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Trigger Warning: Sexual assault, violence.

The Femicide Mexican epidemic and the *Ni Una Menos* Movement:

Let's not ignore the ugly side of our country just to protect its vacationing reputation.

Mexico is a country which despite all its natural wonders, archeological sites and excellent, top-tier cuisine faces an under-reported and astonishing epidemic of gender violence specifically at the hands of men directed to women. Women in Mexico are highly targeted, ranging from systematic gender microaggressions to sexual abuse to murder. As a response to this appalling treatment to women, the modern feminist movement in Mexico has exploded in anger and indignation over cases of disappearance of women, most of them, having been murdered in brutal ways. A few weeks before the COVID-19 lockdown of 2020, the women of Mexico protested the regime that disregards women's lives by the lack of police investigation and the government's tendency of "sweeping under the rug" these deaths, or by placing blame onto the victims. Maya Averbuch, The Guardian reporter, provides insight into the protests that occurred in this period:

"Many marchers on Sunday expressed frustration with the country's federal and state authorities: most murder cases go unsolved, and families often search for the missing on their own. Elsa Arista González, who founded a Facebook group to report disappearances and abuse in the city of Nezahualcóyotl, in Mexico state, said that people were fed up with the impunity."

Considered by the UN a "gender-motivated homicide," femicides in Mexico reached its peak the first semester of 2020, the most violent one in over 30 years, with the number accumulating to 10.5 women a day killed (García par. 2). A Harvard study breaks down how violence against women is even more threatening and alarming for women partly or entirely indigenous. The unfortunate phenomenon dates to colonial times, in which Spaniards held power enough to abuse indigenous women without any flicker of a consequence. Nowadays, about 20% of Mexico's population is partly or entirely Native American (Miller par. 3-4).

The Mexican Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System confirms the northern Mexican state, Nuevo León (My home state), to be the second most violent entity in the country regarding femicide (Martínez, par. 12). Nuevo León in 2017 established criteria to explain what femicides are and how to identify them, this to be able to name the problem and grasp the gravity of the murderous epidemic. The first criterion is the body of the deceased woman having indications of sexual violence. The second is finding in the body signs of degrading acts such as mutilation. The third criterion is one of the most important according to Griselda Nuñez, a prosecutor specializing in femicides and crimes against women in Nuevo

León, and it's about previous records of violence from the aggressor/ murderer. This last criterion is pertinent to mention since in some cases it's incorrectly assumed the victim sustained a romantic relationship with the aggressor. To clarify, any type of relationship involving trust might facilitate the circumstances for the aggression to happen, but this is not exclusively the case. Nuevo León data has found the *modus operandi* (Recurring habit) of the victim's body being exposed and/or disposed of on public roads (Grupo Reforma).

In Mexico City, two of the femicides that took place in 2020 were highly addressed nationwide and caused extreme outrage. The first was the case of 7-year-old, Fatima, who was kidnapped from outside of her elementary school and brutally killed with instances of sexual abuse. Her body was found in a trash bag that was disposed of in a vacant lot (Gallón par. 1-5). A few days before the disappearance of Fátima, 25-year-old woman Ingrid Escamilla was killed and skinned alive by her partner. Officers got to Escamilla's and her partner Erick's home when they saw him on his knees with a knife next to Escamilla's body and a large pool of blood. "He had no problem confessing what he had done. In his story, he explained that they both argued after she told him that he drank too much. According to him, it was she who threatened to kill him with a knife. However, it was he who ended up stabbing her several times in the neck. Once dead, he removed parts of her skin and some organs. He flushed some of her remains down the toilet and some into a nearby sewer" (Clarín par. 4-5). Protests in Mexico City and other Mexican cities exploded in rage, protesting the government's incapability of preventing this murder since the aggressor already had a history of violence against women. This unfortunately is way more common than it should be.

