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Julia T. Scheibmeir
Scripps College

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**Film, Fashion and Fotografía: The Exoticism and Eroticism
of Female Victims in Juárez**

by

JULIA T. SCHEIBMEIR

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

PROFESSOR TINKER SALAS

PROFESSOR SANJUAN

PROFESSOR PEREZ DE MENDIOLA

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Film, Fashion and Fotografía: The Exoticism and Eroticism of Female Victims in Juárez is a study on the unprecedented wave of gender violence that has engulfed the city of Ciudad Juárez. Hundreds of young women have been tortured, violently murdered and disappeared since 1993 in an act called “femicide,” or violent misogynist acts against women.¹ The victims and their families are dishonored even after death as local and international mediums blame them for engaging in “risky behaviors” such as drug abuse and prostitution. Mexican tabloids have created a fantasy world revolving around sex and murder in the maquiladoras. U.S. media eroticizes the “hot tamale” Latina stereotype so commonly seen on-screen. Fantasies surrounding the exotic “Other” and violence against women serve to fetishize sex violence in Ciudad Juárez, and perpetuate negative stereotypes about border people and culture. This analysis looks at iconic representations of the abject female body within a border context, the role of the media in promoting and exploiting this tragic phenomenon, and the ways in which activists are mobilizing for justice and social change. The commercial film industry, fashion companies and certain freelance photographers have contributed to the fetishization of female murder and mutilation in Ciudad Juárez, yet some documentarists and performance activists have produced informative and inspirational work that demands immediate action from local residents, global allies and Mexican state officials.

Until recently, there was a paucity of scholarship regarding gender violence in Ciudad Juárez. The Mexican government ignored and covered up the stories for a number of years by silencing and bribing victims’ families. Middle-class, North American feminists were some of the first people exposed to the story as they opened their May/June 1998 issue of *Ms. Magazine*. In response to this horrifying report,

¹ Marcela Lagarde Y De Los Rios in Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas. (Durham (NC): Duke UP, 2010), xxiii.

academics and artists from around the world produced works in support of gender violence victims. A plethora of work now exists regarding the female victims of Juárez and the mobilization of activist groups, but this study specifically investigates the role of the female victim as both a degraded object and an iconic martyr, and the highly effective use of performance as a political tool. The books, articles, films and essays carefully selected for each of these four chapters have greatly inspired my particular study of female representation, feminicide and the media.

Chapter II of my thesis, entitled *Ciudad Juárez: An Environment Conducive to Violence*, offers a chronological history of the U.S.-Mexico border and analyzes the factors that have contributed to the current violence in Juárez. The historical “city of vice” narrative is crucial in assessing the motives for criminality, misogyny and territorial conflict in the border region of Ciudad Juárez. The purpose of this study is to make sense of how history has shaped the attitudes and behaviors toward women on the U.S.-Mexico border. With the aid of border historians and theorists such as Oscar J. Martínez, Ovid Demaris, Julia Tuñón Pablos, Paul Ganster and David E. Lorey, this chapter elucidates the reasons why the border strip between the Texas Gulf and the Pacific has long been perceived by U.S. citizens as a corrupt and lawless region. Demaris supports this stereotype in his sensationalist book, Poso del Mundo: Inside the Mexican-American Border from Tijuana to Matamoros, even describing Ciudad Juárez in the mid-20th century as “a seedy pleasure strip offering *gringo* tourists all the ‘exotic perversions’ that are illegal in Texas, while its own residents suffer from extreme poverty, starvation, and violence on account of male honor, pride and virility.”² Countering Demaris’ attack, native *juareense* Martínez defends his native land in Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez Since

² Ovid Demaris. Poso del Mundo: Inside the Mexican-American Border from Tijuana to Matamoros. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1970.

1848, stating that “although unseemly activities undeniably constitute a persistent feature of the border region, this state of affairs should not be viewed as unique to the area”- in fact, vice and corruption are found in many borders, frontiers, and ports throughout the world, especially in places where “boom” conditions have existed.³ In his preface, Martínez cautions that “those unfamiliar with the U.S.-Mexican border may conclude from reading Demaris’ Poso del Mundo that Mexican frontier towns are little more than lawless and immoral entertainment centers.”⁴

Demaris highlights every negative Mexican and border stereotype (claiming to have seen them firsthand) in his book. The authors of Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico take a similar stance on the themes that have culminated in the complex situation in Ciudad Juárez today: Machismo and sexism, migration, and the controlling of women and their sexual purity in order to maintain prestige and inherit property.⁵ Yet Demaris is unique in that he wrote Poso del Mundo in first person, as a *gringo* visiting the border for research purposes. Published in 1970, Poso del Mundo tells the story of Demaris interviewing Juárez residents about the recent prohibition era: “Dry *americanos* descended upon the bars in droves and the cash registers rang with joy from noon to noon. *Señoritas* danced and *mariachis* sang and cocks fought and bulls died and *gringos* guzzled.”⁶ His character observes quickie divorce tourism and the constant trafficking of drugs and prostitutes (called white slavery or *poquianchismo*). Demaris

³ Martínez. Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1975.

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Anne Rubenstein in Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico. (Duke University Press: Durham & London), 2006.

⁶ Ovid Demaris. Poso del Mundo: Inside the Mexican-American Border from Tijuana to Matamoros. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1970.

claims that while writing Poso del Mundo, Mexicans were greatly anticipating the arrival of American factories in the city, believing that the companies' presence would lift the Mexican economy out of debt crisis and would solve the overpopulation problem along the border. Former Juárez Mayor, Aureliano González Vargas, was one strong proponent of the industrialization of the city:

Every day we are finding more ways to combat the population problem. By next year we will have at least fifty American industries on this side of the border providing jobs for ten thousand of our people. This program, in a small way, will make up for the United States closing the door on the *bracero* in 1964, which left tens of thousands of farm workers stranded in border cities.⁷

Maquiladoras, or U.S.-owned processing plants, were first established in Ciudad Juárez in 1965 as part of the Border Industrialization Program (BIP). Those optimistic about the arrival of American business to Mexico's border cities claimed to believe that the border program would be good for both the U.S. and Mexican economies, allowing the U.S. to industrialize northern Mexico's economy by way of foreign investment and cheap labor. This important shift in policy radically changed the social dynamic in Ciudad Juárez. Leslie Salzinger states in "From High Heels to Swathed Bodies: Gendered Meanings Under Production in Mexico's Export-Processing Economy," that a striking feature of the early *maquiladora* factories is the overrepresentation of young females in the workforce. Oscar J. Martínez supports this concern in Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848: "one major weakness of the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) is the fact that 85 percent of the workers are women. Plant managers praise Mexican women for their alleged dexterity, adaptability, patience, cheerfulness, and obedience."⁸ Recently,

⁷ Ovid Demaris. Poso del Mundo: Inside the Mexican-American Border from Tijuana to Matamoros. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1970, 28.

⁸ Martínez. Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1975.

the social and gender inequality produced or sustained by the Mexican *maquiladora* industry has brought significant attention from scholars to question the industry's ethics.

Chapter II explores the many consequences resulting from the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993. According to Rachael Kamel and Anya Hoffman, "while the *maquiladoras* mean new jobs for desperate people, they have also brought substandard working and living conditions." They argue that female workers are preferred in the *maquiladoras*, because "hiring predominantly young, politically inexperienced women allows management to keep wages low, dominate employer-employee relations, and impose abominable working conditions."⁹ Kamel and Hoffman argue that the typical Mexican *maquila* worker is from a poor, rural area and moves to the border in search of employment. "Cheap, docile, and dextrous," she begins working as early as thirteen, supports her family, earns seventy-five cents an hour, and works forty-eight hours a week.¹⁰

In Genders and Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories, Leslie Salzinger supports Kamel and Hoffman's claim about the typical *maquila* worker, but she explores in depth the implications of the "profoundly objectifying" global factories in Ciudad Juárez. Author of many academic works on sexual harassment in Mexican *maquiladoras*, Salzinger worked in a factory, owned by the transnational corporation Panoptimex, in order to get a firsthand perspective for her research. In the workplace, Salzinger observes not individual women workers, but "reproductions of a global fantasy," the "objects of managers' multiple desires" and representatives of "transnational

⁹ Rachael Kamel, and Anya Hoffman. The Maquiladora Reader: Cross-border Organizing since NAFTA. (Philadelphia, PA: American Friends Service Committee, 1999), 62.

¹⁰ *ibid*

capital's dream of productive femininity.”¹¹ Like Salzinger, Julia Tuñón Pablos, author of Women in Mexico, claims that in the violent and patriarchal society of Ciudad Juárez, poor, working women are reduced to sexual objects and made subhuman by the fetishization of their existence and their actions.¹² These authors' analyses of gender's centrality in global production explain the societal shift taking place in Mexico in the 1960s and 1970s. Recognizing the change in gender roles and increased female independence resulting from globalization is crucial to understanding the first documented cases of femicide in Ciudad Juárez in the 1990s.

Chapter III, *The Fetishization of Female Victims in Media Portrayals of Mexico*, examines the societal impact of Latin@ stereotypes and representations of femicide victims and *maquiladora* workers in popular culture. My focus is limited to the portrayal of Mexican characters in film, fashion and photography. The authors I reference are primarily contemporary scholars on representation of the abject female body. Alicia Schmidt Camacho of Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas claims that “The cultural production of this subaltern group has entailed the sexualization of poor Mexican women's bodies as a means to sell the bleak and fragile partnership between the [U.S. and Mexico].”¹³ Schmidt Camacho analyzes the sexualization of Mexican border women in the political sphere:

The informal economies of human smuggling, drug trafficking, and pornography service expand the formal economies in Mexican woman's labor in the United States. Rape at the border sets a price on women's labor in the United States, rendering migrant women

¹¹ Salzinger. Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2003.

¹² Laura Sjoberg and Caron E Genry. Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics. (London: Zed Books), 2007.

¹³ Alicia Schmidt Camacho in Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas. (Durham (NC: Duke UP, 2010), xix.

available as a flexible source of service. Informal- even friendly- transactions over the domestic tasks that other women and men cannot do for themselves are inextricably tied to the rapists in the desert.¹⁴

Female bodies in the *maquiladoras* perform monotonous routines in order to contribute to the neoliberal world order. Thus the *maquila* worker is an imperative, yet disposable, cog in the wheel of industrialization. With this theory, Schmidt Camacho claims that individuals in the media and political sectors capitalize on eroticism in gender violence and the dispossession of Mexican female bodies. Certain film producers, fashion designers and photographers are all guilty of exploiting a social fantasy in which the female migrant worker, portrayed either as naïve, attractive, and readily appropriated for work, or as a wild, promiscuous “maquiloca,” is sexually abused. This disturbing image, while sexually arousing for some men, serves as a warning to young females to not transgress traditional gender norms.

Popular culture producers who turn tragic stories of human suffering into sensational accounts undermine the terrible reality of violence and misogyny in Ciudad Juárez. Sex and violence always sell, but melodramatic headlines only worsen *maquila* womens’ reputations and do nothing to resolve the issues plaguing the U.S.-Mexican border region. Instead, they send out a very public signal that Juárez is fertile ground for criminal activity.¹⁵ Exaggerated representations of border communities in the media only contribute to the long-standing cynicism regarding the notion that these communities constitute nothing more than poor, inconsequential towns appendaged economically to

¹⁴ Alicia Schmidt Camacho in Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas. (Durham (NC): Duke UP, 2010), 275.

