Women Killed to Women Who Killed: Femicide and the Female Serial Killer on Television Through *Sharp Objects* (2018)

Meriem Ayech Hamraoui[1], Ilhem Mortad-Serir [2]

[1]University of Tlemcen (Algeria), meriem.ayechhamraoui@univ-tlemcen.dz
[2]University of Tlemcen (Algeria), ilhem.mortad@univ-tlemcen.dz

Article info

Abstract ;

As the science of crime and murder, criminology is recent yet most pivotal to the world of lawlessness. It aims at categorising and catching a criminal. It majorly focuses on the male serial killer as the most perilous type and looks at females as mostly victims. For myriad scholars, the act of killing women by the opposite sex is known as femicide. However, few believe that even women killing women is femicide, for it is not about the one committing the murder; it is about the one who is killed. Though criminology did not give much thought to female murderers, this research attempts to help rectify that deficit. The emphasis is to be laid on the female serial killer who targets women through the TV series adaptation of the American novel Sharp Objects since it portrays the mutated monstrous woman.

Corresponding author: Meriem Ayech Hamraoui

Authors Meriem Ayech Hamraoui[1], Ilhem Mortad-Serir [2]

1. Introduction

Though murder existed as long as human beings have, criminology as the methodical study of this unlawful conduct has not come into sight until the 18th century, and the term itself, has not been conceptualised before the 19th. It is a multi-faceted field that stands dependent on many other disciplines such as psychology (O'Brien and Yar xi), which studies the human brain and its various subconscious manifestations. In criminology, it leans towards an anatomic psychological study of criminal behaviour, its development and mutation in parallel to external variables, such as society (ibid viii-ix). In studying the mind of a criminal, the focus on the serial killer became one of the most renowned criminological endeavours.

A serial killer, in its simplest definition, is one who commits more than three murders, identically, with a period of cooling off between each kill (qtd. in Philbin and Philbin 3). Within the serial killer study, the emphasis was on males, yet, there is no denying that women, too, can hurt, abuse and kill. Women, too, are deranged enough to be serial murderers. While male serial killers are known for choosing female victims, it is a novelty for women to serially kill their own kind. This act of targeting women is known as femicide. It is the intentional murder of females for what they represent: the female sex (Nowak 1). In most instances, femicide is linked to men, but with time, social change and even feminist movements, even women are accused of committing such a horror. Being a killer as a whole would denote insanity, and being a woman killing other women may indicate an even more severe a reason.

Literature, as the mirror of society, also echoes societal revulsions. It is mainly adapted into screen, a media closer to the audiences due to its brevity and visual advantage. While on paper, the serial killer is read and imagined; on screen, the insanity is visualised. Hence the choice of the illustrated version of *Sharp Objects* to gauge the incentives behind a woman becoming a serial killer and the rationale behind her choice of female victims. To study this new portrait of women in visual media, one believes it necessary to make use of the feminist theory to film.

2. Psychological Criminology, the Science behind Murder

In its encompassing sense, criminology deals with various aspects such as the investigation of crime in contrast to law and order, its perpetrators' incentives and behaviours, its impact on the victims and their surroundings, the procedures on how to encounter it, and the lawful body which fights it (Williams 1). Criminology duly deals with criminal bearings through multiple disciplines akin to psychology (Walsh and Ellis 2), mainly because there was a constant doubt within criminology as it was accused of being yet an immature discipline.

Richard Sparks, for instance, dwelled on the deficits of criminology towards its own historical background and immaturity in view to its origins and setting (Murphy and Whitty 571). For Frank Cullen, other scholars saw it as "largely irrelevant", especially that it cannot exhibit the reasonability and objectivity of science (qtd. in Brown et al 7); it remains more of a speculative field based on observation. Hereafter, this paper focuses on psychological-criminology as a reliable discipline rather

than on the unrefined totality of criminology. Psychological criminology plays a significant role in explaining how the urge to commit crime is entranced within the mind of a delinquent. It starts by looking at the triggers for criminal tendencies, their sustainability and development in the face of individual and social motives.

Sathyanarayana Rao explains that behavioural sciences aimed at understanding those criminal incentives through the psychological lobotomy of the mental processes of criminals (4). They reached a better understanding through the discovery or the creation of "Criminal profiling". That is, a criminal's identifiable portrait is to be made according to the crime he commits and the shared characteristics of the crime in synchronism with other similar criminalities (ibid). The results reached in terms of categorising criminal demeanours postulate: "aggressiveness, restlessness, poor attention span, under achievement, impulsivity, reluctance to postpone gratification in the interest of long term goals, intolerance of frustration and unreliability in personal relationships" (West 78). Ultimately, a criminal or a murderer is the accumulation of social failures.

