil the divers dimensions in which femicidal violence operates, as well as its negative consequences, direct and collateral damages, and its multiple victims. Our theoretical approach intends to provide certain guidelines to reflect and humanize the victims, and also a deeper understanding of the contexts where it happens, emphasizing that these crimes eliminate women's subjectivity and desensitize society, as such they are violations of women's Human Rights.

## Keywords

Femicide, Violence, Human Rights

---

## 1. Introduction

It is pretty evident that in the last few decades, in Mexico as in the Central American region, gender-based crimes against women have reached alarming proportions (Godoy-Paiz, 2012). The most extreme version is *femicide*, a concept we owe to Russell (2011), who started using it in 1976 to name the misogynist killing of women by men. Radford (1992) later added that it is a form of sexual violence, and that it represents a disruption that harms or degrades women, coercing their ability to control intimate contact.

It is a notion that seeks the recognition of a differentiated and gendered form of violence that occurs within complex webs of violence and power, marked by particular social attitudes and practices, symbols and beliefs (Godoy-Paiz, 2012).

From that moment on, it has become a popular field of study from different disciplinary approaches. But the increasing academic interest on femicide has also been fueled by the mobilization of feminists groups, whose advancements in the recognition of the main characteristics and the rationale of these crimes has been fundamental (Corradi, Marcuello-Servós, Boira, & Weil, 2016).

Regarding the research in Mexico, a country where approximately ten women are murdered every day (Bazán, 2020), even when taking into consideration the growth in numbers, brutality, and territorial expansion of femicide, it has not received the attention it deserves. Femicides seem to remain overshadowed by the emblematic case of Ciudad Juarez (Corradi et al., 2016; García-Del Moral, 2016) which, despite its obvious importance, is not representative and no longer adds to the comprehension of this rising issue.

Although quantitative studies advocate for the need to acknowledge the scope of the problem to prove it has become endemic, and to encourage measures to eradicate it (Olvera, 2020), it is our intention to avoid this social phenomenon to get lost in statistical accounts, because it is not exclusively about the numbers. Furthermore, this valuable input lacks the necessary dissemination.

For such reason, we have decided to focus our attention on the laudable work of Maria Salguero (2020)<sup>1</sup> to help us establish the dimensions of the problem as accurately as possible. After detecting the absence of reliable data, she created a map in Google Maps and a blog titled “Yo te nombro” (I name you), where she has kept a thorough record of every femicide reported in the press in Mexico since 2016. She has gone even further, and also includes certain data about the murders, with the intention of making the problem visible from a different perspective and vindicating the victims subjectivity: they were human beings, women with a name and a history.

According to the information available in Salguero's (2020) sources, there were 2240 femicides in Mexico from January to August 2020, contrary to the official numbers reported by the *Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública* (2020) which indicated that only 620 alleged femicides, in addition to 1906 intentional and 1088 accidental homicides of women, were registered during that same period.

So, it is worth asking why, despite their notoriousness, these brutalities remain invisible? We agree with Weil (2016), who claims that femicide is an uncomfortable subject that reveals extreme forms of violence and tends to be mainly studied by the fields of law and criminology. There is a tendency to omit its foundation on gender inequality and misogyny; it can hardly be approached qualitatively from the victims perspective; and the information available is limited and unreliable.

We know this troubling issue requires immediate attention, yet it will not be solved treating exclusively the evident part. Thus, we have based our analysis on two of the theoretical approaches proposed by Corradi et al. (2016): the feminist,

---

<sup>1</sup>Geophysical engineer, claimed one of the most influential women of 2020 by Forbes magazine.

intended to raise awareness of the underlying logic of femicide and violence against women; and the sociological, oriented to diagnose cases and contexts to demonstrate that the killings of men and women occur under different circumstances and are perpetrated by different actors.

Our main objective is to see beyond the more evident violence of femicide and gender based crimes, and to unveil the latent components that make these violations of Human Rights possible and admissible in certain contexts.

The thematic axes on which we focus are violence, femicide and human rights. We interpret them through a conceptual framework that includes primarily Johan Galtung's structural and cultural violence; these, despite their limitations, represent an important breakthrough in the recognition and visibility of certain situations that are not easily perceived as violent.

We don't intend to adapt the phenomena to the theories, on the contrary, we advocate the use of the concepts as theoretical tools that must be adapted to the complexity of each context. So, to fill the gaps in the aforementioned notions, we also include the reinterpretations and contributions others have made about them, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence and Rita Segato's moral violence.

Our premises are the existence of invisible but insidious violence that impregnates our day to day lives; that femicide is a symptom of a deeper pathology, strongly incarnated in the subjectivity and the social fabric; and the urgent need for interdisciplinary approaches (Araiza, Vargas, & Daniel, 2020; Walsh & Menjívar, 2016). Thus, our objective is to make a critical examination of the paradoxical invisibility of the issue that broadens levels of analysis (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016), and to interpret the some of the various dimensions and extent of the violence inscribed in femicide, as well as to humanize the problem.

## **2. Interpretative Axes: Violence, Femicide and Human Rights**

### **2.1. A Multidimensional Understanding of Violence**

A complex phenomenon, such as violence, can be approached from several perspectives, neither of which holds the key to an absolute knowledge of the subject. Nonetheless, a useful tool to widen our focus, is to acknowledge this and to use an interdisciplinary approach (that includes social anthropology, sociology, philosophy and psychology) and an intersectional perspective (interpretations made by men and women, but also from different countries with very different socioeconomic situations), so the foundation of our interpretation is the premise that violence is not always neither evident nor perceived as such, and that it is experienced differently by people in very divers social situations.