¹⁵ Erin Frey. Femicide in Juárez, Mexico: The hidden transcript that no one wants to read. (New Haven: Yale University), 2008.

the American side.¹⁶ Oscar J. Martínez states that perjorative characterizations regarding Ciudad Juárez have elicited strong rebuttals from *juarenses* citizens and activists who argue that in most cases these media producers are “ignorant and do not even know the city.”¹⁷

Media producers who do not adequately know their subject material (for example 98% of Hispanic-themed films in the U.S. are written by non-Latinos) have, on occasion, perpetuated negative stereotypes and publicly misrepresented Mexicans and other Hispanics.¹⁸ In looking at film and the ways in which Mexican women have been portrayed in recent decades, I analyze the larger ideological questions embedded in the actresses’ representations of a gendered Mexican identity. Film directors choose how to characterize the U.S.-Mexican border and its residents, and the images they produce largely impact international public opinion on the situation in Juárez. Both MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands by Rosa Linda Fregoso and Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film by Sergio De la Mora and have been extremely helpful in articulating the emotions I feel when watching sexualized representations of *maquila* women and femicide victims. *The Virgin of Juárez*, *Bordertown*, *16 en la lista* and even the documentary *Maquila: A Tale of Two Mexicos* have all been criticized by scholars for depicting the border as a place of damnation and its inhabitants as gamblers, coyotes, drug dealers, prostitutes or murderers of women.¹⁹

¹⁶ Martínez. Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1975.

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ Boze Hadleigh. Mexico’s Most Wanted: The Top 10 Book of Chicano Culture, Latin Lovers, and Hispanic Pride. (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc.), 2007.

¹⁹ Rosa Linda Fregoso. MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003.

De la Mora argues that cinema, like other expressions of popular culture, is a crucial site where social and political discussions about the Mexican nation's past, present, and future take place. He claims that the enduring popularity of the prostitution melodrama and the ubiquity of the brothel-cabaret in Mexican culture have as much to do with Mexico's violent history of colonialism as they do with the nation's deep sense of religiosity and spirituality.²⁰ The implications of this are that women in Mexican film are often portrayed either as the pure, virginal, and suffering "good women" who are denied sexual agency, or as "bad women" who embrace sexual pleasure and/or engage in work linked to sexual commerce.²¹ These contrary representations of women onscreen affect societal expectations of feminine sexuality and normalize the degradation and brutalization of "impure" Mexican women.

In addition to films which serve to perpetuate negative Latin stereotypes, I analyze documentaries such as *Senorita Extraviada* by Lourdes Portillo and *Performing the Border* by Ursula Biemann. Unlike the filmmakers interested in selling sex and violence for financial gain, these filmmakers bring awareness to the feminicides in Juárez without further degrading the women involved. Rosa Linda Fregoso allows that these films give a more nuanced understanding of the regulation of women's bodies under economic processes of globalization by utilizing "nonrealist techniques" to disturb the viewer's relation to reality, thus forcing the viewer to contemplate the exploitation of laboring bodies within the *maquiladora* and sex industries.²² These latter examples, and

²⁰ Sergio De la Mora. Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2006.

²¹ *ibid*

²² Fregoso. MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003.

particularly *Senorita Extraviada*, are praised in several of the texts that I read for this chapter. Portillo and Biemann give voice to the families whose daughters did not deserve their fate. The films explore questions about the disposability of young women and the cheapening of life in a city where poverty and globalized capital have created an environment of lawlessness and violence. These documentaries bring printed texts to life and give visual representation to victims' families and advocates.

Another form of cultural production that receives attention in this chapter is the fashion industry. Considering how the body performs sexuality and difference through clothing and makeup, apparel and appearance are important themes in this portion of the study. I analyze scholarship regarding the *maquila* uniform, physical descriptions and images of *juarense* prostitutes, and representations of gender violence victims in the world of *haute couture* fashion. In the summer of 2010, the MAC makeup company released a fashion line inspired by the depoliticized aesthetic of the *maquila* culture in Ciudad Juárez. Made to appear as ghosts and sleepwalkers, the models displayed \$4,000 dresses and \$20 nail polish inspired by the "ethereal" and "romantic" lifestyles of the *maquiladora* workers of Juárez. The positive hype received at New York Fashion Week did not last long, and soon the company was faced with heated reactions from thousands of people on social networks and beauty blogs.

Gender and sexuality are contained not only in the coded images of film and fashion, but in photography as well. Gruesome, graphic photography has been produced on violence and poverty in Ciudad Juárez. While it is necessary for the public to see what is happening along the U.S.-Mexican border, some of the images serve to exploit rather than to educate. One such example is found within Bordertown, a book with text, drawings and photographs by *estadounidenses* Barry Gifford and David Perry. Focusing

on themes such as kidnapping, prostitution, drug dealing, robbery, rape and murder, Bordertown is a multi-media collage documenting dispossessed Mexicans who must either hustle on the streets or cross the border to escape being beaten down by poverty, violence, and exploitation. A second example of a photography book with disturbing images is Charles Bowden's Juárez: the laboratory of our future. The photographs include images of burning rubble, violent protests, and horrifically maimed, lifeless bodies and charred faces. Less erotic and exploitative than Bordertown, Juárez: the laboratory of our future includes unnecessarily graphic photographs which repel the viewer and dishonor the dead.

My final chapter, *Mobilizing Border Activism: An Analysis of Social Change in Juárez*, delves into the creative sphere of performance art in public spaces as a political tool. My goal in this chapter is to discern the cultural specificity of rights by looking at how human rights discourse is incorporated into symbolic actions. I present iconographic images, such as pink and black crosses and La Santa Muerte shrines, as religious symbols that resignify the city into a hauntingly artistic memorial for the dead. The question of representation resurfaces as I explore how victims are remembered, honored, and defended by their mothers, sisters and supporters, who have emerged as protagonists in grassroots movements. The primary texts I reference for this chapter are Kathleen Staudt's Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez, Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán's Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera and various texts by Rosa Linda Fregoso. Global communication and the visual arts are highly effective tools currently used to educate and mobilize emergent and shifting collectivities in a network of competing alliances.

Ciudad Juárez is not an inherently evil place, and the characters in its melodrama are not easily sorted into clean categories. There is a mysterious sexual appeal to the rough and lawless region of northern Mexico, an image which is stereotyped and capitalized on in transnational media productions. Young, female *maquila* workers are portrayed simultaneously as a degraded erotic object and as a sexy symbol of resistance against an oppressive, patriarchal culture. Determined activists, performers and media producers have succeeded in placing the feminicides in Juárez in the international limelight for almost two decades. Despite the dangers of the Drug War and widespread violence, numerous organizations continue to combat public portrayals of *juarense* women as loose and culpable. It is with the utmost respect for these activists and the victims of femicide that I tell their story and condemn misogyny, impunity and sexual exploitation in the media.

Ciudad Juárez: An Environment Conducive to Violence

Prior to acquiring an infamous reputation as a lawless transit zone for immigrants, traffickers and serial murders, the Mexican border town of Ciudad Juárez, or Paso del Norte as it was formerly known, was a prosperous hub for the region's mining, agriculture and railroad industries. *Juarense* native and author of Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez Since 1848, Oscar J. Martínez asserts that modern transportation systems such as the railroad transformed the relationship between Paso del Norte, renamed Ciudad Juárez in 1888 in honor of national hero Benito Juárez, and El Paso, Texas.²³ Increased trade between Mexico and the United States triggered the emigration of Mexican populations to the northern frontier, and the fusion of North and Central American influences created a unique hybridization of language, art, customs and politics on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. The U.S. controlled the border economy, and thus *Gringo* soldiers and tourists were granted easy access into border cities such as Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez, where they frequented the growing number of local bars and brothels. The surge in gambling, cockfights, boxing, shopping, dancing and prostitution made for a colorful turn of the century along Mexico's northern border. Politicians' efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to "clean up" Ciudad Juárez, the infamous "Queen of the Bordertowns," and to emerge from debt crisis resulted in the industrialization of the city. The implantation of *maquiladora* factories and out-of-control urban growth led to a social breakdown and environmental degradation.²⁴ Ciudad Juárez is now sadly fraught with violence, corruption and misogyny.

²³ Oscar J. Martínez. Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1975.

²⁴ Paul Ganster, and David E. Lorey. The U.S.-Mexican Border into the Twenty-First Century. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 2007.

The reputation as one of the most violent cities in the world did not occur overnight. A series of historical events in the 20th and 21st centuries has led to a progressively lawless, misogynistic society with a high incidence of crime and violence against women. The state of Chihuahua suffered greatly in the early 1900s from agricultural and economic devastation caused by the Revolution and commercial competition with El Paso, Texas. With such bleak prospects, state politicians looked to Ciudad Juárez to help fill the coffers. As a border city, it was the final stop on the Mexican Central Railroad, making it a transit zone for a constant stream of people and contraband. Border towns began catering to North American tourists in search of women, alcohol and an exotic atmosphere. The explosion of adult recreations in Juarez coincided with American reformers' efforts to curtail alcohol consumption and other vices during the Prohibition Era, providing Ciudad Juárez with a market for alcohol, sex and gambling.²⁵ U.S. Consul John W. Dye found Juárez in 1921 to be the most "immoral, degenerate, and utterly wicked place" he had "ever seen or heard of" in his travels. Dye described the city as a "Mecca for criminals and degenerates from both sides of the border," where "murder and robbery are everyday occurrences and gambling, dope selling and using, drinking to excess and sexual vices are continuous."²⁶ The moral scourge of *norteamericanos* aside, the deeper problem lay in the fact that the more economic benefits the city reaped from tourist dollars (effectively "selling out" to the white man), the more dependent it grew on its northern neighbor.

²⁵ Jefferson R. Cowie. Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-year Quest for Cheap Labor. (New York: The New Press), 2001, 105.

²⁶ Martínez. Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1975.

Attempts to regulate liquor smuggling and marijuana trafficking on both sides of the border in the early 1920s boosted a black market economy, making the narcotic trade (alcohol, opium, marijuana, heroin and cocaine) a profitable business for organized crime operations.²⁷ The first big drug lord in the area was Sam Hing, who peddled opium to Mexican traffickers and U.S. tourists out of a fake business locale. Hing's narcotic operation was succeeded in the mid-1920s when eleven Chinese immigrants dedicated to the sale of narcotics were murdered in Juárez.²⁸ Their deaths were ordered by rival drug lordess, Ignacia Jasso, nicknamed "La Nacha" and her husband, Pablo González, or "El Pablote," a couple who assumed leadership roles in the first drug cartel in Juárez. The first to consolidate the sale of marijuana, heroin and cocaine, La Nacha's cartel demanded total respect for their "territory," not letting anyone else sell drugs within their downtown area of control.²⁹

In 1928, organized crime became linked to local and state politics as drug lords, such as the Quevedo brothers, held political positions and were protected by state officials. President Ortiz Rubio, concerned by increasing gang activity and political influence stated the following in a telegram to Governor Almada in July of 1930:

²⁷ Mottier. "Drug Gangs and Politics in Ciudad Juárez: 1928-1936." *Mexican Studies*: Vol. 25, No.1. *University of California Press*. (2009.) 9 February 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/10.1525/msem.2009.25.1.19.pdf?acceptTC=true>>.