It is also evidenced that not all those who kill are insane. In most cases, the psychotic symptoms of the culprits are not visible; and hence neither the criminal nor the people in his vicinity would categorise him as mentally deranged (West 78). This fact refutes the reliability of profiling a criminal based on similar committed crimes by mentally ill criminals. Thus, it is impossible to stereotype based on generalisations (Sathyanarayana Rao 4). To aid in the process of rectifying such a deficiency, based on the Freudian approach to psychoanalysis, "Psychiatric criminology" or "forensic psychiatry" attempted to probe into the dissimilarities between criminals, that is, the individual ordeals each one faced to reach a stage of psychopathy (ibid). Hereafter, scholars targeted criminals' personal torments akin to: "physical or mental trauma in childhood, to other 'triggers' like job loss, the break up of a relationship and other stressful situational factors" (D'Cruze 34).

In *The Mask of Sanity*, Cleckley set a new definition to the psychopath, not a popular film character but most likely an influential person in his occupation. He is socially pleasant, that is attractive, weirdly calm and sharp. Nevertheless, such a façade would not last due to his deviant side, which could be a result of individual trauma; it would eventually come to the surface, explaining his inability for "long term commitment to any course of action" (qtd. in Wortley 107). Beyond that, scholars including Abramsen and Roche attested to the strength of a criminal's subconscious functionalities, a strength precisely lied in reflecting past ordeals through unstable actions. Still, the criminal himself is entrenched with his obliviousness to the reasons behind his psychopathy. Then, the criminal is unaware of the delinquent enticements that drive him to kill (qtd. in Sathyanarayana Rao 4).

The field of psychological criminology is still under development, yet it was able to create certain profiling to what is known as a serial killer. Many studies have been made in the field, and so it was able to reach quite an exceptional understanding of what such a felonious act means.

2.1.   Serial Killing

Authors Meriem Ayech Hamraoui[1], Ilhem Mortad-Serir [2]

The term serial killer was first coined in the 1980s by FBI agents to differentiate between an ordinary murderer and one who kills repeatedly (Scott 89), i.e., serial killing denotes a continuous murderous process. As defined by the FBI, "a serial killer is someone who has killed a minimum of three people" (qtd. in Philbin and Philbin 3). In most cases, the culprit does not personally know the victims, so passion cannot be considered an initiator (Philbin and Philbin 3). The mystery, however, does not lie in what a serial murderer is; rather, it lies in the temptations behind the creation of a monster.

In *Soul Eaters*, serial killers are characterised based on childhood trauma, which according to Leyton, prevented feelings like regret, love and compassion from adequately developing, as they can only be grasped at a young age (qtd. in Venas 2). This failure leads to creating a psychopath, someone who experienced "emotional development issues", prudent and brilliant yet addicted to murder (Venas 2). Upon the investigation of Tampa, Florida's culprit Joe Long, he claimed that the "severe head trauma" he went through in his accident gave him the urge to kill women. For others, it could be hereditary genes or infancy ordeals like being abandoned to live in an orphanage (Philbin and Philbin 4). Hence, most scholars, men of law and psychologists agreed on one idea, "that serial killers are programmed in their childhoods to be killers". This programming happens as a reaction to being ill-treated by an elderly figure as an object to be harassed, hit, and sexually abused. Such injustices would create a sick child controlled by feelings of worthlessness and a subconscious impulse for an aggressive outlet. The process of releasing that anger starts through small creatures like animals, and with age, develop into bigger preys: human beings (Ibid 5).

Predominantly, there are four types of serial killers. Firstly, there is the "visionary", or the hallucination victim, who is targeted by "'voices' or 'visions'" given to him by a higher force like god, evil or even a pet like David Berkowitz known, as "Son of Sam". He thought the dog next door guided him to kill. So, the voices or visions urge the criminal to think that a specific set of people need to be murdered, and he is obliged to comply. Secondly, as the name denotes, the "mission-oriented" trusts in his undertaking to eradicate a disagreeable group of people from existence, similar to whores as it was the case for Robert Hansen. Then, the "power/control oriented" or the Ted Bundy, who is a killer with the need to exert power on his victims. Finally, the "hedonistic", who can either be "Oriented toward pleasure" or to be a "lust killer". Pleasure oriented or "thrill-seeking" ones feel such satisfaction when they kill, like "the Night Stalker". The lust killer akin to Edmund Kemper, on the other hand, feels sexual arousal as a result of the murder committed, so he continues to kill with the goal of reaching that sexual indulgence with no consideration to the human lives lost in the process (Peck and Dolch 225).