We have chosen Johan Galtung's theory as our conceptual framework since, despite its problems and limitations, it addresses an important theoretical problem, and opens up other categories of violence that make it possible to theorize beyond the surface phenomena, toward a broad set of social relations, to designate forms of injury and harm that do not meet the criteria of the spectacle and

that are not registered as violence (Winter, 2012).

We agree with his outright rejection of the positivist concept of violence, which typically only sees any use of physical force by a particular actor, whose intention is direct and clear against another person. On the contrary, he defines violence as “the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what it is” (Galtung, 1969: p. 168). In other words, violence can take the form of insults, denials and obstacles to basic human needs<sup>2</sup>, and it happens when the potential exceeds the actual and, thus, is avoidable.

For Galtung, violence always implies three main elements: a subject, an object, and an action, even though the latter can take the form of omissions or impediments. Moreover, he states the existence of three dimensions of violence: direct, cultural and structural. Our main focus will be the last two.

Structural<sup>3</sup> violence as conceived by Galtung (1969) is a constant and dynamic process that characterizes social, political and economical systems. It rests on exploitation, and leaves scars not only on the body but in the subjectivity of the dominated class (or gender), its basic formula is unequal distribution of power that flows from social institutions in a discrete way (Galtung, 1969, 2016).

This notion has been critiqued for being broad and vague, and neglecting the specific differences and historical variations, it could become a back box, linear and deterministic; but that only means we need to complement it in order to improve its interpretative capacity, because it is a crucial concept for understanding complex social dynamics.

According to Farmer (2004), this concept is intended to inform the study of the social machinery of oppression, which is a result of many unconscious conditions; it is exerted systematically (indirectly) by everyone who belongs to a certain social order, hence the discomfort it generates to elucidate it.

By including this, we can understand that most violent acts are not necessarily deviant, they serve conventional norms and material interests, and in that sense are moral. In fact, erasing or distorting history is part of the necessary process for the emergence of hegemonic power. So, it is fundamental to interrogate the subtleties and complexities of power relations and the microeconomics of different historical and social contexts, to note that violence is reworked through daily life and enacted through social relations and institutions.

In addition, one could think that these manifestations of violence repeat themselves because of their invisibility, but as Winter (2012) clarifies evoking Greek tragedy, they become invisible through repetition: there is a coalition of violence that implicates all sides and that echoes in their shared fate. In this scenario, what makes violence structural is not that it is invisible, but that it lingers like a fog, it is inherited across generations that reproduce it dynamically.

<sup>2</sup>Galtung (1990) states the needs of survival, wellbeing, identity and liberty, which we think are close to some of the articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, U. N., 1948).

<sup>3</sup>By structures we mean social relations and economic, political, legal, religious arrangements, that shape subjectivity. These outcomes are experiences individually, but structures target classes or groups of people that share forms of oppression (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016).

Of the above we can underline that inequalities, especially those based on gender, arise from the structural framework of societies, but we must include historical processes and global connections that also play a role into shaping local realities (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016). That, combined with the uses, traditions, myths, and beliefs, characterize cultural violence.

On the other hand, Galtung's cultural violence refers to the aspects of the symbolic scope of our subjectivity, which are nearly unalterable and legitimize both direct and structural violence; it provides a certain rationality supported by societies belief systems and, at the same time, guarantees its reproduction. It is invisible, yet insidious, because it is hardly detected by either side of the implicated.

Nonetheless, Cocks (2012) argues that Galtung's definition of cultural violence as ideological mystification, meaning the use of words and images to conceal, distort, sanitize a violent (structural) social order, has some limitations. For instance, he does not bother to define culture itself, and ignores the fact that foundational power is essential to eradicate one set of meanings to clear the ground for a new one. So, to understand the complexity of cultural violence, we must admit its historical role.

With the intention of alleviating this weak spots we bring to the table the notions of moral violence (Segato, 2010) and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2015) that, in spite of not being exactly the same as cultural violence, have several coincidences and can serve as a complement.

Segato (2010) emphasizes that morality determines values and social interests that separate society into binaries, even when they do not favor the majority. So, moral violence seeks to highlight the role of customs in the legitimization and reproduction of social differences (gender, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, etc.) that relay on repetition and depend on massive dissemination, guaranteed by their apparent banality.

It is fiercely attached to moral values, family and religion, it shows the existence of non-physical means for establishing the status quo through constant psychological coercion that affects women's self esteem, confidence and autonomy (Segato, 2016), and it involves emotional aggression, ridicule, devaluation, sexual restraint, moral coercion, body shaming, economic control or dependency, forced isolation, undermining, amongst others (Segato, 2010). It is probably the most visible part of cultural violence.

Symbolic violence also refers to a form of domination and exploitation, but focuses on the unconscious complicity that shapes rationality and perception with the contribution of Institutions (Bourdieu, 1998, 2007; Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, & Sanghera, 2016). This concealment involves both the dominated and those who wield power, neither of which is conscious of these interpretive patterns that shape their subjectivity (Bourdieu, 2000).

Hence, symbolic violence rips out submissions that are not perceived as such, and that are a result of the internalization of hierarchical relationships; this violence is crossdressed, transfigured, unrecognizable, free from intention, and it

does not work on the bodies but through them (Bourdieu, 2007; Thapar-Björkert, Samelius, & Sanghera, 2016). It is the violence of trust, obligation, duty, debt, recognition, honor and moral, the dominated feel ashamed and inferior, deserving of such treatment (Bourdieu, 1998; Voirol, 2004).