Ni Una Menos, "Not one (woman) less," is a famous hashtag and online movement that have sparked series of protests with purpose to apply pressure to the government and incite them to act and decrease the occurrence of these violent acts. Its social network characteristic attracts attention to the cause and raises awareness on it: it does exactly what social media should do: spread information on a social issue that would otherwise be unknown, due to traditional media's decision to *not* write about hard-to-discuss and taboo subjects that are not "trendy" or "entertaining," enough to be in their media. One of the protests from the *Ni Una Menos* movement has been highly controversial online, spreading like wildfire as a topic of conversation or of dispute in academic, social and domestic environments: The vandalization of the Angel of Independence.

Built in 1910 to commemorate Mexico's war of independence, 'The Angel of Independence,' is a victory statue on a major roundabout in downtown Mexico City, which feminist activists spray painted in early 2020, to have the country take notice of this matter (Small par. 3-5).

On Women's Day March 8th, 2020, the *Ni Una Menos* movement gained traction across Mexico, when women protested the unbelievers and the ignorant members of society. Women decided to boycott work, school, usage of services such as Wi-Fi, bank movements, and

purchases of any kind. The purpose of this was for society to comprehend what it would be like if all women were killed or have disappeared: how necessary we are, how we are just as important as men but are not being treated like so. Some women even took matter in their own hands and protested in additional ways besides the ones already mentioned: My mom, for example refused to show any affection such as kisses and hugs to my father and her sons for them to care about the cause, literally raising the questions “What if it was your mother? What if it was your wife?” The official March 8 halt Facebook page wrote: “If we (women) halt, the world halts. Remember: this day is to create awareness about the situation of gender violence that is battering through the country.” The movement was backed by mostly all major educational entities and professional as well, meaning they excused their absences and by law, include no drawbacks (De La Luz par.1).

However, common response emerged from some entities in the country, signaling a backfiring effect from the intended purpose. In some very notable high schools and universities in Nuevo Leon for example, the day without women was used as an excuse for boys to watch a football match, teachers allowed video games to be played in class-time and allowed male students entered women’s bathrooms to record videos. The utter misconstruction of the central idea of the halt made the community sad and disappointed in the male students participating in these actions, but most importantly, the male professors and directors allowing wrongdoing to unfold unchecked (Robles et al. par. 7-9).

Ignorance like this is a head-on example on why femicides and gender violence keep prevailing in Mexico. Another theory is that these issues are sensitive subjects and delicate matters that people are simply not thrilled to address. With children, hard topics tend to be avoided to spare kids’ warping of their idea of the perfect world they live in, when doing this though, we condemn the cycle of turning a blind eye to the matter. Additionally, a common trend in Mexican culture is to assume women talking about these issues are radical feminists who suggest *all* men are responsible or partially responsible for the violence ensuing. This is simply not the case.

Femicides in Mexico will persist until women feel equally as safe as their male citizens to live a long and prosperous life. We need to understand how rage in any type of relationship might lead into violence, as well as to ensure the aggressor’s punishments are suitable for the crime committed. Unfortunately, the Mexican government's response to these movements has not been satisfactory for the people involved in the protests and people who support the cause in general. It’s appeared to become a highly gender-biased issue, since most parts of the protestors are women who empathize at a certain point with the issue of violence against women. People in positions of power such as the government and the police, however, are mostly men. This and the privilege of day-to-day men to not going through the injustices and plain fear women go through, drives a wedge between men and women in understanding each other's experience. As previously mentioned, this has become a very gender-based issue, opinions tend to be very

black-and-white on the subject, with men and women being divided on them. The movement is often disregarded and written off as “feminazi.” (Aragón par. 4-5)

I want to make something clear about this term: the Nazi party promoted fascism and anti-Semitism, leading to a highly deathly, utterly devastating world war. To compare this with the feminist movement that asks for gender equality and empowerment, ending violence against women and femicides is highly inappropriate and a spit in the face to all alive and dead victims of gender violence.

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