Trujillo (2010) Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala

Trujillo, Hilda Morales


Trujillo delves deep into the lives of women in Latin America (Guatemala specifically) and all they must endure. The article focuses on something the author calls "femicide", which she describes as the murder of a woman or many women, simply because they are female. The article explains that though femicide rates have been climbing steadily in Guatemala for the past several years, many authorities will never investigate or follow up on any particular case. Additionally, the court systems are extremely corrupt, and courts choose to ignore cases of femicide when they are brought to court. Throughout the article Trujillo sets out to examine why this is happening, who is committing these crimes, and how the problem of femicide can be stopped (or at least, reduced).

Trujillo goes into detail about the history of the word "femicide" and how it is a necessary addition to the English language. The prefix "homo" is equated to men, so a "homicide" actually refers to the death of a man. Trujillo goes on to explain that the origin of femicide lies in the "social environment of machismo and misogyny" which has "normalized" acts of aggression and violence towards women (Trujillo, 2010:131). Without femicide, there is no word to explain this horrifying phenomenon that has been occurring throughout the world for centuries. Trujillo argues that a gender distinction should be made when studying these cases because modern society has such a long history of committing acts of violence against women simply for being women, that a new term must be coined to accurately discuss and attempt to fix the issue.

According to Trujillo, from 2000 to 2006 “three thousand violent deaths of women” occurred in Guatemala (Trujillo, 2010: 130). The history of femicide within and outside of Guatemala is spotty, because the statistics are unreliable; many of the cases of violence against women go unreported or un-investigated, and many laws created to help women are unenforced. Human rights treaties also are largely unenforced or unsigned, and many women’s rights activist groups are not taken seriously. Many police forces choose to ignore cases and never follow up, making life miserable for the women who file these claims.

Trujillo gives many solutions to the problem of femicide in her article, almost all of which are treaties to sign or groups to join. Though these are options worthy of discussion, her article leaves many issues unaddressed. Many of her improvement ideas center around her view of all women as victims. While it is imperative that law enforcement officers do their job and protect these women, the key to helping these women is helping them help themselves. Trujillo makes almost no mention of how to encourage women to take a stand against domestic violence. The focus should be on the betterment of the condition of women through empowerment and support groups. These groups would help women grow independent from their spouse and enable them to take control of potentially dangerous situations. Additionally, if these groups included men, it would be able to give men valuable insight into the realm of domestic violence and femicide and potentially prevent them from committing any sort of crime against women. Bringing men into consideration would help prevent femicide because any sort of discrimination issue can only be solved when both parties are taken into consideration.

My only other questions are based in incredulity. How has this problem gone on for so long and not been publicized more? Why has nobody intervened to help these women establish these groups sooner? My only answer to these questions is the patriarchal and oppressive society we live in is to blame. Problems for women, like those stated in the article, will continue to worsen unless we are able to change the very foundation on which we live.