These notions refer to imperceivable but harmful violence, apparently universal, natural and invariable; therefore, they are the most effective control and dominance mechanisms. They are accepted even by the oppressed, consequently legitimizing hierarchies in a way that hinders any complaint and that reproduces the hegemonic order.

In the same way, we would like to retrieve the notion of social practices<sup>4</sup>, coined by Bourdieu (1980), to emphasize the implicit relational aspect, and by adding the adjective “violent” (as a modality of such practices) we can understand it as a type of social bond (Cufre, 2010). Thereby, all those mundane and relational practices (behaviors, conducts, beliefs, humor and jokes, myths, traditions, etc.) become important, with overtones that enhance, manifest or perpetuate the conflict of gender inequality, and risk the physical or psychological integrity of women in the apparent banality of everyday life that, contrary to femicide, are widely accepted and imperceivable.

All of this is part of a large communication system, whose messages become intelligible only for those who participate in the social code (Segato, 2013); hence we seek to decipher the highly harmful gender-based conflicts that still remain buried within femicide and the violent social practices toward women.

Lastly, another critique that Galtung’s theory has received, is that he seems to focus exclusively on violence (an peace), and disregards the role of neoliberal capitalism (Cocks, 2012), by default ignoring the differences between First World and Third World social issues. By this we mean a set of ideas and practices that prioritize individual responsibility and freedom, that support the deregulation of markets and incite consumerism, and the privatization and fiscal discipline; it assumes the less influence the State has, the better (Biebricher & Johnson, 2012). This competition-driven market, that is at the core of this model, impregnates society and helps replicate and widen the gaps of power inequality; this ideology does not seek to repair structural and cultural violence, rather than making them manageable (Farmer, 2004); because to some degree the increasing inequality is a necessary feature.

By including all this into our framework of violence, we sought to reach a deeper understanding of the context in which the increasing number of femicides occur, as well as the footprint they leave behind. For practical purposes, we will use Galtung’s nomenclature, but with our own reinterpretation of the con-

---

<sup>4</sup>Generally speaking, this concept is used to highlight each element of a given human phenomenon, that has to be analyzed taking into account the links that bind it to the other elements in a system with its own senses and functions. One of the fundamental qualities of such practices, is that they are produced and reproduced most of the times unconsciously, however, they reveal certain representation systems of social groups that, behind a facade of absurdity, have meanings that need to be unraveled without laying aside the link between the parts and the whole (Bourdieu, 1980).

cepts, that are meant to be used as tools, and not in a dogmatically way.

### Silent and Insidious Effectiveness

Galtung (2016) pinpointed that violence is dynamic and it usually flows from cultural, through structural, toward the direct dimension. The first two tend to remain hidden and, nonetheless, they disseminate and imprint a hierarchical character into everyday social practices (Segato, 2010).

The exercise of violence as a means to attain power has two main effects: one oppressive and other configurative. The last one impregnates the psyche, legitimizing from within the asymmetrical and uneven relationships that are also reiterated culturally (Muñoz, 2011). It is necessary to recognize that the androcentric unconscious permeates men and women equally because it produces subjectivity (López, 2019).

This does not mean that violence and power relationships are the same; as ugly and unfair as domination might be, direct control over others to preserve the social organization in order to benefit ones own interests, is not itself violence (whether it is structural, cultural); conversely, structural violence may, in fact, be reduced without changing the organization of power relations. A complete account of structural violence, recognizes the complex web of power that underlines, but are also shaped by, the dialectical understanding of structures and action (Parsons, 2007). We conceive the internal connections to be collective and persistent: power apparatus<sup>5</sup> and structures of domination<sup>6</sup>.

These structures of domination that are distant, largely invisible and massive (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016), result from the continuous work of reproduction and legitimization to which every fiber of the social tissue contributes: family, religion, State, school, community, judicial system, among others (Bourdieu, 2015). Consequently, we interpret attempted femicide as the crudest form of direct violence, a culmination of a series of violent social practices that, at the same time, are supported by interconnected ideologies.

Following Bourdieu (2015), we understand that their efficacy is such because that remain tacit. Female morality is imposed through the constant disciplining of women's bodies (clothes, hair, manners, etc.), which becomes a type of sym-

<sup>5</sup>According to Michel Foucault an apparatus (*dispositif*) is a set of various institutional, physical and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures that enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body. It is a useful concept to analyze power and the link between the discursive and the non discursive; he describes the existence of several apparatus (surveillance, knowledge, power, sexual, etc.) which are webs of relationships that can be established between heterogenous elements: discourses, institutions, architecture, law, bureaucracy, scientific statements, amongst others. Apparatus have a strategic purpose, like domination. The latter is understood as a global power structure that consolidates power relationships that, instead of being mobile and allow others strategies to modify the situation, are solidified, blocked (Castro, 2004).

<sup>6</sup>Bourdieu (2015) states that domination structures are produced by the continuous (historical) reproduction to which contribute singular agents (for instance: men who are physically and symbolically violente) as well as institutions (collective agents). The necessary conditions for this symbolic web, are the long lasting transformation of the bodies and the production of permanent dispositions, this is more powerful in the extent that it is exercised through familiarity and desensitization, with a physical world and symbolic structures penetrated by said structures.



bolic confinement reassured by culture, always determined and conditioned by the male gaze, either for pleasure or incitement.

Based on the above, we anchor our interpretation to the idea that structural violence makes cultural violence visible, and that violent social practices toward women within institutions are an expression of intertwined hegemonic ideologies: patriarchy, religious fundamentalism, and masculinity (Muñoz, 2011). A formula that becomes deadly for women and other vulnerable groups.

