

Murdered if not a murderer

Eva Alterman Blay

The media have announced that women are entering the world of crime, attracted by drug dealers. Has the scenario changed? The extraordinary rate of assassinations in Brazil in 1996 was 24.8 people in 100,000, including both sexes and all age ranges. Women were 4.6 of this total. The murders took place in both urban and rural regions.

However, violence came to men and women in different ways. For the men, the homicide was the result of relations maintained in public space with other men—a bar, a drug ring, friends, on the street, in traffic, at work. For the women, the death above all came from private relationships. In the State of São Paulo in 1998, the second highest cause of female death was AIDS, most often contracted from partners who maintained sexual relations outside of marriage. The third cause was murder.

In 1998 in the city of São Paulo, 5,157 people, or 14 people per day, were murdered. Of this total, 285 (5.5%) were women. Adding the 384 "attempted homicides" of women, the total is 669 female victims. A great many of the murdered women tried to interrupt the cycle of so-called "domestic violence" by seeking out the Special Police Units in Defense of Women (Delegacias de Defesa da Mulher - DDM), which have registered 36,372 cases of aggression, threats of all kinds, and sexual violence.

Like the men, the women are also victims of slaughter, armed robbery, disputes, stray bullets, etc., However, they are also victims of their vindictive partners or ex-partners. This tragic macho behavior did not change with modernity in Brazil. Among the cases in which the aggressor is known by the police, 91.5 percent were committed by someone who had or have tried to have intimate relations with the victims. The violence occurred in all social and educational classes. Some one-quarter of these women worked and the majority (65.9%) were between 19 and 45 years old. Some were only 13 or 14. The majority of the

victims and aggressors are white. The amorous relationship in Brazilian society preserves the man's bond of possession of "his" woman. This pattern of behavior is "taught" within family life.

Fifty-three female murderers were found, and they can be classified in four groups: 1. As in past centuries, abandoned, powerless, killed their children and committed suicide; 2. Killed to defend their daughters from a rapist, who was sometimes the woman's own partner 4. In self-defense against aggressive partners;4. Because of involvement with assailants and drug dealers.

There are two theoretical problems:

1. The concept of "domestic violence" has the advantage of revealing that the home can be a center of violence. However, it does not take into consideration that violence against women goes beyond the domicile, reaching the workplace, the street, etc.

2. The violence called domestic remains contaminated by the very disqualification that the domestic has in society. The aggressions are treated by judges and public prosecutors as small problems of fighting between husband and wife. The victim continues to be attacked and at the end is murdered by the same aggressive partner that she had previously denounced.

Homicides and attempted homicides—that are registered in the police stations in general and rarely in the police stations in defense of women---demonstrate that the problem is badly structured and requires solutions that take into consideration the social differences of gender.

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