²⁸ Rafael Nuñez. "A Not-So-Secret History of Vice in Juárez." *Newspaper Tree*. (2007.) 9 February 2012. <<http://newspapertree.com/features/850-a-not-so-secret-history-of-vice-in-juarez>>.

²⁹ *ibid*

. . . the municipal administration of Ciudad Juárez is in the hands of persons who do little honor to their positions [by virtue of being persons of] bad antecedents, vice-ridden and underhanded— they traffic in drugs.³⁰

Thus, in the midst of continual political instability and economic depression, criminal and political leaders monopolized the wealth in Ciudad Juárez through funds generated by North American gamblers, dealers and drug addicts. By the end of the 1930s, the Quevedos were ousted from power, but they had left behind a complex drug trafficking operation. In 1942, Antonio J. Bermúdez, the mayor of Ciudad Juárez, launched a campaign to abolish rampant prostitution and reduce the flow of marijuana; however, after his tenure, brothels, bars and casinos flourished as never before.³¹

Narco trafficking in the 1950s was dispersed among many small, independent bands of drug dealers, all competing with one another, but on a relatively small scale. As the demand for narcotics increased across the border, so, naturally did the supply. Upstanding government officials were participating in the lucrative drug industry as well. By 1976, the Chihuahua State Attorney General said that he had statements from inmates and officials implicating the mayor of Juárez, Raúl Lezama Gil, and his son as participants in the binational drug industry. They were also accused of selling hard liquor and prostitutes to prison guards and inmates.³² Rafael Aguilar Guajardo, federal police commander of the Mexican National Security and Investigation Center, founded the Juárez Cartel.³³ These early cartel leaders, many of whom held power in other arenas,

³⁰ Mottier. "Drug Gangs and Politics in Ciudad Juárez: 1928-1936." *Mexican Studies*: Vol. 25, No.1. *University of California Press*. (2009.) 9 February 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/10.1525/msem.2009.25.1.19.pdf?acceptTC=true>>.

³¹ Martínez. *Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1975.

³² Nuñez. "A Not-So-Secret History of Vice in Juárez." *Newspaper Tree*. (2007.) 9 February 2012. <<http://newspapertree.com/features/850-a-not-so-secret-history-of-vice-in-juarez>>.

³³ *ibid*

practiced explicit collusion by controlling a 250-mile stretch of the U.S.-Mexico border. In the early 1980s, Mexican drug runners smuggled a staggering sixty tons of Colombian cocaine per year into the United States.³⁴

Another profitable venture in Ciudad Juárez was the establishment of *maquiladora* factories in the 1960s. The word *maquila* has become nearly synonymous with “exploitation”- where women, like objects, are assigned value (based on perceived attractiveness, or “*buena presentación*,” and feminine characteristics such as dexterity and docility). The number one source of employment for working-class women in Mexico, the *maquila* industry is invested with fixed meanings to produce a cheap and easily managed labor force.³⁵ As in the early days of the city’s debt crisis, providing cheap *maquila* labor for U.S. companies is seen by some Mexicans as “selling out” to the white man. The difference in these examples is that the previous instance was justified, because male politicians and businessmen were saving the State of Chihuahua from financial ruin, whereas now, female workers are to blame for modernization and the degradation of the city.

U.S. companies play into the Mexican stereotype of women’s inferiority and serviceability, based on the contention that female gender characteristics are devalued and therefore permissibly subject to low salaries. According to a top-level management consultant, “factory girls genuinely enjoy themselves. They’re away from their families. They have spending money. Of course it’s a regulated experience too- with dormitories to

³⁴ George W. Grayson. Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State? (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers), 2010, 74.

³⁵ Pablo Vila. Ethnography at the Border. Cultural Studies of the Americas, Volume 13. (Minneapolis: London), 2003.

live in- so it's a healthful experience.”³⁶ Economically independent young women are a threat to patriarchal society, because they defy traditional gender roles. No longer needing to be supported by a male figure, *maquila* women pay a price for autonomy in a culture that values community, tradition and female chastity until marriage. Contrary to the management consultant who claims that “factory girls genuinely enjoy themselves,” the reality is that thousands of females wake up at four A.M. six days a week, leave their shantytown neighborhoods, cram into aging buses and eventually reach the vast industrial parks blanketing Mexico's northern border.³⁷ Because factory work is highly repetitive and requires little training, workers are easily replaceable commodities and are thus discouraged from organizing for better pay. There is a tremendous turnover rate in these factories, reaching up to 80 percent in some *maquiladoras*, due in part to low wages, deplorable working conditions, and the stress and health threats common to this type of labor.³⁸ The constant chaos caused by this instability has given greater anonymity to impoverished migrant females residing in Juárez. Perceived as disposable objects in the *maquilas* and on the streets, young, anonymous women are vulnerable targets to violence.

Companies which actively promote sexual objectification as a means of insuring employee loyalty often encourage femininity and displays of sexuality in the workplace. Beauty contests within the *maquiladoras* are built on media stereotypes regarding “sexy” and “promiscuous” female employees. By sponsoring cosmetics classes for workers and beauty and swimsuit competitions with names such as “guess whose legs these are,” and

³⁶ David M. Newman. “Social Structure, Institutions, and Everyday Life” from *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life*. Pine Forge Press, 2008, 224.

³⁷ Alejandro Lugo. *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. (Austin: University of Texas), 2008.

³⁸ Joshua M. Kagan. “Worker's Rights in the Mexican Maquiladora Sector: Collective Bargaining, Women's Rights, and General Human Rights: Law, Norms, and Practice.” *Journal of Transnational Law & Policy*. (1991.) Web. 15 November 2011.

distributing prizes such as a free night for two in a fancy hotel, *maquiladora* corporations promote cultural hostility and disrespect toward female workers.³⁹ These contests have encouraged a pageant-like atmosphere within particular factories and this sexualization of factory life allies workers with management and alienates them from one another.⁴⁰ The result of this sexually charged atmosphere, combined with stories of indiscriminate sex on the job, epidemics of venereal disease, and even fetuses found in factory restrooms, is a reputation that utterly degrades working women, yet creates a fantasy world for those in power.⁴¹

Maquila women have been slandered in U.S. and Mexican tabloids for failing to live up to the Mexican female ideal: simultaneously pure and sexually deviant. This contrasting ideal is represented by the iconic female figures La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche. Their symbolic traits denote co-eternal binary opposition: La Virgen de Guadalupe serves as the unselfish, long-suffering wife and loving mother, while La Malinche monopolizes sexuality and betrayal.⁴² The ultimate example of “selling out to the white man,” La Malinche, also known as *La Vendida* (the sell-out) and *La Chingada* (the one penetrated/raped/screwed), embodies all that *maquila* workers are accused of in Mexican society: sexuality, treachery, victimization, betrayal.⁴³ La Virgen is idolized and

³⁹ Newman. “Social Structure, Institutions, and Everyday Life” from Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life. Pine Forge Press, 2008, 234.

⁴⁰ Debbie Nathan. “Death Comes to the *Maquilas*: A Border Story.” *The Nation*. (13 January 1997). 20 November 2011.

⁴¹ Newman. “Social Structure, Institutions, and Everyday Life” from Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life. Pine Forge Press, 2008, 227.

⁴² Julia Tuñón Pablos. Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1999.

⁴³ Rita Cano Alcalá. “From Chingada to Chingona: La Malinche Redefined Or, A Long Line of Hermanas.” *Aztlan* 26:2, 2001.

La Malinche is demonized, yet both are glamorous in their beauty and power over men. Within the *maquilas*, this dichotomy comes into play as women are simultaneously expected to maintain and provide for the home, under tremendously challenging circumstances. Managers recruit young, feminine and virginal girls to work in their factory plants, yet once employed, the girls are perceived as Malinche traitors and whores as their bodies are displayed, inspected, used and disposed.

The societal reverence and loathing of historical (or mythical) female icons is arguably a hindrance to the progress of women's rights in contemporary Mexican society. Expected to behave like angels yet pressured to yield to male desire, women are violently controlled and silenced as they attempt to assert their independence and embrace their sexuality. Historically in rural Mexico, women have been aggressively shielded by their kin from "unwanted" male advances. Chastity and female modesty were highly valued because they greatly affected familial prestige and property ownership. A concentration on sexual purity has led to a *machista*, misogynistic sentiment toward women who do not live up an impossible ideal: the constructed, mythical "eternal woman," thus alienating women from their realities, options and values.⁴⁴ Mexico as a nation has traditionally valued La Virgen's traits of female purity, piety and domestic loyalty, yet Ciudad Juárez has more use for Malinche types: pretty young women who like to have fun, provocatively show off their bodies and willingly sell their souls to the white man. Juárez's long-standing reputation as the "sin city" of Mexico has permitted double standards and violent, lawless behavior.

⁴⁴ Tuñón Pablos. Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 1999.

Throughout the 20th century tension was palpable along the border, and particularly in Ciudad Juárez, as more and more women moved in to the city to take *maquila* jobs. But it was not until 1993, a year after the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), that a wave of horrific violence against women surged. Bodies began to surface in the desert and in garbage cans near *maquila* factories, some with burns, carvings on their backs, signs of sexual violation and other forms of mutilation, humiliation and torture. Hundreds of women, *trabajadoras de la maquila* and otherwise, have suffered this horrific fate in Juárez. This reality has instilled fear in young women as they walk alone on the streets, are prohibited from entering work as punishment for arriving late, and for missing the bus back home due to overcrowding. This phenomenon has been termed “femicide” (the killing of women) or “feminicide” (the exploitation and extermination of female bodies), making evident the reality that, in Ciudad Juárez, violence against women has been naturalized as a method of social control to prevent the corruption of traditional Mexican social values.⁴⁵

Attributing the murders of women to processes of globalization has created the enduring myth of “*maquiladora* killings,” claiming that killers are allegedly targeting female *maquiladora* workers. Independent journalists and academics have identified that a small percentage of victims were actually *maquila* workers (Benitez et al.: of murders between 1993 and 1999 only 15 *maquiladora* workers were murdered out of 137 victims).⁴⁶ This cliché narrative continues to this day because it conveniently groups all victims into one “promiscuous” and culpable category, and allows for catchy newspaper

⁴⁵ Fregoso, Rosa Linda., and Cynthia L. Bejarano. Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas. (Durham: Duke UP), 2010, 142.

⁴⁶ Fregoso. MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 8.

headlines such as “*Maquilas que matan*” and “*Masacre contra trabajadoras de la maquila en Cd. Juárez.*” While theories and critical stereotypes of globalization can be helpful in examining structural transformations in export-processing zones along the U.S.-Mexico border that have taken place in recent decades, these theories do not provide viable alternatives to NAFTA and globalization, nor do they suggest a plan of action to make Ciudad Juárez a safer place for working-class women.

Many publications claim that the environment along the border is corrupted by capitalist greed and constituted by unequal gender rights in which women are treated as second-class human beings. This theory is founded upon a general mistrust toward government and corporate interests and the convenient placing of blame on the nation’s most powerful institutions. Due to this lack of trust in the system, far fewer crimes are reported than actually take place in Ciudad Juárez (only 10% are reported).⁴⁷ Many women fear becoming the next victim reported in the papers and only one of one hundred victims sees the conclusion of the judicial process with a sentence assigned to the perpetrator.⁴⁸ Mexican government officials, police and detective forces have been publicly denounced for impunity and pathetic efforts to put an end to the brutal killing of poor, young Mexican women. According to the Mexican National Commission for Human Rights, of the approximately 751 women killed between 1993 and 2010 (numbers vary greatly depending on the perspective of the published report), 99% of crimes reported to justice authorities in Mexico have gone unpunished.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Molly Molloy. “Juárez murders: Impunity regardless of gender.” *Grassroots Press*. (12 May 2010.) 2 March 2012. <www.grass-roots-press.com/2010/05/12/3615/>.