It is alarming that society sees and knows these conditions and the harm they cause, and yet decides to deny them or ignore them. This paradoxical invisibility rests on the unquestioned repetition of violent social practices, and describes a failure to acknowledge that this is caused by a deeply rooted indifference bound up with the discursive limits of intelligibility (Winter, 2012).

## 2.2. Femicide: Towards a Symbolic Recognition

Homicide derives from Latin *homo* (man) and *caedere* (slaying), as we know, it refers to the murder of a human being, regardless of sex-gender; nevertheless, in many languages *homo* belongs to the male gender (Corradi et al., 2016). As we mentioned before, Russell (2011) was the first to use the term femicide as a substitute for homicide; her primary goal was to mobilize the visibility of a problem that until then had been legitimized and tolerated. She sought to create awareness that the violent deaths of women were crimes with very particular characteristics and that, in fact, discourse has a very important ideological load, it is a statement, it intends to promote change in the way these crimes are perceived and interpreted (Corradi et al., 2016; Munévar, 2012). The importance of this notion lies in its intention of highlighting the dissonance between the social experiences of men and women.

Yet, despite the generalized climate of violence against women that has historically lingered in Mexico, this concept wasn't relevant until the nineties, thanks to the emblematic case of *Las muertas de Ciudad Juárez*. It was Marcela Lagarde<sup>7</sup>, a transcendental woman both as a feminist activist and a politician, who translated the term, choosing *feminicidio* instead of *femicidio*. She considered the latter could be seen as analogous to homicide, leaving aside the ideological background; thus the notion of *feminicidio* recognizes the implication of the State and public institutions in these felonies (Corradi et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, since that time, there has been a strong resistance to calling them as such, because it means recognizing that behind the horrific murders of women, lay structural and cultural dimensions that allow them, so, to some degree, we are all implicated. María Salguero (as quoted in Bazán, 2020) denounces that "Even if they find the causes of femicide, even if they find the girl naked with

<sup>7</sup>It should be noted that Lagarde was a pioneer in the fight for judicial recognition of *feminicidio* in the *Código Penal Federal* (Federal Penal Code) during her term as a deputy (2003-2007), she also fought for women's rights and achieved the creation of the *Comisión Especial de Femicidio* (Special Commission of Femicide) and the *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a Una Vida Libre de Violencia General* (Law of Women's Access to a Violence-free Life).



signs of sexual violence, they always want to frame it as another felony, like rape or intentional homicide, just to avoid calling it femicide” (para. 7).

But the situation is even more complex because, according to [Caputi & Russell \(1992\)](#), femicide is only the most extreme case of femicidal violence, which in fact is not limited to the direct violence of murder, but rather a continuum of violence and terror against women that remains, for the most part, veiled, and includes a great variety of violent social practices, that range from the most direct dimension, (like physical or verbal abuse, rape, violation, torture, sexual slavery, genital mutilation), to more subtle cultural and structural violence (such as, higher rates of illiteracy and poverty, unnecessary gynecological surgery, forced heterosexuality, sterilization or obligated motherhood, wage gap between men and women, sexualization from infancy, the restrictions of women’s sexuality, amongst others).

In other words, we understand femicide as all chronic and systematic violence that can be direct, structural or cultural, that occur when women die prematurely due to their gender, under particular social circumstances, and when the state and institutions fail to protect them ([Godoy-Paiz, 2012](#)). It is linked to misogyny and patriarchy, the hegemonic ideologies, where we can identify uneven power relationships that could be harmful for women. Therefore, these crimes are not simple murders (if there was such thing as a simple loss of a human life), they seek to annihilate not only the biological body, but the symbolic and subjective construction of the victim as well, and it sends a message to all women ([Corradi et al., 2016](#)).

It is important to note that the raise of femicidal violence, does not happen randomly or anywhere. It proliferates within contexts of growing civic insecurity, like Mexico, that affect great segments of society and that include other social inequalities, legal impunity and organized crime that profits from illicit activities. Thus, it is partly perpetrated by the state, naturalized by institutions, and normalized by society. To understand this epidemic we must look also at the big picture and include the social practices of everyday live that, little by little, make femicide tolerable, which, in this scheme of things, is not only affecting and involving women ([Godoy-Paiz, 2012](#)). It is also important to mention that another element that adds up to the disadvantages of women is, as we mentioned before, neoliberal capitalism, because it enhances maldistribution of life chances ([Biebricher & Johnson, 2012](#)), favoring those who can be more “productive”: men.

### **Over My Dead Body: Meaning and Resonance**

Definitely, femicidal violence is not just a series of senseless actions, but very meaningful ones, with their own rationale and supported precisely by the Mexican context ([Marcuello-Servós et al., 2016](#)); so much so, that it has an ontogenetic and phylogenetic inertia ([Segato, 2010](#)). Femicide can be read as a symptom of a system that produced and perpetuates quotidian violations of Human Rights and normalizes violence ([Godoy-Paiz, 2012](#)).

So, we start from the assumption that femicidal violence has double inten-

tions; the first one is instrumental and seeks domination; the second, as pointed out by Segato (2013) is communicative, the crime has an imprinted signature. It is the most extreme demonstration of patriarchal force<sup>8</sup> and a manifestation of misogyny, as well as a claim to maintain male order and privilege, or recover the structurally established and culturally legitimized gender frontiers (López, 2019; Incháustegui, 2014). In other words, the main objective, whether conscious or not, is to preserve male supremacy at any cost (Bourdieu, 2015; Caputi & Russell, 1992).