Serial killers could also be categorised in a different manner that is based on being "organised or disorganised". The organised type is known for his caution and sharpness. He sees the devil in the details, and he rather calculates his moves before and after each kill to avoid leaving any evidence to be incriminated. He is also socially agreeable and sexually skilled. On the other side of the continuum, the unorganised kind is less intelligent and does not care about the meticulousness of his unlawful act, risking being caught. In addition, he features as being socially and sexually unsuccessful. Then, there is another dichotomy for the serial killer, the "mixed, or sadistic". A mixed

serial killer is an umbrella term for both the organised and the disorganised types. The sadist, however, is that who enjoys lengthening the suffering of the victim. It is the process of torture that grants him gratification. Moreover, the sadist leans more towards an organised type (Foeling 98).

Seemingly, the male serial killer was privileged for having many classifications, and have been subjected to various inquisitive crusades. Contrastively, female serial killers were not allowed as much fame, though some intellectuals defied the current and decided to dive into the criminal-female's realm. Women's criminality was often related to their psychological instability, thence to study a female murderer is to dwell on her darkest mental spirals.

2.2. Female Serial Killers and the Psychological Turmoil

Since the typologies of serial killers are general, they can also be applied to women. Having childhood trauma, psychopathic genes or mental breakdowns could also be the motives for women serial killers. But certainly, women experience pain differently. In an article entitled "Murder Becomes her", the author clarifies that: patriarchal discriminations, a life of oppression, sexual and emotional exploitation, compression and most importantly, mental enslavement could only bring women to the altar of insanity or murder (Huneycutt).

Though there was not much importance given to female murderers, some displayed certain curiosity in explaining such an anomalous behaviour. Cesare Lombroso, the father of criminological studies, branded murderous women "as primitive and pathological individuals who had failed to develop into moral, feminine women" (qtd. in Estrada et al 138-39). While men fail to develop into compassionate beings, women fail to become feminine and thence become criminals. Apparently, this claim postulates that any woman who is not feminine is likely to be insane and thus murderous. The association between murder and feminism is further made by Freda Adler when she makes the link between women gaining equal rights in the last two centuries and women becoming criminals simultaneously (qtd. in Estrada et al 139). This rather outlandish coincidence suggests that gaining freedoms rendered women more vicious than they used to be. Throughout history, the female serial killer was categorised into a set of types. Kelleher and Kelleher provided the following: "black widow, angel of death, revenge killer, profit or crime killer, sexual predator, team killer" (Ferguson 316).

In a general view, most female serial killers have steady homes and choose familiar victims from their vicinity. The main reasons for their kills include financial profit, vengeance or sheer pleasure. Regarding the different categories, the black widow is one whose victims are "husbands, former husbands, or suitors". In contrast, the angel of death is, in most cases, a caregiver who psychopathically ends up killing the ones in her care as if she seeks attention through their loss. That is why most serial killers known as the angel of death were nurses (Ferguson 316). Like the black widow, the revenge killer selects her victims domestically, precisely "family members". For-profit or crime killers, deceptively financial gain is the spur to kill. In contrast, the predatory serial killer tends

to choose unfamiliar victims, precisely men whom she kills savagely, to reach sexual gratification (Foeling 102). The first female serial killer in history is believed to have been a predatory one: Aileen Wuornos. Finally, the team killer, who is certainly not independent in her choice nor method, either belongs to: "(1) male/female teams, (2) female teams" or "(3) family teams" (ibid).

Be that as it may, if becoming murderous denotes insanity, then what brings women to such an unfortunate haven? What makes the angel in the house mutate into the angel of death? Scientifically, women tend to harm themselves more than they harm others. As a matter of fact, self-directed violence is a female territory, as testified by Hawton and his colleagues (qtd. in Pickard 72). These violent tendencies begin as a reaction to trauma, but in time there are more potent triggers such as: "ego, castration, penis envy, and the like", which seem to be a male interpretation of the female psyche. Penis Envy, for example, is Freud's understanding of the female urge for freedom, a woman for him is simply jealous of a man (Blumenfeld 82). As women tended to imitate men as they started gaining freedoms, they may have also imitated their psychopathic tendencies. Contrastingly, from a feminist point of view, it is beyond men's understanding; it is a revolt against gender-roles, and the female physiognomy (qtd. in Gurung 33).