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ *ibid*

In addition to international criticism for impunity, Mexican authorities have also been under fire in recent years for their disparaging remarks regarding female victims and their personal choices (being out at night, drinking, dancing and dressing promiscuously) that may have increased their risk by attracting the wrong crowd. State officials assert that “Many of the murdered women worked in factories during the week and as prostitutes during the weekend in order to make more money,” suggesting a direct link between *maquila* workers and prostitution. State criminologist Óscar Máñez Grijalva offered his thoughts on changing morals as a result of modernization:

As a result of the influence of the United States, women are joining the workforce at an earlier age and therefore discovering independence. This means young women could become more promiscuous. Some of these independent women have maintained sexual relations with more than one person. This behavior leads to danger.⁵⁰

These statements allude to “*la doble vida*,” or the engagement of respectable work by day and sex work by night- as though non-traditional sexual behavior justified their killings. By shifting the blame to the victims, police have tried to justify their inability to solve the majority of the murders. Such expressions of nonnormative sexuality have been so relentless that the mother of murder victim Adriana Torres Mirquez responded indignantly: "Don't they have anything else to invent? They have said the same in every case: that it's the way women dressed or their alleged double life."⁵¹ Feeble attempts to deflect the blame, combined with accusatory statements, only reinforce negative stereotypes and paternalistic attitudes regarding the working woman's role in society and make the Mexican police force contemptible in the eyes of human rights activists and scholars.

⁵⁰ Fregoso. MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 4.

⁵¹ *ibid*

Some critics, such as Schmidt Camacho in Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas, go as far as to claim that “gender crimes in fact sustain a binational project of governance and growth,”⁵² in which case the feminicides occurring in Ciudad Juárez for nearly two decades are actually funded and carried out by the government. Fregoso argues that “the state is in many ways directly implicated in the culture of femicide in the region” and she calls the phenomenon “the consolidation of a new form of state-sanctioned terrorism.”⁵³ The authors of Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas emphasize the element of impunity and claim that “femicide is a state law” because “the state is incapable of guaranteeing respect for women’s lives” and “it is incapable of prosecuting and administering justice, and preventing and eradicating the violence that causes it.”⁵⁴ The theory of state-sanctioned terrorism is supported by interviews with members of the working class who feel targeted by the police. Mexico’s ruling political parties (the PRI, the PRD and the PAN) have been discredited for poorly representing underprivileged populations, as well as for rampant corruption and impunity. For these reasons, among others, many Mexicans have become completely disenfranchised with the entire political system and the government’s ability to protect the innocent and persecute the guilty.

In analyzing the global, neoliberal economy and its local manifestations at the border, we can see how gender power and performance theories are threaded and manipulated in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Demonizing *juarense* men for *machista* attitudes

⁵² Susana Torres in Fregoso and Bejarano’s Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas. (Durham: Duke University Press), 2010. 286.

⁵³ Fregoso. *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*. (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 17.

⁵⁴ Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos in Fregoso and Bejarano’s Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas. (Durham: Duke University Press), 2010, xxiii.

and blaming women for immoral sexual practices does nothing to solve the sexual harassment and violence afflicting women residing in the city. Many historical and societal factors have influenced the proliferation of violence in Juárez, including, but not limited to, the increase in drug trafficking organizations, alcohol smuggling and gambling enterprises, and sexist global hiring practices. The situation in Ciudad Juárez today reflects nothing of the glittering downtown of the casino era, or the jazz era, when the border was a thriving, lively tourist attraction. Now roving bands of *descuenteros* (small groups composed of two to four individuals, who sucker-punch and mug their victims on the street) and *polviteros* (men who lace their victims' drinks with sedatives) make the prospect of walking late at night in the more seedy areas of downtown Juárez very dangerous.⁵⁵ While Fregoso argues that the rape, mutilation and massacre of working-class Mexican women is a form of state-sanctioned terrorism by an undemocratic patriarchal state in its crusade against poor and racialized citizens,⁵⁶ I believe that the hypersexualized culture of the border city and the degrading treatment of *maquila* workers intensifies female vulnerability in a place where low-status women have not been adequately protected. The increasingly illicit practices of 20th century Juárez, encouraged by the neighboring United States, eventually led to a society which knew no bounds and transgressed various social norms. The citizens were not expected to abide by state laws, and thus they did not. From this historical account we can clearly see the bloody toll that corruption, lust and infamy have taken on the "Queen of the Bordertowns."

⁵⁵ Nuñez. "A Not-So-Secret History of Vice in Juárez." *Newspaper Tree*. (2007.) 9 February 2012. <<http://newspapertree.com/features/850-a-not-so-secret-history-of-vice-in-juarez>>.

⁵⁶ Fregoso. *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 20.

The Fetishization of Female Victims in Media Portrayals of Mexico

Since the end of the Mexican Revolution, Mexican films have provided visual models of manhood and womanhood and served as a vehicle for the circulation of Mexican national identity narratives. Cinema, like other expressions of popular culture, is a crucial site where social and political discussions about the nation's past, present and future take place. Throughout recent history, cinematic border representations, produced both in Mexico and the U.S., reflect an ongoing process of conflict, exchange, adaptation, and reinvention propelled by class, the character of economic exchange, gender and immigration.⁵⁷ The borderlands function as a kind of purgatory and no-man's land from which border women are often presented as exotic and hypersexual, while *fronterizos* are depicted as testosterone-laden *pelados*, *nacos*, *cheros* and bandits. In the traditional gendered conventions of mass media, the female protagonist/antagonist is assigned the passive role as object of the gaze, and thus her skin color, dress, and speech convey codes from which we determine her position in society. In this chapter I analyze how popular art forms such as film, fashion and photography shape our understanding of gender and sexuality in Mexico and what role they play in perpetuating negative stereotypes and effectively promoting awareness to a serious social problem. Without denying poverty,

⁵⁷ Paul Ganster and David E. Lorey. The U.S.-Mexican Border into the Twenty-First Century. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 2007, 142.

corruption, drugs, decay, pollution, or unequal distribution of wealth, this study endeavours to demonstrate that negative characterizations of the border region obscure more than they reveal. Recognizing that there is some basis for the images that predominate in public discourse about the border, and Ciudad Juárez in particular, I explore the role of art and visual media in the fetishization of the femicide phenomenon.

Since the beginnings of cinema, Hollywood has depicted the U.S.-Mexico border as a lawless land, rich with temptation, vice and exoticism. Early Hollywood film producers portrayed the border as a vital repository of threatening ideas- drug trafficking and abuse, illegal immigration, globalization, sexual promiscuity- created a trope of racialized sexuality and Mexicana immorality which continues to this day. Indigenous Mexican women, or *muchachas corrientes y callejeras*, were depicted in brothels and bars, indulging in illicit sexual relations. These popular images devalorized female sexuality and blamed women for spreading venereal disease and causing racial degeneration on the U.S.-Mexico border.⁵⁸ Hollywood and major independent filmmakers are not alone in the fascination and fixation on the border region, but the U.S. film industry is the most pervasive image machine of the border region for a global audience.⁵⁹ Due to the prevalence and repetition of negative images depicting a corrupt, hypersexual and impoverished border region in cinematic space, U.S. citizens tend to perceive the area in terms of undocumented migration, drug trafficking, prostitution and decaying cities.

⁵⁸ Fregoso. MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 147.

⁵⁹ Camilla Fojas. Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2008.

Ganster and Lorey interviewed a number of U.S. citizens who feel they have lost control of “their” border. They quote one *gringo* observer’s perceptions of the southern frontier:

The border is drowning in the filth of a putrescent Rio Grande aglow with toxic wastes; it is terminally ill with the rampant pox of poverty known as *colonias*; it is a land of social injustice where evil foreign maquiladoras unmercifully exploit downtrodden workers for their cheap labor.⁶⁰

During the debate leading up to signing of NAFTA in 1992, U.S. presidential candidate Ross Perot publicly denounced the border region as “one large slum.”⁶¹ More recently, the border has come to be closely identified with industrialization, and *maquila* production plants have taken their place alongside prostitution, drugs and gambling in the litany of abuses allegedly perpetrated upon border residents.

Juárez: The Laboratory of our Future (1998) by Charles Bowden, offers a visual example of colonialist fantasies regarding the alleged hyperfeminine forms of sexuality introduced into “traditional” societies like Mexico by global forces. Bowden adopts the narrative of globalism to explain the realities of Mexico in colonialist terms, claiming:

Killing girls has in effect become what men of Juárez do with the frustrations of living in a town with unemployment and abundant poverty. It is the local language of rage, a blood price exacted for what Juárez is: the world’s largest border community, with 300 maquila plants, and the highest concentration of maquila workers in the country.⁶²

For Bowden, femicide represents the “blood price” the state of Chihuahua pays for allowing the United States to colonize northern Mexico and control its economy. He attributes violence in Juárez to male bitterness toward women with employment in the

⁶⁰ Ganster and Lorey. The U.S.-Mexican Border into the Twenty-First Century. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 2007, 5.

⁶¹ Ganster and Lorey. The U.S.-Mexican Border into the Twenty-First Century. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 2007, 7.

⁶² Fregoso. MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 14.

maquilas, toward the Mexican government for allowing this to happen, and toward the United States for exploiting border lands and working class people, rendering them powerless and impoverished. Juárez: The Laboratory of our Future is a photography book depicting various explicit images, with one being the body of a kidnapped, raped, and murdered sixteen-year-old girl found in a park. The face of horror belonging to this young border woman is aestheticized and transformed into a fetish described by Fregoso as “a horror made beautiful and primitivism exoticized.”⁶³ In his article “I Wanna Dance With the Strawberry Girl,” Bowden reiterates the myth of the *maquiladora* killings and expresses his forbidden desire for the young “*fresa*” (*maquila* girl) who animates his voyeuristic gaze. He also objectifies the “whore” who serves as muse for his literary fantasies. While Bowden is a seasoned and critically acclaimed writer and critic of pervasive violence and sexual abuse in Juárez, Fregoso argues that Bowden’s perverse and disturbing masculine gaze exploits the Mexican female body in a libidinal manner and constructs border women as abject.

The sexual ideology of the virtues of proper womanhood has deep historical roots. In Mexico, La Virgen de Guadalupe represents an image of perfection, self-sacrifice, and purity that no woman can attain. The virginal bearer of a holy child, the nurturing Virgen is portrayed as the ultimate mother and wife. Mexican women not revered for their tenderness and domesticity (working women, Chicanas and prostitutes) are represented by another iconic female archetype, La Malinche. The quintessential sinner and traitor to her race, La Chingada provides society with an image that effectively “justifies feminine

⁶³ Fregoso. MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 14.

submission and male domination.”⁶⁴ Young working women in Juárez are thus being culturally defined by a rigid set of dualities and labeled as either “good” or “bad” women, “clean” or “dirty,” as “virgins” or “malinches.” The characterization of *juarense* women in the media has been profoundly influenced by the two archetypes present in the Mexican psyche: that of the woman who has kept her virginity and that of the one who has lost it.⁶⁵ These archetypes, embodied in the stories of la Malinche, the violated woman, and la Virgen de Guadalupe, the holy Mother, sharply define female roles in Mexican culture based on physical sexuality. As historical and mythical figures, these two archetypes contain tremendous political and social significance for Latin American women.