This modality of direct violence against women, is based on the use and abuse of their bodies without any consent, participation or will, the woman is annihilated, her body is claimed and appropriated by the aggressor, it is expropriated and it is therefore, objectified, the woman becomes disposable and replaceable and can be consumed, devoid of subjectivity and humanity (Radford, 1992; Segato, 2013).

In this sense, according to Segato (2013), one of the implicit messages in femicide is the guarantee of inclusion in the masculine fraternity, so the victim becomes a sacrifice, the waste of an initiation ritual, a metaphorical colonized territory through which men can demonstrate being worthy, given their aggression and deadly power, of manhood.

Besides, it works as a power apparatus that controls and represses everything (and everyone) that questions the patriarchal order, focused on the desire for power, dominance and control by men, and manifested in the restrictions of public and symbolic spaces, behaviors and restrictions (Radford, 1992). It also works as a political mechanism that aims to maintain women in disadvantage and inequality, excluding them from the world of social relationships, limiting their access to assets and resources, intimidating and punishing those how dare question it (Lagarde, 2006).

We can interpret this as a demonstration of the asymmetry between men, responsible and independent subjects; and women, products and objects of exchange (Bourdieu, 2015), as a manifestation of sexist horror<sup>9</sup>, motivated by hate, contempt and, at the same time, pleasure and a sense of ownership of women (Caputi & Russell, 1992).

Therefore, the concept of gender<sup>10</sup> is fundamental (Radford, 1992). This social construct affects values, roles, identities, distribution of power and resources,

<sup>8</sup>By patriarchy we mean the domination system that still concentrates wealth (economic, symbolic, social and cultural) in the hands of men. Evidently this ideology has certain contextual variations, but what they all have in common is that the dominators are capable of making their perspective universal. As Bourdieu (2015) pointed out, it is not exaggerated to compare masculinity with nobility, because they are both doubled standard and establish radical asymmetries in the evaluation of, at least, two groups, in this case men and women.

<sup>9</sup>We have decided to use horror instead of terror, following Cavarero's (2009) proposal, who differentiates them in the sense that terror causes the person to run away from danger, on the contrary, horror paralyzes. Horror is awakened by violence that is so cruel that makes escaping or thinking impossible, they cannot even be named or talked.

<sup>10</sup>Understood as power relationships that are structurally defined through the social and political construction of masculinity as active and aggressive, and femininity as passive and receptive.

spaces and moments that are assigned and impregnate every sphere of social reality. Hence we understand gender as the social, political, cultural and legal meanings assigned unevenly to men and women (López, 2019).

This type of hierarchical relationship between sexes is historically determined and, in addition to putting men in a privileged position and women in a submissive and discriminated one, inhibits the full development of the latter (Paredes-Guerrero et al., 2016). So, this logic has an impact on structural violence, through the reiterated exclusion of women and their confinement into the reproductive and domestic fields, but also in cultural violence, which reinforces roles and functions, by less restrictive means but essentially subordinates them.

It is thereby indispensable to comprehend that just as war does not start with the first shot, and does not end with the last one (Galtung, 2016), femicide does not appear from thin air and always causes collateral damages and secondary effects. Most of the times in the shape of structural and cultural violence, through institutions that blame the victim, stigmatize their relatives and exonerate the murderers (Lagarde, 2006); the re-victimization of the victim as well as the family, who are at the same time re-traumatized (the first time by the loss of their loved one, and many others throughout the process of justice), all of this leaves social and psychological scars.

Besides, the misogynist motives of femicide tend to be obscured or hidden<sup>11</sup> in plain sight, implicitly denying the masculinity of the assassin, who is frequently described as a beast or an animal (Radford, 1992), making them seem as isolated and disconnected events, that make no sense, caused by an individual unrelated to society. As Farmer (2004) said, the burden of significance can be overwhelming, as the links of the net are revealed.

As if it was not enough, they tend to exonerate the killer, attributing the offense to external factors that alter men's state of consciousness (drugs or alcohol), to a pathological state, a momentary alteration of the personality, or emotional state caused by someone else or his uncontrollable male nature (Lagarde, 2006; Radford, 1992). This only obstructs the comprehension of the meaning these actions have, and leaves the people close to the victims without justice. This impunity seals the silent pact of collective masculine solidarity and complicity (Segato, 2013), that is powered by arbitrariness, social and judicial inequity (Lagarde, 2006).

We can assure that gender violence would not have acquired an endemic character in Mexico, if it had not been for the omissions of public duty. Ignoring the legal complaints is a highly pathogenic form of structural violence, because it reassures the denial of the subjectivity that nullifies and forecloses the victims (Segato, 2010), and it is proof that institutions do not protect anyone but the status quo. Furthermore, impunity is a contagious agent, it implies that one can commit these crimes without any concern, since there won't be any consequences.

<sup>11</sup>For example, by substituting femicide by "passion crime", "homicide" or, even worse, "found a lifeless body".

Such persistent, quiet, overlapping, and even rationalized violence, can only be vaguely intuited or sensed behind a facade of normality. Those who suffer from it, are not capable of developing defense, avoidance or confrontation mechanisms, since it is nearly impossible to identify where it comes or from whom. This climate of generalized violence that [Benyakar \(2016\)](#) called menacing or threatening environment, converge with the notion of latent violence ([Galtung, 1969](#)), defined as those circumstances in which, even when violence (direct, structural and/or cultural) has not yet appeared, it can hatch at any moment, so it prevails a perpetual sense of danger.