2.3. Femicide

The term femicide, in its early days, denoted the "gender-based killing of women by men". It was first created by feminists during the late 20th century. However, with time it started to be used to describe any type of women murder (Nowak 1). There are various categories of femicide based on their orientation. The World Health Organization report sets four definitive types: "Intimate femicide", "Murders in the name of 'honour'", "Dowry-related femicide", and "Non-intimate femicide" (1).

Intimate femicide comprises the highest percentage of female murders, i.e., a third of the total percentage. It is that in which a male partner kills his wife or lover. Even worse, the most targeted category is expecting women. Murders in the name of honour serve as a cover-up for obscene sins like "incest" or as a reputation protector and a punisher for those women who take liberties with sexual discretions beyond marriage lock, be them intentional, or forced like rape. The perpetrator is, in almost all cases, a family member, man or woman. On the same plain as honour-based murders, Dowry-related femicide is a drawback to ill-practised cultural traditions. Dowry, which is a sum of money paid by women to their in-laws in places like India, if not fully paid, becomes a reason for abusing, scaring or even killing women. At last, non-intimate femicide, which leaves the family borders, but is not any less horrendous. It postulates women's sexual abuse and torture before being massacred by strange psychopathic sex-mongers (WHO 2-3).

Yet again, men seem to be the major perpetrators of women murder; only honour killings seem to have included women as culprits. There is indeed little research behind women killing her kind, and so the purpose of this research paper is to discover one of women's inducements behind femicide. More precisely, to uncover one of the reasons behind women-women- killing on screen, this research chooses cinema, or precisely, television adaptation as the tool to lay the female serial killer bare.

3. Cinema and the Serial Killer

Cinema is quite a fledgling form of art compared to literature; it only dates back to 1895 (Metz 1). Nevertheless, its effect on the audiences was too pivotal that it quickly rose to power, just like the serial killer. Novels, films and Tv series with a psychopath at heart became the craze of the youth (O'Brien and Yar ix). They did not only shade the horror with the allure, but they also offered "the control over disorder, the pleasure of pattern-discovering, the identification with a strong representative of the law, and of course the enjoyment, from the reader's secure position, of the murders as art or simply as an intellectual game". Lost within the dopamine and adrenaline of the literary or cinematographic ride, the reader/ viewer is hypnotised into neglecting society's moral, ethical norms and internalising the appeal of a powerful, unscrupulous being. It renders the criminal a pleasurable artist and the crime a piece of art (Baelo-Allué 7).

The art of the serial killer has gained much fame in the last two centuries. It engages the viewer as an investigator, where he tries to understand killing patterns, guess who the next victim would be, and who the killer is (Baelo-Allué 9). During the closing half of the 1900s, numerous savants have agreed to the allure of murder in fiction and to the truth behind it. Simpson revealed that a many scholars believed in the interconnectedness of patriarchy with the appeal of murder or the serial killing of women on screen. Suzanne Moore asserted the connections between "murder, misogyny, and masculinity" precisely the Hollywood industry directly or indirectly promoted "individual masculine terrorism against female victims, even in its fiction" (qtd. in Simpson x). That is why an amalgam of Feminist Film Theorists cooperated to reach a new method to analysing film by revealing concealed "misogynist behaviours and gender inequalities, in both the personal relationships and the social positioning portrayed in films" (Carrero 5).

In contrast, there was a notable shift in literature and cinema to celebrate women who kill. Georgia brown mentioned the transformation, from the typical female in distress threatened by an insane male to a mentally ill woman menacing the life of men. Brown gave the example of King's *Misery*; nonetheless, she also provided an explanation for the unhinged female conduct, as she related it to the effect of feminism on female characters. She asserts that any female character not fitting the feminine role is most likely to serve as a monstrous character on the Hollywood screen (qtd. in Gabbard and Gabbard 421). The attention shifting to female killers became well established in the final years of the 1900s with the release of *Basic Instinct,* the most unorthodox story of a female serial killer who attracts and kills men thanks to her all-sexually- bewitching traits (Simpson 211). The appeal of this category of stories did not fade, for many similar stories of the psychopathic woman have been made during the 21st century, including *Gone Girl* and *Sharp Objects* by Gillian Flynn, adapted into a movie and a Tv Series, respectively.