One example of the conversion of a Virgen into a Malinche lies in the salacious media narrative of the perilous descent of a young and innocent country girl through the urban vices linked to the growth of nightlife and adult entertainment in Mexico’s cities is an allegory for the exploitation of working class females.⁶⁶ According to Camilla Fojas of *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier*, the borderlands (or slums) provide a natural home, within the frame of this Hollywood narrative, for a mixed-race character with degraded moral values, alone without community and lacking in political encumbrance.⁶⁷ This national, cautionary moral myth is directly linked to the perceived

⁶⁴ De la Mora. *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2006, 30.

⁶⁵ Leslie Petty. “The ‘Dual’-ing Images of la Malinche and la Virgen de Guadalupe in Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*.” MELUS: Vol. 25, No. 2. (2000.) 11 February 2012. <www.jstor.org/stable/468222>.

⁶⁶ De la Mora. *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2006, 33.

⁶⁷ Fojas. *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2008, 42.

corruption of rural, indigenous young women as they immigrate to border cities in search of employment, as well as her role in the corruption of the border as an indigenous émigré.⁶⁸ A perceived lack of sexual morality and modesty on the part of working class women stems from visual representations in which the *maquila* worker is portrayed as a prostitute: Pronounced make-up emphasizing the eyes and lips, low cut blouses, miniskirts and high heels. Apparel in the *maquiladoras* and on the streets of Ciudad Juárez plays a prominent role in the performance of gender along Mexico's northern border. In a study of managers in the *maquiladora* industry, Melissa Wright observes: "Throughout the maquilas, attention to women's dress style is articulated as an American or Mexican affect...The difference is generally discussed as one of length; fit; color; shoe style; make-up applications and hairstyle." While some *maquila* factories are indeed "focused on questions of appearance and behavior," referring to worker's adherence to gendered (and often sexualized) codes of comportment and dress, other personnel departments are more interested in the "muting" of gender markers and provide the same smock uniform for all employees.⁶⁹ The significance of widely disseminated, and often inaccurate, representations of femininity and sexuality in the workplace is that "loose" Mexican women are stripped entirely of value and thus risk not only objectification and violence, but blame for their brutal deaths.

As integral participants in the "progressive" *maquiladora* enterprise, female workers theoretically should be revered as regional, national and international heroes. Instead, working women are despised, dehumanized and disposed of. Ironically, the *maquiladora* is viewed by the Mexican and U.S. governments as a promoter of progress,

⁶⁸ *ibid*

⁶⁹ Salzinger. "From High Heels to Swathed Bodies: Gendered Meanings Under Production in Mexico's Export-Processing Economy," *Feminist Studies*. 1997.

whereas the workers inside are emblematic of poverty and vulnerability. *Maquila* women are blamed by misogynist men for leaving home and participating in industrialization, or the “selling out” of Mexico to the white man (a bitterness which dates back to Malinche’s role in the Spanish Conquest).⁷⁰ In defiance of patriarchal order, these women are entering the workplace, asserting their independence and participating in the process of economic globalization. This phenomenon interferes with the widespread ideological notion that “*el hombre para el trabajo y la mujer para la casa*,” and thus progress and mass production signify the loss of culture to many Mexicans.⁷¹ The devaluation of border female sexuality is part of a more generalized narrative about the evils of modernity and the border as a place of excess, violence, prostitution, drugs and contraband. Expressed in popular cultural forms such as film, fashion and photography, the earlier stigma of the frontier and its inhabitants contributes to the “demonized yet casual throw-away view of border women.”⁷² Simultaneously portrayed as traitors and victims of first world greed and capitalism, *maquila* women are important characters in the emerging genre of “new world border” films. Film is an important tool in the creation of a new national identity which incorporates the role of the *maquiladora* worker as an emerging symbol of *mexicanidad*.

The documentary *Performing the Border* by Ursula Biemann gives a nuanced understanding of the regulation of women’s bodies under economic processes of

⁷⁰ Rita Cano Alcalá. “From Chingada to Chingona: La Malinche Redefined Or, A Long Line of Hermanas.” *Aztlan* 26:2, 2001.

⁷¹ June C. Nash, María Patricia Fernández-Kelly. “Women, men and the international division of labor.” *SUNY Press*. (1983.) 13 February 2012. <www.sunypress.edu/p-919-women-men-and-the-international.aspx>.

⁷² Fregoso. *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 12.

globalization. Biemann's film equates exploited bodies with exterminated bodies through a linear chain of associations: *maquila* workers- sex workers- victims of feminicide. The segment portraying female workers in the *maquila* industry is followed by the testimony of a Juárez sex worker and followed immediately after by a segment on the murdered women. Although *Performing the Border* does not stray from the prominent discourse linking feminicide to an imperial agenda, the film brings awareness to gender violence in Juárez without further degrading the women involved. *Performing the Border* also encourages the viewer to contemplate the links between the exploitation and alienation of labouring bodies in various sites within global capitalism, as workers in the *maquiladora* industry and in the sex industry.

The prostitute, like the *maquiladora* worker, is a social agent embodying modernity's anxieties, desires, and contradictions. She plays a central role in the "city of vice" narrative so commonly documented due to its economic potential and erotic appeal. North American photographers Barry Gifford and David Perry capture the essence of this fascination with overtly sexual Mexican women in Bordertown (1998), a grainy, multi-media collage depicting seedy prostitution joints and heavily made-up sex workers in provocative positions. The females in this book are given no voice. Instead, the authors complement the image of a scantily clad woman stretched out on a mattress with the caption "one woman keeps insisting she'd rather "fuckee and suckee" me rather than let David take her picture." The next page features Jacqueline, a 19-year old sex worker with painted eyes and lips and a gold-chained necklace dangling between her protruding breasts. Gifford then comments that he "prefer[s] the cheaper girls in their curators to the more expensive women in the clubs" because "there is less guile in them, they seem less hard, their sadness more palpable." He expresses his own desire for these "*putas*," as he

calls the sex workers, with “Maybe I’m deluded or just wishful, but they are decidedly tender in the tropical Mexican Laredo night.”

Bordertown is intended for U.S. audiences, and thus capitalizes on the stereotypes of border culture. Like Bowden in “I Wanna Dance With the Strawberry Girl,” Gifford and Perry are critical of the violence and sexual exploitation along the border, yet Gifford’s masterful, Anglo male gaze admits to an intermixed racial and sexual fetish, and his exoticism of the sex workers depicts the women as primitive, controllable objects. The gritty images and snippets of patronizing text effectively dehumanize the participants in this project, and thus provoke feelings of disassociation in the reader. Prostitution holds a privileged status as a reigning motif in cultural production, because the prostitute, paradoxically both pure and corrupt, crosses familial, moral, class and geographic boundaries. Besides “selling out” her body to male desire in order to survive, she is also someone’s sister, mother, daughter, wife. Gifford and Perry’s sexually titillating representations of the victimized prostitute, both pure and corrupt, perpetuate negative stereotypes regarding women and sexual promiscuity along the U.S.-Mexico border.

A more recent form of female dehumanization lies in the fashion world’s exploitation of the femicide victim. In the summer of 2010, Chicana fashion designer sisters Kate and Laura Mulleavy, owners of the fashion brand Rodarte, created a line with they hoped would honor their heritage. They took a road trip along the U.S.-Mexico border, and inspired by the colors and culture they saw, created a fashion line representing the depoliticized aesthetic of *maquila* culture in Ciudad Juárez. Rodarte teamed up with the MAC makeup company and put the show on the runway. Made to appear as ghosts and sleepwalkers, the models displayed \$4,000 dresses and \$20 nail polish inspired by the “ethereal” and “romantic” lifestyles of the *maquiladora* workers of

Juárez. Some of the fashion pieces are gritty and earth-toned while other fabrics are sheer and ghostly. The models chosen by the Mulleavy sisters are the aesthetic antithesis of the stereotypical female victim in Mexico. Typically portrayed as poor, dark women and girls, the victims are represented in the *haute couture* show by tall, pale, light-haired and elegantly dressed models, as if to say that one type of woman is targeted and murdered. The collection was put on the runway in the 2010 New York Fashion Week, where it received positive acclaim from numerous Hollywood celebrities and fashion designers. None of the show's attendees seemed to find the symbolic representation offensive or inappropriate.

However, as soon as the collection was released to the public, MAC was faced with heated reactions from thousands of people on social networks and beauty blogs. Labor movement blogger Lindsay Beyerstein ranted: "As we all know, dead women are sexier than live ones. Casting your models as ghosts is also a good excuse to make them very, very white."⁷³ Fashion blogger Minh-Ha T. Pham posted in 2010:

Glossed over by the fantasies of fashion are the harsh physical and economic realities of the thousands of maquiladora workers who provide the hidden labors of globalized fashion and the hundreds (some argue, thousands) of women who have been murdered between Tijuana and Juárez.⁷⁴

As a leading company in the beauty industry, MAC effectively reinforced, and profited from, stereotypes and misconceptions regarding female genocide in Mexico. This faux

⁷³ Lindsay Beyerstein. "Fashion Designer, Makeup Mogul Sell Luxury Goods 'Inspired' By Dead Maquila Workers." Working in These Times Blog. (2010.) Web. 13 February 2012. <http://www.inthesetimes.com/working/entry/6241/designer_rodarte_and_makeup_mogul_m.a.c._sell_luxury_goods_inspired_by/>

⁷⁴ Minh-Ha T. Pham. "Linkages: Maquiladoras Enchant Rodarte and Fashion Pretends Technology Is Not Its Friend." Threadbared Blog. (2010.) Web. 13 February 2012. <<http://iheartthreadbared.wordpress.com/2010/07/12/linkages-maquiladoras-enchant-rodarte-and-fashion-pretends-technology-is-not-its-friend/>>.

pas is one example of the way in which male determined standards of beauty reject the nuanced person and promote the commodification of female sexuality and, in this case, sponsor the sexualization of factory life and even feminicide. The question remains, how does one represent the dead in a respectful manner, in a way that does not further sacralize their bodies, but honors the memory of their former existence?

Representations of abject female bodies in the media and fashion industries are starkly contrasted by the “macho” visual representations of the powerful male body and its desire to possess the weaker sex. Hollywood has perpetrated the image of male banditry along the border in “greaser” films playing on the association of Latinos and criminality, often portraying a roving Mexican outlaw whose main occupations consist of every vice imaginable: lust, greed, thievery, treachery, rapaciousness, deceit, gambling, and murder.⁷⁵ The greaser indicates a dark-skinned outlaw or bandit who is unhygienic, filthy and unsavory, with a marked proclivity for violence. The aesthetic counterpart to his irrational violence, dishonesty and illegal dealings is an unkempt appearance marked by greasy hair and missing teeth. Whereas Hollywood has historically portrayed Mexican men as slimy villains and thieving psychopaths, masculine protagonists in Mexican movies are revered for their strength, courage and virility- thus advocating Catholicism, patriarchal family values and national pride. The *charro*, a man who symbolized masculinity through his dramatic feats of strength in the Mexican rodeo, was, and continues to be, idealized in Mexican culture as an “invincible national hero.”⁷⁶ *El charro*

⁷⁵ Camilla Fojas. *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2008, 5.