An invaluable input to the Mexican climate of violence comes from mass media, and although it is not our objective to analyze its role, it is an unavoidable subject when referring to the way violence is spread. It plays an essential role in echoing femicidal violence by minimizing the acts, exhibiting the victim and her relatives ([Caputi & Russell, 1992](#)), obstructing the mourning process<sup>12</sup>, putting them at risk or of being harassed on social media, or revealing their personal information without any sensitivity, while the identity of the perpetrator remains covered. The coverage and sensationalist approach makes it seem like a show or even propaganda.

This information invades us from different fronts and discretely encourages violence as a marketable product ([Aspe, 2016](#)). At the same time, it generalizes and intensifies the menacing sensation, fear, anxiety and the feeling of nonsense and vulnerability of women ([Benyakar, 2016](#); [Muñoz, 2011](#)). The victim's story is sold, and while others profit from it, their personal experience is silenced (contrary to what Salgero does). They stop being humans, to become products of consumption, disposable and insignificant, a mere spectacle, as the neoliberal model dictates. Media's role is only a mirror of society<sup>13</sup>.

Therefore, following Segato's idea of the messages inscribed in femicide, we can identify two parallel interlocutors: women, as potential victims, must be aware and stay in line, otherwise they could pay the price (their lives); and men, who must obey the command of masculinity, with the guarantee that they will get away with anything.

### 2.3. A Violation of Women's Human Rights

In this paper we consider Human Rights as those included in the Universal Declaration of the United Nations of 1948, when the devastation caused by World War II highlighted the need to explicitly state the basic conditions for humanization.

According to [López & Aguirre \(2017\)](#) Human Rights are a set of norms, guardians of human dignity, regardless of conditions like society, ethnicity, religion,

---

<sup>12</sup>It is worth mentioning that the lethal violence of femicide is irreversible, but also all the other times of direct violence that cause wounds that are rarely completely healed, especially those inflicted repetitively, as psychoanalysis has shown us ([Galtung, 1998](#)), and as we can conclude in this chain of femicidal violence.

<sup>13</sup>Obviously it is not a reliable reflection, it isn't objective, as it tends to favor the hegemonic ideologies and the most privileged groups of said society.

economics, beliefs and sexuality; they have to be unalterable and universal, non-transferable and inexhaustible but, above all, they are State limitations, it is its guardian. There is a silent pact that implies that these rights come, as well, with the commitment of the individuals to adjust to a common law. In the 1948 document it is clearly dictated that these are a common ideal to which all nations need to work for, so that individuals and institutions promote the respect for rights and liberties.

Generally speaking, a violation is an action that breaks or acts against something, especially a law, agreement, principle, or something (someone) that should be respected (Cambridge Dictionary, 2021). In coincidence with our conceptual framework, Human Rights violations are multiple, and include the denial of others freedoms and the exacerbation of vulnerabilities; they are not random in distribution or effect, and they are often symptoms of much deeper pathologies of power linked to the social conditions that determine who will suffer abuse and who will be shielded from harm (Ho, 2007).

Audrey Chapman's (1996 as quoted in Ho, 2007) approach to such violations follows three categories: a) violations resulting from actions and government policies; b) those related to patterns of discriminations; and c) others related to a State's failure to fulfill the obligations of the Human Right's declaration. So, the State is responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling these human rights.

Symbolic violence is a legal or moral power that constructs social reality in ways that enable or are likely to enable various form of harm to persons. Symbolic violence in this sense is only one step removed from the physical destruction of concrete, hard violence, which gets enacted in turn but is previously mediated through an institutional action before being realized as violation (Colaguori, 2010).

Therefore, Human Rights violations are distinguished from other crimes because they are committed with the participation, passive or active, of the State. Under this light, sadly to the great majority of Mexicans, the 30 articles that make up said Declaration may seem utopian, because we are witnesses of their systematic violation. This is evidence of a failed state, that does not guarantee security and liberty, especially for women; on the contrary, it seems that it reproduces and hinders the patriarchal and "machista" discourse, through the added element of impunity (López & Aguirre, 2017).

This Declaration is essential to us because, as Farmer (2004) stated, if we study people's experiences of structural and cultural violence they are characterized by several violations of Human Rights, that prepare the ground for worst manifestations of violence, like femicide, which is, obviously a very direct form of dehumanizing women in the public and private spheres (Godoy-Paiz, 2012).

In this sense, violence exists in diverse spheres throughout women's lives (Lagarde, 2006), so femicide is the tiniest visible part of the violent social practices towards women, a culmination of a series of situations characterized by reiterated and systematic violations, omissions or obstacles of women's Human Rights, widely accepted by all of us, men and women, and rarely questioned.

We frame femicide (consummated or not) as a violation of the Human Rights of women, whose bodies, frequently marked by torture, are stripped away of any trace of humanity; this also shows certain asymmetries between men and women, inscribed in all aspects of everyday life, thus we consider indispensable to approach this phenomenon from a gender perspective.

Based on that and making a brief review of the articles by the United Nations, we can conclude that in Mexico women do not enjoy either freedom, justice or peace; our human dignity is constantly doubted, even by the authorities; our rights are usually uneven in contrast with those of men; unlike them, we do not live free of fear, on the contrary, we are scared and unprotected by the State; we are not born or raised free and equal in dignity and rights, as do men; our liberty is limited, may it be by direct domination or fear, we are the target of cruelties, inhumane and diminishing behaviors; we have to lower our voices and limit our opinions and liberty of expression; in general, we are excluded from the protection of law (UN, 1948/2020).

It is urgent to interpret the emblematic cases of femicide as red lights that indicate an endemic situation that has been relatively hidden by the State, so it is possible to promote their reflection from different approaches and perspectives, to re-humanize the victims (and all women for that matter), to enhance interventions and to prevent these cases to fall into oblivion (Lagarde, 2006).