To better understand the female serial killer, one believes the cinematographic utensil to be more encompassing due to its usage of the visual advantage to portray the monster. There is also the power shift to cinematographic works since they mutated into educational and cultivating indispensable apparatuses. They are more "popular, far-reaching, and, with any luck, entertaining", and farther than

that, the visual tool "plays an active role in shaping our collective consciousness" (Drucker). Psychology played a great role in the viewer- response. All the cinematographic gimmicks were developed based on their effect on shaping and motivating specific cerebral reactions. As the viewer's brain receives the horrific, suspenseful images, it experiences a psychological alteration in perception, which may not have been able to be experienced only by reading (Holl 23).

It is to be clarified that this research aims not to favour film or TV series to the book versions, but rather to use the visual utensil to understand the dichotomy of the male/female serial killers. The focus will simply be on the cinematographic version, to keep women and murder at the centre, rather than adaptation theories.

3.1. The Feminist Film Theory

The discipline of studying cinematographic artefacts had come into existence during the second half of the 1900s. At first, it was mainly dominated by literary men "who offered film appreciation, analysis, and history as variants of their literature courses" (Andrew 882). With time, the discipline started to spread vastly across other fields but, it was not given full vent. There have been no straightforward methods associated with the analytical process of studying film at the time, and thence the totality of an analytical discipline for cinema became but a fantasy.

The advent of the 21st century brought new changes to the Society of Cinematologists. They declared that the field encompassed: "Film Studies, Cinema Studies, Television Studies, Media Studies, Visual Arts, Cultural Studies, Film and Media History, and Moving Image Studies" (Andrew 883-884). The research field became broader in scope, reaching all visual media. TV series, for example, belong to the realm of film and cinema, "Film producers regard TV as part of the established distribution system of cinema" (Carroll 20), meaning a TV series is but an extended version of a film. In regards to the analytical theories, there is a bundle of theoretical approaches to film studies that work interchangeably or separately to reach the results needed (McGowan 27). With the rise of feminism and its high reach to all domains, the filmic genre was also privileged to welcome the feminist theory as one of the analytical approaches used to study cinematographic productions in all their variability.

At first, studying women representation in cinema focused on "the search for a suppressed canon of women filmmakers-a feminist version of the auteur theory-and the study of the image of women in films, primarily the image of women in films by men", in a sense it was similar in view to feminist literary criticism. Be that as it may, by the mid-1980s, the psychoanalytical feminist approach to film rose to play a pivotal role in film criticism (Carroll 349). The process of investigating women and psychology in films resulted from two distinct urges. The meaning of the psychological bearings of film in association to gender properties, and the wish to make sense of the role gender plays in cinema, or how people of both genders reflect on cinematographic works with gender at their core. The latter resulted from the political dispute on women's representation or position in the filmic world in contrast to men (Kuhn 1222-1223).

The feminist theory thence brought sexism in films into the spotlight because it revealed the extent to which the female portrayal was restricted and dominated "by the dichotomy of the mother versus the whore". Women belonged only to these two groups, the saints or the sinners, in the case of this paper, the victim or the culprit. This misogynistic trend also had a toll on women in real life because society would expect them to fit the stereotype (Carroll 349). Therefore, the visual media is not to be studied based on its cinematographic technicalities but on its engagement with "external issues: "race," gender, violence, and so on" (Kuhn 1226).

4. Sharp Objects (2018)

Sharp Objects is a novel written by the American author Gillian Flynn, first published in 2006, and in 2018 its HBO Tv adaptation was released to the audiences. Both works tell the story of the young journalist Camille Preaker who returns to her shady birth-town Wind Gap to investigate the murder of two young girls but winds up lost in the toxic horrific nooks and crannies of memory lane. The audiences also find themselves in the presence of an unexpected serial killer, if not more than one.

Directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, the Tv miniseries' screenplay was heavily based on Flynn's novel and modified by other writers, including Marti Noxon, Alex Metcalf, Vince Calandra, and others (Weinlander and Pinals 127). The principal characters in the show are: Camille Preaker played by Amy Adams, Adora Crellin as Camille's mother by Patricia Clarkson, Camille's half-sister Amma Crellin acted by the young talented actress Eliza Scanlen, along with detective Richard Willis powerfully portrayed by Chris Messina (ibid 127-128). According to the different rating platforms, the miniseries is quite appreciated by the audiences. For Rotten Tomatoes, it received a 92%, on IMDb an 8,1/10, and on Times of India 4/5.