⁷⁶ Scott Berghegger. “Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia: The Socioeconomic Origins of Machismo and the Macho.” Vol. 1 No. 11. *Student Pulse*. (2009.) 23 February 2012. <<http://www.studentpulse.com/articles/27/yo-soy-yo-y-mi-circunstancia-the-socioeconomic-origins-of-machismo-and-the-macho>>.

is a man who tames animals and treacherous women, binges on alcohol and is prone to violent outbursts. The concept of “*charrismo*,” or “corruption, violence and anti-democratic behavior” is commonly represented in Mexican cinema as a heroic, ultra-masculine ideal.

Scott Berghegger of “Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia: The Socioeconomic Origins of Machismo and the Macho,” claims that *Charritas coloradas*, or “red jokes,” cut to the heart of the lower-class Mexican man’s degradation of women in order to stress the superiority of his gender. The folkloric portrayal of women in the men’s jokes is entirely the opposite of the idealized faithful mother figure whose love will never expire. The rebellious women of *machismo* folklore are bold and licentious, freely offering up their bodies to men on both sides of the border.⁷⁷ Mexican and Chicana women are encouraged to play up their role as the sultry, sexy temptress, but if they submit to men’s desires, they are perceived as whores. Berghegger quotes a group of lower-class Mexican men who claim that “Chicanas are worse whores than hens,” and “not even blows can control them.”⁷⁸ This contradiction is extremely problematic because the power of a woman’s sexuality leaves her with no options. Traditionally in Mexican society, women are expected to adhere to *hembrismo*, or extreme submission and loyalty to their male partner, but in Mexican and U.S. cinema, Latinas are often portrayed as “spitfire” sex symbols, prostitutes, servant/maids and tough street Cholas. Men are encouraged by on-

⁷⁷ Scott Berghegger. “Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia: The Socioeconomic Origins of Machismo and the Macho.” Vol. 1 No. 11. *Student Pulse*. (2009.) 23 February 2012. <<http://www.studentpulse.com/articles/27/yo-soy-yo-y-mi-circunstancia-the-socioeconomic-origins-of-machismo-and-the-macho>>.

⁷⁸ De la Mora. *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2006.

screen depictions of violence and female domination to seize power and show off their male virility. These common cinematic stereotypes are challenging ideological concepts to combat, but one solution is to encourage discourse around the issue of gender violence without perpetuating the stereotype of a “barbaric” and “uncivilized” Third World. Such representations are careful not to demonize a class of men or attribute cultural, genetic, or biological origins to violence or sexual deviance, and work to denaturalize violence against Mexicanas and Chicanas.

While mainstream films have given precedence to action, violence and sex over character study, plot development and social content, filmmakers working outside the major studios have produced some of the most accurate and moving portrayals of border life. The border, while clearly not a utopian space of multiculturalism and equality, is too often misrepresented by U.S. mass media as a glamorous, high risk place of pure conflict and contention; a symbolic line separating Mexican barbarism from U.S. civilization.

Although lucrative and wildly popular, this portrayal only contributes to sexist ideologies and the ongoing tensions among ethnic and racial groups along the border.

Documentaries seeking to combat these misrepresentations instead concentrate on the lives, experiences and perceptions of border residents to create documentaries and works of art that reflect a deep sensitivity toward the complexity of border reality.

Representations known as “border aesthetics,” or filmic resistance devoted to politically transformative depictions of the border region, depart from and critically reconstruct the normative and phobic images of the borderlands in the northern imaginary.⁷⁹ These films attest to the ways that the Hollywood border genre is continually being reimagined and

⁷⁹ Fojas. *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2008, 5.

redeployed to explore the most salient issues of contemporary culture. This complex interplay of media events is a hopeful sign that Hollywood film and media culture has begun to lose its ideological dominance with regard to negative depictions of the U.S.-Mexican border.

One exemplary activist documentary is Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada* (2001). Portillo maintained daily contact with the mothers and local women rights activists that she encountered while filming in Ciudad Juárez. Driven by a passion to inform U.S. and international audiences of the murder and disappearance of women in Juárez, Portillo's film expresses moral outrage and demands political action. *Señorita Extraviada* poignantly echoes the strategies of grassroots activists, mothers, sisters, and allies in their ongoing struggle to locate the disappeared and prevent additional murders. Portillo confronted the challenge of representing these murdered women by attempting to honor the memory of their former existence. She enshrouds her film in the discourse of religiosity by employing religious symbolism (images of crosses, montages of crucifixes and home altars) and iconography. Not a single dead body appears in the film. Rather than sexualizing the victims and blaming them for their fate, the narrative gives voice to women's agency, to the mothers and sisters who have emerged as protagonists in grassroots movements. The film portrays women on the border neither as passive victims nor as hapless dependents of the patriarchal state.⁸⁰ Instead, *Señorita Extraviada* underscores the strength and determination of women activists and politically motivated citizens who continue to demand the rights of women within the nation-state.

⁸⁰ Fregoso. MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 26.

The border itself, as both a barrier and a unifier, has come to figure prominently in regional cultural expression. Because mythical stereotypes could never be sustained without the process of repeating and fixing impressions of racial and sexual “others,” border films have stock characters: The sultry Latina, the pious (de-sexualized) female Mexican immigrant, the righteous cowboy/border guard, the crooked drug runner- and stock sets and scenery- the open desert, abandoned border towns the canteen, the whorehouse.⁸¹ Film and photography play an important role in circulating highly sexualized images of Mexican femininity, as does the articulation of class and culture in elements of fashion and dress style. The hypervisibility of the feminine body in audiovisual media, as in the commodification of gruesome photographs depicting tortured and dismembered bodies, heightens the invisibility of the disposable of the poor, dark women on the border.⁸² The drive for commercial success has influenced many U.S. and Mexican producers’ treatment of border themes, and the enduring popularity of the prostitution melodrama and the ubiquity of the brothel-cabaret in Mexican culture have as much to do with Mexico’s violent history of colonialism as they do with the nation’s deep sense of religiosity and spirituality.⁸³ The implications of this are that women in Mexican film are often portrayed either as the pure, virginal, and suffering mothers and maids who are denied sexual agency, or as party girls and prostitutes who embrace sexual pleasure and/or engage in work linked to sexual commerce.⁸⁴ These contrary representations of

⁸¹ Fojas. *Border Bandits: Hollywood on the Southern Frontier*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2008, 16.

⁸² Fregoso. *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 22.

⁸³ De la Mora. *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2006.

⁸⁴ *ibid*

women onscreen affect societal expectations of feminine sexuality and normalize the degradation and brutalization of “impure” Mexican women. The discursive production of border woman as fetish easily crosses the line from informative to titillating, yet more nuanced understandings of the regulation of women’s bodies do exist in cultural production. Filmmakers working outside of major studios have produced more accurate and moving portrayals of border life, thus creating documentaries and works of art that reflect a deep sensitivity toward the complexity of border reality. The forms of cultural expression in Ciudad Juárez are diverse, ranging from habits of dress and social style, to celebrations of community solidarity, and milestones in film and photography. Recent social development on the border has influenced national reality in Mexico and the U.S., and an expanded cultural repertoire allows border residents to fashion new cultural worlds.

Mobilizing Border Activism: An Analysis of Social Change in Juárez

The power in activism lies in mobilizing social forces and achieving concrete change for the benefit of society. By promoting the visibility of victimized women, juarenses activists give value to lost lives and show appreciation for working women's role in the world. The victims of femicide have received more attention dead than they ever did alive. As poor, working women, they were largely ignored until their disappearance forced them into the limelight. The initial core of grassroots activism began with mothers of the murder victims and human rights organizations, determined to make public their demands, just as assassins publicly exhibited their daughters' bodies. Governmental disdain for the working class became increasingly evident as the mothers of missing girls were ignored and even threatened for pressuring police. After years of little to no attention, the May/June 1998 issue of *Ms.* magazine featured a story called "The Maquiladora Murders" with a close-up picture of a dead woman's bruised, half-buried legs in the sand, her white sandals still on her feet. The story shocked *Ms.* magazine readers and the word began to spread. Soon the U.S. media, followed by international media, quickly capitalized on the story of four hundred murdered women along the

border, profiting from the horror and fantasy induced by stories and images of sexual violence. Using tactics such as fetishizing the working women of Juárez and sensationalizing the “*maquila* murders” and “city of vice” narratives, journalists and filmmakers exploited the tragedy on an international scale. While this superficial activism was self-serving, the publications were effective in raising consciousness and generating transnational support for the antiviolence cause.

Loosely networked alliances began to form, within and across the border, in an effort to combat the problems stemming from female objectification, dehumanization and a deep-rooted misogyny toward impoverished *mestiza* women. Despite constant pressure from these organizations, it was only after the Mexican Government was put on trial in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that authorities began to thoroughly investigate the murders and politicians implemented a strategic plan for the city of Juárez. Although improvements have been gained, the fight is not yet over. Activist organizations are plagued with budget limitations, an overwhelming number of unsolved murders and little response or support from local government officials. Yet activists continue to pursue justice for the victims and their families by creating awareness, raising funds, and demanding governmental accountability. This chapter analyzes the evolution of the anti-violence social movement collaboration and the highly effective use of performance as a political tool.

In 1993, civil society organizations and citizens began to keep a systematic record of the disappearances and homicides of women in Ciudad Juárez, mainly through what was reported in the newspapers. Most of the women had been reported missing, and in many cases, the authorities had not yet opened an investigation. Mothers of the victims networked and organized to press for police action on locating and stopping the killers.

Their demands were largely ignored by police and government officials, who claimed that the victims had put themselves at risk by “dressing provocatively” and working as prostitutes. Mourning mothers then began sharing personal stories about their daughters’ tragic deaths and their own frustrating and even fearful experiences with the police (being threatened, sent from office to office, given fabricated evidence, asked for bribes to pursue cases, told that evidence was lost, etc.), causing the victims’ families to relive the murders over and over.⁸⁵ Conferences and the internet served to share their testimonies with local and global audiences. The international community, appalled by the inefficiency on the part of the PAN and its leaders’ contemptible blaming of victims, began to exert pressure through visits, the news, and organizational reports.⁸⁶ The Organization of American States (OAS) approved the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women in 1994, leading to a rich and intense debate in the region about women’s right to live free from violence.⁸⁷ In support of this entitlement, and in protest of gender violence worldwide, symbols and slogans such as *Ni una más* began to emerge on telephone poles and streets all over Ciudad Juárez.

One form of protest is the strategic placement of pink crosses, adorned with flowers and the victim’s name written in black on the crossbar, in the desert and throughout the city. With messages such as “*Ya basta de violencia en contra de las mujeres. Ni Una Más,*” the installation of pink crosses in significant public spaces

⁸⁵ Staudt. *Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2008.

⁸⁶ Gabriela De Cicco. “Ciudad Juárez: Finally, Steps Towards Justice.” Association For Women’s Rights in Development. (2009.) 15 March 2012.
<http://www.peacewomen.org/news_article.php?id=136&type=news>.