### 3. Conclusion

To conceive violence from a more complex point of view, and from an interdisciplinary and intersectional perspective is to change the scope towards a theoretical framework where structures, cultures and the symbolic world are essential to better understand the issue of femicide and femicidal violence. In addition, this allows us to see the apparatus of power and structures of domination that constraint individual and social agency to the extent that Human Rights are unattainable (Ho, 2007).

The use of violence, as an instrument but also as a means to communicate, have a well documented history in the sociology and psychology of social control and dominance (Colaguori, 2010); nevertheless, it is essential to admit these felonies cannot be detached from the idiosyncrasy of the individuals that commit such crimes, in addition to the social and historical context, the growing climate of structural and cultural violence intersected by the particular way neoliberal capitalism has impacted our country, Mexico. This nuance definitely adds up to the complexity of the problem, since it is an academic issue but also a sociopolitical one (Salgado, 2016).

This carries some obstacles. The first one, is the evidence that the “preventive” measures launched by previous and current governments, are mostly directed to the potential victim (implicit curfews, being always beside a man, avoiding certain places and times, etc.), and not towards structural and cultural modifications that resolve from the core the conflict of power distribution between sex-

es-genders.

The second, closely linked to the previous one, is the lack of investment in long term interventions that include women as well as men. We are all part of society and if violence is a characteristic always possible in any relationship, it cannot be reversed with the solely participation of one half of the population. In other words, we could say that sexism, gender violence and femicidal violence, are men's problems suffered primarily by women. We need to join efforts, it is not a problem between men and women, but of both against hegemonic ideologies incarnated and legitimized by institutions.

It is uncomfortable to admit that most of the violence against women, whether structural or cultural, are in fact hidden in plain sight, they only become invisible through repetition and indifference. These violence(s) of everyday life are multiple and mundane, and shape people's subjectivities and social practices that are implicated in ordinary people's behaviors. But these dimensions of violence, cultural and structural, are not conscious choices, they tend to function impersonally and apply to certain groups (Farmer, 2004).

We consider that the eradication of femicide is inseparable from the violent social practices toward women and, thus, the elaboration of underlying gender conflicts that constitute the social tissue. The cycle of violence does not reproduce itself automatically, it requires constant reproduction and legitimization, so it is a big mistake to "attack" violence with more violence, and it only feeds the vicious circle.

In this sense, if the damage suffered by the victims (direct and indirect) of femicide are irreversible, and other women suffer the consequences of a threatening environment, it is urgent to focus on the multiple elements, levels and causes. It is impossible to erase the injuries, but we can still make deep changes. But we are not so naive as to think a completely violence free world is possible. To cast violence as never justifiable in seeking a more peaceful social order, a complex ethics of violence should recognize the need for non violence solutions to conflict and war, but also recognized violence as necessary or unavoidable in certain instances, like revolutions (Parsons, 2007).

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

## References

- Araiza, A., Vargas, F., & Daniel, U. (2020). La tipificación del feminicidio en México. Un diálogo entre argumentos sociológicos y jurídicos. *Revista Interdisciplinaria de Estudios de Género de El Colegio de México*, 6, e468.
- Aspe, V. (2016). Sobre violencia, cultura y reconciliación en México. *Revista de Filosofía Open Insight*, 7, 79-112.
- Bazán, C. (2020). María Salguero, la geofísica que le pone nombre a las cifras de feminicidios en México. *Efeminista*.



- <https://efeminista.com/maria-salguero-feminicidios-mexico/>
- Benyakar, M. (2016). *Lo disruptivo y lo traumático. Vicisitudes de un abordaje clínico*. Argentina: Nueva Editorial Universitaria.
- Biebricher, T., & Johnson, E. V. (2012). What's Wrong with Neoliberalism? *New Political Science*, 34, 202-211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2012.676398>
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *La distinción. Criterios y bases sociales del gusto*. España: Taurus.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000). *Cuestiones de sociología*. España: Ediciones Istmo.
- Bourdieu, P. (2007). *El sentido práctico*. Argentina: Siglo XXI.
- Bourdieu, P. (2015). *La dominación masculina*. México: Editorial Anagrama.
- Cambridge Dictionary*. Cambridge University Press  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/es/diccionario/ingles/violation?q=Violation>
- Caputi, J., & Russell, D. (1992). Femicide: Sexist Terrorism against Women. In J. Radford, & D. Russell (Eds.), *Femicide. The Politics of Woman Killing* (pp. 13-21). Twayne Publishers.
- Castro, E. (2004). *El vocabulario de Michel Foucault. Un recorrido alfabético por sus temas, conceptos y autores*. Argentina: Prometeo.
- Cavareto, A. (2009). *Horrorismo. Nombrando la violencia contemporánea*. España: Anthropos.
- Cocks, J. (2012). The Violence of Structures and the Violence of Foundings. *New Political Science*, 34, 221-227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2012.676400>
- Colaguori, C. (2010). Symbolic Violence and the Violation of Human Rights: Continuing the Sociological Critique of Domination. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*, 3, 388-400.
- Corradi, C., Marcuello-Servós, C., Boira, S., & Weil, S. (2016). Theories of Femicide and Their Significance for Social Research. *Current Sociology*, 64, 975-995. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0011392115622256>
- Cufre, L. (2010). *Una inquietante familiaridad. Prácticas sociales violencias como organizadoras de subjetividad*. México: Biblioteca Digital de Humanidades.
- Farmer, P. (2004). An Anthropology of Structural Violence. *Current Anthropology*, 45, 305-325. <https://doi.org/10.1086/382250>
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, Peace and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6, 167-191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 3, 291-305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343390027003005>
- Galtung, J. (1998). *Tras la violencia, 3R: Reconstrucción, reconciliación, resolución. Afrontando los efectos visibles e invisibles de la guerra y la violencia*. Red Gernika.
- Galtung, J. (2016). La violencia: Cultural, estructural y directa. *Cuadernos de Estrategia*, No. 183, 147-168.
- García-Del Moral, P. (2016). Transforming *Femicidio*: Framing, Institutionalization and Social Change. *Current Sociology*, 64, 1017-1035. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115618731>
- Godoy-Paiz, P. (2012). Not Just "Another Woman": Femicide and Representation in Guatemala. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 17, 88-109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1935-4940.2012.01192.x>
- Ho, K. (2007). Structural Violence as a Human Rights Violation. *Essex Human Rights Review*, 4, 1-17.
- Incháustegui, T. (2014). Sociología y política del feminicidio; algunas claves interpretativas