In a 2018 online article on the *Vulture*, New York, Bastién refers to the reasons behind the allure of the miniseries. She praises the suspenseful unexpected nature of the events, and especially the winding up of the story. Besides the story, she admires the characters as well for being beyond the usual; they are bruised and unstable. They are mainly female characters which allow the readership a broader view, a "study about how women grapple with intimate abuse and violence, in the process becoming a towering achievement for each of its leads" (Bastién). With much focus on deranged women, the miniseries presents a captivating storyline.

4.1. The Typical Serial Killer Vs Amma Crellin

Amma Crellin is a young girl of 13 years old. She is the epitome of the cool girl outside the house and the perfect doll inside it. At first glance, no one can take her for a serial killer nor even remotely aggressive. Still, somehow Amma fits the psychopath profile; she is beautiful, socially pleasant, sharp and calm, and she is the most popular girl in town, but during the nights, she goes out drinking and partying and bullies John Keen, whom we know as one of the victims' older brother (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 3, 02:22-02:52). On another night, she tormenters detective Willis, using obscene words, and her sister when she sticks a lollipop in her hair, something not even an older man would dare to do (ibid

44:30-46:30), for her deviant side cannot be kept at bey as Cleckley asserted (qtd. in Wortley 107). Even at the first moments the viewers meet Amma, she wears revealing casual clothes which make her look much older than her age, she is smoking weed, and she makes fun of death alluding to the dead girls (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 1, 19:28-20:15).

From the psychopath to the serial killer, the latter is thought to be programmed at a very young age as a subconscious response to trauma and child abuse by an elder creating an ill infant with uncontrollable urges to hurt, commencing by smaller prays to bigger ones (Philbin and Philbin 4). In Amma's case, such trauma resulted from her mother Adora's excessive control and over protectiveness. Amma was, in fact, living the trauma since she was just a child, though she did not look like it. Throughout the eight episodes of the series, Adora's attempts to keep Amma to the confines of the house, dressed like a baby doll, are witnessed. In Amma's words from the first episode, "I'm just her little doll to dress up". Nonetheless, Amma is, as she calls herself, "incorrigible"; she only keeps the doll façade at home for Adora (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 1, 54:03-54:20). Further, Adora keeps Amma sick, giving her poison and pills to stay in bed to the extent that Amma even develops immunity against it (ibid: Ep 8, 34:50-35:10).

Amma also fits the serial killer typology concocted by the FBI (qtd. in Philbin and Philbin 3). She killed more than one girl, belonging to the same category in different periods. Ann Nash, who was killed a year before the second victim Natalie, as described by her father, "was plane, but she was smart, she…did for herself", she was not the typical little girl. From her picture, she had short disorderly hair, which she cut by herself, and wore overalls. She was a vibrant tomboy (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 1, 43:23-44:44). Similarly, Natalie's mother spoke of how her daughter was a stubborn, opinionated free soul. She called her: "A spitfire, a contrarian, a tomboy, a goofball. Smart as a whip, she didn't suffer fools" (ibid: Ep 2, 10:35- 10-58). Concerning the last victim, she looked so similar to Ann with short unruly hair and glasses (ibid: Ep 8, 36:32-36:38), and she was brilliant when she commented on Frank's editorials and spoke of her future plans (ibid, 42:57-43:11). In a more explicit sense, the murdered girls were mini-feminist women. They were independent, tenacious, and far from being feminine; therefore, they were most likely chosen for such a reason.

Though Amma did not follow the same pattern in killing, like a true serial killer, she left an identical signature in all the girls. She mutilated the bodies by leaving them with toothless mouths, like "a prop" or a plastic "doll" referred to by Chief Vickery as "little "O" for a mouth" (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 2, 07:10- 07:20). The lack of Amma's care to the details insinuates that she belongs to the unorganised type of serial murderers (Foeling 98) as she changed her pattern for killing and dropped Natalie's body in a public place in town. The detective called her stunt "risky" with "way more chance of being caught" (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 2, 07:02- 07:24). Nevertheless, she is socially agreeable and intelligent, so she is rather a mixed serial killer, organised and disorganised (Foeling 98). After all, Amma was not caught.

Be that as it may, she seems to belong to the "hedonistic" type, she seeks the pleasure in killing (Peck and Dolch 225), she tells her sister Camille "sometimes you need to be mean, or you'll hurt",

Camille thought Amma referred to hurting herself, but it was the other way around (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 6, 45:38- 45:50). To feel fulfilment Amma took lives, yet the lives she took were of girls her age. Having said that, these features apply to the usual type of serial killer; while Amma is a little girl, she does not fit the major serial killer features, which are age, pattern and choice of victim.