⁸⁷ *ibid*

signifies both religiosity (suggesting that God is on the side of women and the victims) and a visible resistance to femicide and the government's lack of regard for working-class women. In 2002, (to the chagrin of Mexican elites) the coalition Ni Una Más established a gigantic pink cross at the Paso del Norte bridge, the main passage between Juárez and El Paso, Texas. The crucifix contains nails which symbolize each of the victims. Rosa Linda Fregoso comments on the visibility of the religious symbol in Juárez, stating that the cross marks the intersectional identities of the targeted feminine subject, the feminine body of the poor and dark woman.⁸⁸ Preferring to ignore and cover up the issue, the government and private business leaders have repeatedly tried to silence and remove activists from public arenas by criticizing and threatening them for drawing attention to the killings, which, they argue, scare away investors. While this may be true, the implantation of crosses in the city contests the normalization of the crimes and mourns the loss of a valuable life. According to U.S. theologian Nichole M. Flores Henry, the crucifix is a symbol which invokes both Christ's suffering and resurrection, and thus serves as a testimony to the crimes against women, the suffering of the community, and a protest against the perpetuation of violence. Flores Henry argues that the crosses do not glorify suffering; they lament it while recognizing a God who suffers brutal torture in solidarity with the people.⁸⁹ Despite this clear act of Christian faith, the Catholic Church has remained conspicuously absent from the protest, perhaps because the victims were reputedly sexually deviant, "independent" women. The pink and black crosses do not necessarily symbolize the Christian institution, they represent God's love for, and

⁸⁸ Fregoso. *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 22.

⁸⁹ Nichole M. Flores Henry. "The Pink Cross: Resisting Femicide in Ciudad Juárez." *Women in Theology*. (2011.) 4 April 2012. <<http://womenintheology.org/2011/03/31/the-pink-cross-resisting-femicide-in-ciudad-juarez/>>.

protection of, the women of Juárez, and they give hope to the broader anti-femicide movement.

A second iconic religious symbol observable in the streets of Juárez, is the skeletal goddess of death: La Santa Muerte (also known as *Señora de las Sombras*, *Señora Blanca*, *Señora Negra*, *Niña Santa*, and *La Flaca*). A syncretism between Mesoamerican and Catholic beliefs, the Santa Muerte religion maintains a certain reverence toward death, and, ironically, toward women. *La Flaca* accepts those that the Catholic Church rejects, and thus is offered gifts such as cigarettes and tequila. Worship of the sacred skeleton, adorned with colorful robes and carrying a scythe, has become more public in recent years with the increase in violence and death along the border. The iconic image of the robed skeletal goddess, often represented in the form of body art and figurines, gives spiritual solace to people disillusioned with the dominant Catholic Church, mourning the death of loved ones, and suffering extreme hardships. However, one problematic aspect of the framing of *La Flaca* as a luminously white, thin and girlish saint is the association of whiteness and youth with goodness and purity. And similarly to the pink and black crosses, the seditious skeleton poses a problem for Mexican authorities, who claim that her followers: drug traffickers, homosexuals and prostitutes, are worshipping the devil.⁹⁰ The State is frightened by the increasing presence of La Santa Muerte, because her influence challenges the power, legitimacy of governing political and religious institutions and threatens their control over the populace.

Grassroots groups and people disenfranchised with dominant power structures and ideologies subversively employ these religious symbols and iconography. The strategic placement of crosses and Santa Muerte shrines resignify the city into a hauntingly artistic

⁹⁰ Jorge Vargas. "Mexico destroys 'Death Saint' revered by criminals." (2009.) 4 April 2012. < <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/23368/santa-muerte-saint-death>>.

memorial for the dead. These icons give value to the silenced victims and a voice to the mothers and sisters who have emerged as protagonists in grassroots movements. Through their agency and determination, poor women and their middle class allies have shouldered the work of detection and forensic investigation, searching for missing daughters and sisters, combing the desert for bodies, and identifying remains.⁹¹ Visual performance is an effective new technique utilized by activists to promote awareness, foster concrete change and eventually eradicate violence against women. Dramatic representations, such as the placement of pink crosses in public spaces and the use of photography, protest marches and documentary film to arouse strong emotions, allowing social movement activists to communicate with broader audiences. The creative dissemination of information has proven effective in expanding the base of support for suffering families. Fear and apathy silenced these crimes for many years, but eventually family members and human rights advocates began risking their own lives to fight for the slain and disappeared women of Juárez, “*no sólo por la justicia para Latinas, pero para la liberación de toda la humanidad.*”⁹² Similarly to how men and women perform gender in socially constructed ways, *mujerista* activists do gender performance with symbols, icons and colors to present emotional testimonies. A wide range of writers visual and performance artists on both sides of the border have lent their talents to a massive binational outrage over these crimes and the continued impunity granted the perpetrators, ranging from songs, documentaries and YouTube short films to novels, poetry, plays and photography.⁹³ Not

⁹¹ Fregoso. MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 26.

⁹² Marta Lamas and Jean Franco. Feminism: Transmissions and Retransmissions. (New York: Palgrave and Macmillan), 2011, xx.

⁹³ Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán. Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2010, 4.

wanting their daughters to be remembered as a half-buried corpse in a sand dune, activists have used the religious symbol of the cross, painted pink and black, to mourn the loss of loved ones and protest the normalization of gender violence.

In response to the constant pressure and nothing to offer in the way of culprits, or even leads, by 1995, state authorities decided to increase their efforts. The *Fiscalía Especial para la Investigación de Crímenes contra Mujeres* was founded under the administration of Francisco Barrio Terrazas, however “with five overburdened district attorneys and a shortage of staff and technical equipment,” the office faced “great disapproval from the leading protest groups,” meaning marches and demonstrations with the participation of NGOs, academic institutions, and social sectors.⁹⁴ Also in 1995, the state of Chihuahua hired a Spanish criminologist (José Antonio Parra Molina) and a former FBI agent who had experience in profiling both criminals and possible victims; and they set forth a prevention campaign to protect all women at risk.⁹⁵ In a desperate attempt to put a few men, who could be held responsible for hundreds of murders, behind bars, authority figures arrested Egyptian Abdel Latif Sharif Sharif and members of the *Los Rebeldes* gang in 1995- a decision which was contested by local activists. The men were eventually released. In addition to this feeble attempt on the part of the state to capture male perpetrators, the government issued “prevention campaigns” targeted at young women, reminding them to behave in a “moral and respectable” manner, to “not dress provocatively” and to “not run the risk of becoming a statistic.”⁹⁶ This discourse reinforces the virgin/whore binary and implies that if a young woman does not strictly

⁹⁴ Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán. *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2010, 112.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 100.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 101.

abide by all of the Municipal Police (Dirección General de Policía, GDP) guidelines, she deserves what she gets.

On November 6 and 7 of 2001, the bodies of eight women and girls, who had clearly been sexually tortured, were discovered in an old cotton field in the city. This tragedy was termed the “Cotton Field” killings. In response to the international media outcry, the government quickly put four innocent men in prison, charged with the homicide and rape of the eight women tortured and killed. One defendant died three months later in prison. Cross-border networks began to grow as a result of this serial killing. Amigos de las Mujeres de Juárez is an organization that works in solidarity with NGOs to press for systemic and policy changes by sponsoring rallies and marches, making presentations at conferences, and testifying before public bodies and press conferences. Amigos activists conduct searches at sites where bodies are found and raise funds to support several groups in Juárez and Chihuahua City. Their website posts updated lists of murdered women’s names. Together with the international NGO ‘Women in Black,’ Amigos de las Mujeres has staged protest rallies at Mexican consulates.⁹⁷ 2001 was a turning point in the anti-femicide movement, as numerous organizations were formed in response to the “Cotton Field” killings, and Lourdes Portillo’s *Señorita Extraviada* documentary was released, causing a stir among certain academic circles.

By early 2002, a new coalition of feminist activists from hundreds of organizations came together under the campaign ¡Ni Una Más!. Hundreds of women dressed in black (elderly women, *campesinas*, housewives, factory workers, students, and professionals) marched for 230 miles, from Chihuahua City to the Juárez -El Paso border,

⁹⁷ Staudt. Violence and Activism at the Border: Gender, Fear, and Everyday Life in Ciudad Juárez. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2008.

chanting “*Únase pueblo, por el respeto y la justicia... ¿Qué es lo que quiere Juárez? Justicia, justicia, justicia.*” On March 6th of 2002, the mothers of three of the “Cotton Field” victims, with the help of individuals and organizations that belonged to the Red Ciudadana de No Violencia y por la Dignidad Humana, filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) requesting a thorough investigation of the crimes. With this action came harassment and violence towards victims’ families in the years leading up to a verdict by the IACHR. Despite the dangers involved, the families continued to support the petition.

In support of the “Cotton Field” case and the many suffering mothers of murdered women, UCLA faculty and students in the Chicano Studies department organized an international conference called “The Maquiladora Murders, Or, Who Is Killing the Women of Juárez?” in the fall of 2003. More than fifteen hundred scholars, journalists, artists, activists, writers, forensic investigators, policy specialists, and mothers of the victims came together in a series of roundtable discussions, literary and dramatic presentations and keynote speeches. A multimedia student exhibition of written, aural, and visual materials collected in a yearlong undergraduate research internship on the crimes was presented. Ceramic pieces, commemorating the lives of and losses of the Juárez women, and created by the San Antonio-based MujerArtes collective, were sold at a silent auction. The full proceeds of the auction were donated to the nongovernmental organizations of the mothers who attended the conference. A blend of intellectual theory and artistic endeavor, the purpose of the conference was to facilitate more scholarly inquiry into the crimes, examine the social, political, economic and cultural infrastructure in which the crimes continue unabated, and raise funds for NGO organizations in

Juárez.⁹⁸ The conference generated twelve resolutions, known as the “¡Ni Una Más!” petition, which call for an end to violence against women and children in Juárez and Chihuahua. While the conference may not have had a significantly palpable impact on the situation in Mexico, it did provide a safe space for binational cooperation and discourse.

In 2004, the largest-ever solidarity march took place from El Paso to Ciudad Juárez on Valentine’s Day, drawing 8,000 people from around the world, including Hollywood celebrities Jane Fonda and Sally Field. Joining in the V-Day march was President Vicente Fox’s newly-appointed special federal prosecutor, María López Urbina, who vowed to lift the femicide investigation to a federal level and bring justice to grieving families. López Urbina quickly established a DNA data bank and a victims’ registry, but critics claim that her office was slow to investigate cases and the killings remain unsolved.⁹⁹ López Urbina did, however, make a cameo appearance in a film titled *Bajo Juárez, la ciudad devorando a sus hijas*. Her moment of stardom comes when she preaches to *juarense* parents “*que retomen su autoridad y no permiten que sus hijas lleguen a las seis de la mañana.*”¹⁰⁰ Although the film was well-received and won various film festival awards, López Urbina’s impractical advice did little to improve her professional reputation. She had promised to investigate all 143 officials accused of neglect, but managed to obtain only two convictions. When she left her post, she was

⁹⁸ Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán. Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2010.

⁹⁹ Olga R. Rodriguez. “Critics pressure Mexican federal prosecutor as third report on border killings comes due.” Associated Press. (2005.) 7 April 2012. <http://lubbockonline.com/stories/013105/upd_075-4919.shtml>.