- a partir del contexto mexicano. *Revista Sociedade e Estado*, 29, 373-400.  
<https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-69922014000200004>
- Lagarde, M. (2006). Introducción. In D. Russell, & R. A. Harmes (Eds.), *Feminicidio: una perspectiva global* (pp.15-42). México: Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Ciencias y Humanidades Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- López, D., & Aguirre, A. C. (2017). El feminicidio como Violación a los Derechos Humanos: el caso de Mexico desde una perspectiva internacional. *Revista de Estudos e Pesquisas sobre as Américas*, 11, 145-163.
- López, G. A. (2019). Femicide and Gender Violence in Mexico. Elements for a Systematic Approach. *The Age of Human Rights Journal*, No. 12, 158-183.  
<https://doi.org/10.17561/tahrj.n12.9>
- Marcuello-Servós, C., Corradi, C., Weil, S., & Boira, S. (2016). Femicide: A Social Challenge. *Current Sociology*, 64, 967-974. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116639358>
- Munévar, D. I. (2012). Delito de feminicidio. Muerte violenta de mujeres por razones de género. *Revista Estudios Socio-Jurídicos*, 14, 135-175
- Muñoz, P. (2011). Ideologías entrelazadas: patriarcado, masculinidad y fundamentalismos religiosos. In *Violencias interseccionales. Debates feministas y marcos teóricos en el tema de pobreza y violencia contra las mujeres en Latinoamérica* (pp. 37-49). Central America Women's Network (CAWN).
- Olvera, B. I. (2020). Feminicidio en México, la otra pandemia. *Revista Mexicana De Ciencias Penales*, 3, 19-31.
- Paredes-Guerrero, L. J., Llanes-Salazar, R., Torres-Salas, N., & España-Paredes, A. P. (2016). Gender Violence against Women in Yucatán. *Revista LiminaR. Estudios Sociales y Humanidades*, 14, 45-64.
- Parsons, K. A. (2007). Structural Violence and Power. *Peace Review*, 19, 173-181.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10402650701353612>
- Radford, J. (1992). Introduction. In J. Radford, & D. Russell (Eds.), *Femicide. The Politics of Woman Killing* (pp. 3-12). Twayne Publishers.
- Russell, D. (2011). *The Origin and Importance of the Term Femicide*.  
[https://www.dianarussell.com/origin\\_of\\_femicide.html](https://www.dianarussell.com/origin_of_femicide.html)
- Rylko-Bauer, B., & Farmer, P. (2016). Structural Violence, Poverty, and Social Suffering. In D. Brady, & L. M. Burton (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Poverty* (pp. 47-74). Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199914050.013.4>
- Salgado, M. P. C. (2016). Femicide in Mexico: An Approach through Academic, Activist and Artistic Work. *Current Sociology*, 64, 1054-1070.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116637894>
- Salguero, M. (2020). *Yo te nombro*. <http://mapafeminicidios.blogspot.com/p/inicio.html>
- Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública (2020). *Información sobre violencia contra las mujeres (incidencia delictiva y llamadas de emergencia 911)*.  
<https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/articulos/informacion-sobre-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-incidencia-delictiva-y-llamadas-de-emergencia-9-1-1-febrero-2019>
- Segato, L. R. (2010). *Las estructuras elementales de la violencia. Ensayos sobre género entre la antropología, el psicoanálisis y los derechos humanos* (2nd ed.). Argentina: Prometeo.
- Segato, L. R. (2013). *La escritura en el cuerpo de las mujeres asesinadas en Ciudad Juárez: Territorio, soberanía y crímenes de estado* (1st ed.). Argentina: Tinta Limón.
- Segato, L. R. (2016). *La guerra contra las mujeres*. España: Traficantes de Sueños.

- Thapar-Björkert, S., Samelius, L., & Sanghera, G. (2016). Exploring Symbolic Violence in the Everyday: Misrecognition, Condescension, Consent and Complicity. *Feminist Review*, 112, 144-162. <https://doi.org/10.1057%2Ffr.2015.53>
- United Nations (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- Voirol, O. (2004). Reconnaissance et méconnaissance: Sur la théorie de la violence symbolique. *Social Science Information*, 43, 403-433. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0539018404045491>
- Walsh, S. D., & Menjívar, C. (2016). Impunity and Multisided Violence in the Lives of Latin American Women: El Salvador in Comparative Perspective. *Current Sociology*, 64, 586-602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116640474>
- Weil, S. (2016). Making Femicide Visible. *Current Sociology*, 64, 1124-1137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115623602>
- Winter, Y. (2012). Violence and Visibility. *New Political Science*, 34, 195-202. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2012.676397>