4.2.   *Amma Crellin the New Female Serial Killer on Television*

While the typical female serial killer is a vengeful wife, a seductive lover, a predator seeking retribution, a gold digger or a death-giver (Ferguson 316), *Sharp Objects* defied the typical female view and put forward a new monster. As feminist film theory postulated, women in media were destined to fit a stereotype of the sinner or the virtuous (Carroll 349). Women were not supposed to be merciless beasts. That is why in the series, women were never suspected, even when the little boy James spoke of the woman in white who took Natalie, no one believed him; instead, the police and others thought it was part of their folklore ghost story (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 2, 35:05-35:35) because simply for them, women are unable to commit such awful crimes, they can only be victims, following on the misogynistic nature of media, as the feminist theorists would refer to it. Still, in *Sharp Objects*, Amma Crellin destroyed the stereotype; she is both the killer and the victim.

Amma was too young to fit the age categories either of men or women; her choice of victims was also problematic, for a female serial killer rarely, if not never, commits femicide intentionally. According to Foeling's graphical study of the female serial killer, the minimum age for women to kill is 20, and that is for a team killer (102). Concerning the types of victims chosen by the different types of women serial killers, their preys are primarily men, and even if women are included in some rare cases, they are not specifically chosen for a particular reason. Moreover, women rarely kill violently, except for the predatory ones. However, they did not choose women, nor strangling (ibid), which was Amma's way. Strangling then is but an indicator of Amma's repressed rage. A woman in film and Tv was often portrayed as a femme fatal, a sexy, seductive female killer such as Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct* (Simpson 211), or as the crazy former nurse in *Misery* (qtd. in Gabbard and Gabbard 421). Amma was indeed sexually appealing and seductive, but she was a child, which made her inaccessible. In addition, Amma did not target men, nor did she seek revenge, money, or sexual retribution.

Amma targeted girls of the same age as her. Those girls were not forced to be barbies like she was. They were not obliged to behave, stay home, or report their whereabouts at all times as Adora expected of Amma (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 1, 51:08-51: 18). They did not have mothers who expected a perfect child, as Amma alluded to her dead sister Marianne (ibid, 53:30-53:40). Amma was an oppressed female, and fraught women have but two exits, to become insane or to hurt (Huneycutt), so she became the dichotomy of the doll inside and the predator outside. Unintentionally Amma was mimicking Adora's over-control on smaller territories like the mini-house identical to Adora's. Amma called it her "fantasy" (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 1, 51:40- 52:10), and she obsessed with how it should have been the same as Adora's. One day, she had a mental breakdown because the pillows did not match (ibid: Ep 2, 50:06- 50:15). More astonishingly, Amma's pulled teeth signature was her attempt of an

identical ivory floor to Adora's. In the finale episode, Camille discovers that the girls' teeth were used in Amma's mini-house. It is then that she realises that Amma was the real killer (ibid: Ep 8, 47:05-47:36). Amma also exerted control over her friends like her mother, whom she believed loved her to the extent of worship. She claimed they would follow her every command she just needed to ask (ibid: Ep 3 04:07- 04:30).

Despite her supposed power control, inwardly, Amma wished to be as free as those girls she killed. Her envy towards their freedom was translated through her crimes. Penis envy, in this light, is rather uncanny, Amma does not envy men for their freedom, but she envies other females. Amma had no issue with men; she bullied elder ones like John Keen and used the others sexually as she alluded to Camille (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 6, 45:05 45:15). On the other hand, she was jealous of Marianne because she was the perfect obedient girl, when in fever, she says, "I'm not as good, I can never be as good as someone dead" (ibid: Ep 7, 26:25- 26:32). A puppet, a monster and a victim, Amma was also Adora's little sick project like Marianne was. Astoundingly as it may seem, Adora would render Amma ill to nurse her and keep her subordinate. Amma says that Adora prefers her sick (ibid, 06:24-06:30). Though Amma controlled the lives of some and took the lives of others, she was not in control of hers. Just like her sister, she could have died of the poison Adora was feeding her if it was not for her immune system (ibid: Ep 8, 34:50- 35:08).

Before being a serial killer, Amma was the victim of another woman, in fact, another serial killer: an angel of death. Adora Crellin killed her first daughter Marianne as a result of her mental illness Munchausen by proxy. It is the act of making her sick and pretending to care for her to gain sympathy and appreciation, but being the intense woman that she was, Adora ended up killing her daughter (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 7, 10:25- 11:02). Camille was going to be her second victim if it was not for her strong, stubborn nature. Camille, instead, chose to be a self-harmer than let Adora end her life. Finally, Amma was almost the third victim if she did not become immune to the poison (ibid: EP 8, 34:50- 35:08), and she, herself, became the new-born serial killer.

Like Amma, Adora too was oppressed by an elder woman, her mother, Joya. Adora mentions to Camille that she thought having a compliant daughter who would save and love her would make her own mother love her too, but that would not happen. Adora's words insinuate an apparent mother-daughter conflict between the women in the story. Camille called her mom a child at the time, perhaps because she did not complete her entire mental growth, a growth which could have spared her being a sick, murderous woman who almost became a serial killer (*Sharp Objects*: Ep 4, 33:10- 34:15). Horrendously, Joya would punish little Adora with cause or without it, by leaving her in the middle of the night in the middle of the wilderness (ibid: Ep 8, 23:52- 24:50), and this is but one instance of how Adora was abused, the viewer is not allowed further probing into Adora's background, yet this incident alone is an enough peak to the reasons why Adora turned out deranged.

It was a repressive matriarchal family that expected way too much of its women. In a particular instant, the viewer witnesses both Amma's and Adora's attempts into a feminist silhouette. Amma wished to bring a change in the school play by making the lead female character the first to have

created a female militia the world had ever seen, but she was rejected by her teacher (ibid: Ep 4, 13:30-13:41). The astonishment lies in Adora's comment on the original play that it portrayed women as non-fighters simply because men wrote it, which led Camille to question if she was a feminist. Nevertheless, Adora would directly put on the mask of femininity, criticising Camille's attire (ibid: Ep 5, 09:09- 09:18). If only Adora and Amma were not forced to be feminine, they would have certainly become feminists. Perchance, that inner conflict of seeking freedom or latching into feminine approval gave birth to the psychopath. The history of Amma's family was filled with women who hurt and oppress other women, and that could have been why Amma chose to terminate the life of girls; that is what made a new type of serial killer.

Jealousy on one side and women-women oppression on the other made Amma and Adora the monsters they became. The series did not only display the serial killer from a different angle, but it also showed deranged, oppressed women, and most importantly, women who diminished the roles of others of their kind. If one dares say, it is the epitome of the eternal fight between the feminist and the feminine. Only in *sharp Objects*, the feminine is the monster who extinguished the flame of freedom in women's hearts or stopped their hearts from working altogether. Through the lens of the feminist film theory, this work did not only uncover how women are expected to fill a certain feminine stereotype but also revealed the result of such horrible discrimination, even by and among women.

5. Conclusion

A female serial killer is certainly not a novel phenomenon, neither in reality nor in fiction. Violent, murderous men and women were studied long in time by criminologists and psycho-analysts. Criminal behaviours were studied based on their incentives, mutations and developments. The serial killer, at a certain stage in time, represented the best criminal body. S/he is one who takes the life of more than three people in a similar manner. At criminology's dawn, the male serial killer was the craze of research, but in time even female killers took the spotlight.

Typologically, most serial killers were men who targeted both genders but majorly chose women, committing femicide. It was not orthodox for women to serially kill, and even when they did, they have not explicitly planned on targeting women. Femicide, as the act of choosing to terminate the lives of women, was a male terrain; however, due to certain variables, women as well joined this male club. It seems, even women reached a certain level of instability, that they would violate the lives of other females. Literature and Cinema as real-life vehicles portrayed this new type of female serial killer, and *Sharp Objects* is the best example.

While women in Media and fiction used to fit the docile profile, time allowed the presence of more independent women. Nevertheless, in the realm of crime, women were mostly victims and fragile hunts. The coming of the 20th century allowed the emergence of the violent and even serial killer woman, whereby she as well was supposed to fill a stereotype of one of the determined clichés of the serial killer. In *Sharp Objects*, however, a new type is advanced. It is an oppressed female who resorts to serial murder, yet unusual to the world of women discrimination. The oppressor is

Authors Meriem Ayech Hamraoui[1], Ilhem Mortad-Serir [2]

somewhat of a new type. It is matriarchal oppression that decimates the new female, a matriarchal society that refuses independent, shrewd women like Adora would have been, or Amma and just like the dead little girls Ann and Natalie were. Alternatively, it is an oppression that gave birth to the female-female murder, when a female takes the life of her sister.

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