¹⁰⁰ Claudia Olinda Morán. “Exhiben en filme Bajo Juárez a María López Urbina, ex delegada de PGR.” Zócalo Saltillo. (2009.) 7 April 2012. <<http://www.zocalo.com.mx/seccion/articulo/88127>>.

facing 27 legal complaints charging her with abuse of power and defamation.¹⁰¹ Deputy Marcela Lagarde, who chairs the Comisión Especial committee, argues that the constant changeover in personnel is purely cosmetic, and that López Urbina was merely a scapegoat for the administration's failures. "There is no coherence in the government's policies, there are no comprehensive actions," said Lagarde, a member of the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD).

Despite López Urbina's disappointing stint as Federal Prosecutor, the Mexican State continued to take small steps toward justice. On February 24, 2005, the court declared the "Cotton Field" crime petitions admissible. The court's judgment against the State for the violation of women's human rights is significant, because for fifteen years the Mexican State denied that there was a problem to be resolved. According to Andrea Medina Rosas of the Comité de América Latina y el Caribe para la Defensa de los Derechos de las Mujeres (CLADEM):

The recognition of the harm caused and the judgment that Mexico must implement measures to avoid these crimes from happening again is an opportunity to make this serious violation of human rights a learning moment and to more solidly construct the rights of women and of societies based on liberty and equality for women and men.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, this advancement prompted more harassment and violence, this time directed towards the people and organizations that supported and represented the mothers during the trial. With minor changes in policy and legal achievements, due to many years of concerted effort, came a dangerous backlash. The local media discredited the mothers and civil society organizations that denounce violence against women by publishing

¹⁰¹ Latin American Data Base/Latin American Institute. "Fox Government Announces new measures to Boost Investigations of Women's Murders in Ciudad Juárez." *SourceMex Economic News & Analysis on Mexico*. (2005.) 9 April 2012.

¹⁰² De Cicco. "Ciudad Juárez: Finally, Steps Towards Justice." *Association For Women's Rights in Development*. (2009.) 15 March 2012.
http://www.peacewomen.org/news_article.php?id=136&type=news.>

editorial content that created a discourse around the “myth of femicide” as merely the fantasies of mothers seeking money from the government.¹⁰³ This phenomenon created a climate that not only supported further impunity by the government, but put the lives of human rights advocates at risk.

By 2006, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico had acquired the reputation as one of the most dangerous cities in the world. Tourism from North America waned considerably as Mexico waged a violent and militaristic war against drug cartels along the border. State officials attempted to reverse this negative reputation for political and economic reasons, but local activists took advantage of the crisis by demanding better treatment from the government and by forging an international support network. Regional and global sympathizers (often middle-class women) became very involved in the cause, despite their lack of direct affiliation to victims of femicide. In some cases, these more privileged volunteers even became the actual face of the cause- and with this reality the complex question of representation resurfaced. How does one represent the dead in manner that honors their former existence and is respectful of their families’ grief? Who should represent the face of the cause- family members of the victims or white U.S. feminists and celebrities? Julia Monárrez-Fragosos’s “The Suffering of the Other” complicates the current state of activism by exposing some unsettling obstacles in forging solidarity. She argues that the combined metropolitan area of Juarez/El Paso makes for a lack of accountability on the part of binational activists and government treaties, and she questions the motives of “noisy First World celebrities” whose participation in the 2004 V-Day March drew a crowd of thousands from both sides of the border. Clara E. Rojas’

¹⁰³ *ibid*

“The V-Day March in Mexico: Appropriation and Misuse of Local Women’s Activism” complements Monárrez- Fragoso’s chapter by exposing the plethora of celebrities and middle-class *juarenses* that have sought and gained recognition with their self-serving activism. Distrusting the motives of the “Other,” some mothers have demanded to separate the victims’ families’ organizations and the NGOs. Similarly to The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, these outraged women wield their motherhood as a “symbol of power and accreditation” to demand justice for their murdered and disappeared daughters.¹⁰⁴ However, although cautious about what and whom they support publicly for fear of being misrepresented, the majority of grassroots activists in Juárez are opposed to basing a human rights framework on a singular identity. Just as the victims defy a hegemonic stereotype, the activists, too, should represent diversity in ethnicity, gender, class and approach. Cognizant alliances do exist between those who seek justice, and Mexico’s mother coalition can benefit greatly by joining forces with international and transnational antifemicide movements.

Globalization has contributed to the vulnerability and victimization of women in Juárez, but it has also aided the interconnection of transnational activists. Without the Internet, social networks, Skype, and other forms of international communication, *juarenses* would not have gained nearly the visibility or support that it has achieved in the past two decades. Blogs, radio stations and websites run by activists and journalists in the Chihuahua region keep the public informed, provide outlets for distraught family members and raise donations for local organizations. Performance activism for a global audience has given hope to many anguished families and sympathizers. Since the femicides were first reported, the media has put determined organizers on a podium,

¹⁰⁴ Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán. Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 2010, 13.

thus giving them agency, but also making them easy targets for abuse. There have been numerous death threats against activists and journalists in Ciudad Juárez, including Esther Chávez Cano, the head of the NGO Casa Amiga and Samira Izaguirre, radio journalist and founder of the NGO Luz y Justicia, and human rights activist Cipriana Jurado Herrera.¹⁰⁵ Some of the most vocal proponents of social justice have even lost their lives in recent years. A number of activists, including Izaguirre and Jurado Herrera, filed petitions for asylum and are now living in the United States. The unfortunate reality is that increased international attention has not improved local attitudes toward working women. Various tactics continue to be used to intimidate and subordinate activists, and state policies have been slow to change.

After years of legal reversals and disappointing setbacks (and the devastating report from *La Jornada* stating that 598 of the 672 female murders were still unsolved), 2009 ended with steps toward justice: on December 10th (International Human Rights Day) the IACHR issued a judgment in the “Cotton Field” case against the government of Mexico for violations of human rights.¹⁰⁶ This decision, which ended an eight-year legal battle, found that Mexico was responsible for failure to comply with its obligations to legislate and act with due diligence to prevent, investigate and sanction violence against women. It required that Mexican officials apologize publicly for their inconsistencies, errors and negligence, re-open investigations into the cases and erect a memorial site in

¹⁰⁵ Fregoso. *MeXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*. (Berkeley: University of California), 2003, 17.

¹⁰⁶ De Cicco. “Ciudad Juárez: Finally, Steps Towards Justice.” Association For Women’s Rights in Development. (2009.) 15 March 2012.
<http://www.peacewomen.org/news_article.php?id=136&type=news>.

the empty lot where bodies were found in 2001.¹⁰⁷ Some relatives of slain women were not impressed with this judgment. “We don’t want mausoleums, we want investigations that can let us know where are daughters are and who killed them,” said José Luis Castillo, whose daughter Esmeralda has been missing since 2009.¹⁰⁸ Nearly one year later, the Office of the Chihuahua State Attorney General did offer some information on its website, but the list of victims was not complete. According to the web page, Chihuahua state law enforcement authorities resolved 32 reports of missing women. Of the cases solved, 16 women were found alive and 16 later determined dead.¹⁰⁹ The deceased women were identified largely by a faction of the Argentine Anthropological Forensic Team (the same forensic team to identify assassinated bodies in Argentina’s Dirty War) brought in by the Mexican government several years ago under pressure from victims’ relatives and women’s activists. In November of 2011, Mexico’s government publicly apologized for failing to prevent the killings in Ciudad Juárez and for the negligence of officials in investigating the crimes. “We apologize. It is our obligation to investigate these crimes,” said Interior Deputy Secretary Felipe Zamora. “The Mexican government recognizes the inconsistencies, errors and negligent acts of public officials in charge of the probes.”¹¹⁰ The performance of this long-overdue apology was an attempt to reassure Mexican citizens and global critics that the government now has everything

¹⁰⁷ Ricardo Chávez. “Mexico apologizes for not protecting slain women.” Washington Post. (2011.) 20 March 2012. <<http://news.yahoo.com/mexico-apologizes-not-protecting-slain-women-005157025.html>>.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰⁹ Kent Patterson. “A Woman of Steel Seeks Justice for Unrelenting Femicides.” The Cutting Edge. (2010.) 24 March 2012. <<http://www.thecuttingedgenews.com/index.php?article=21656&pageid=89&pagename=Features>>.

¹¹⁰ Chávez. “Mexico apologizes for not protecting slain women.” Washington Post. (2011.) 20 March 2012. <<http://news.yahoo.com/mexico-apologizes-not-protecting-slain-women-005157025.html>>.

under control. However, the killings continue unabated, victims' families are still often ignored, and investigations remain faulty, secretive and corrupt.

Performance activism is one form of resistance to violence and impunity that has been growing in scope in recent years, giving increased visibility to the tragic situation in Ciudad Juárez. Pink and black are the colors that have come to symbolize femicide, and in 2011 a group of activist women began riding pink motorcycles and delivering food to poor neighbourhoods, commonly identified as recruiting grounds for local gangs. Another recently founded organization is made up of "Messenger Angels," or young, religious activists. A leader of the group, Carlos Mayorga, said that the young people from the small, Evangelical church called Psalm 100 had become frustrated with the relentless violence and wanted to do something hard to miss.¹¹¹ The teenagers persuaded city officials to donate old curtains that could be used as angelic robes, raised money for makeup and collected feathers for wings. They created confrontational signs speaking directly to criminals and corrupted officials (e.g. "murderers repent") and defiantly held them up at busy intersections, crime scenes and in front of police stations. The idea is to eventually bring about peace and change. "Maybe the *sicarios* will see this and think God is coming for them" said 14-year old Karen Olguin Rivas. "The people here, they need to change."¹¹²

Since the mid-1990s, a tiny network of activists, beginning with the mothers of victims and a few human rights organizations, in Ciudad Juárez has fomented a dense cross-border movement and eventually a transnational movement of people. A number of

¹¹¹ Damien Cave. "Angels Rushing In Where Others Fear to Tread." *The New York Times International*. Ciudad Juárez Journal. (10 November 2011). 10 April 2012.

¹¹² Damien Cave. "Angels Rushing In Where Others Fear to Tread." *The New York Times International*. Ciudad Juárez Journal. (10 November 2011). 10 April 2012.

artists have addressed the murders in important creative endeavors; risking their own safety to “perform” the border, activists create and utilize documentary film and theater drama, art, music, vigils and solidarity marches. These new forms of popular culture effectively challenge the normalization of violence against women and build a broader base of political support. Activism on the borderlands constitutes an identity formation that intersects with the continuous transnational drive for women’s human rights: the eradication of interpersonal violence, justice for victims’ families, and exercising oversight over public institutions in order to deepen democracy and encourage governmental accountability. As a result of many forms of creative protest and public activism, improvements have been made in terms of preventing and dealing with the aftermath of violence. Ideas for the future of organizing include providing mother-daughter classes on sexuality and self-defense, and promoting campaigns to abolish discriminatory hiring and demeaning practices within the *maquilas*, such as pregnancy tests and beauty pageants. Activists are pressuring the government to provide proper street lighting, conduct background checks on company shuttle drivers and city bus drivers, and hire security guards at night to protect *maquila* workers. Solidarity, support, and safety measures recognize and reinforce each young woman’s right to equality, dignity and life. Misogyny, deeply rooted in everyday practices and structures, will not end overnight, but by broadening the base of pressure to protect women, democracy and governments and policies can and will change.

The current situation in Ciudad Juárez is rife with violent drug cartel battles and militarization as a result of Felipe Calderón’s Drug War. As activists feared, the ongoing daily violence in Juárez has overwhelmed local officials and taken attention away from femicide and, increasingly, youthcide, or violence against children. Impunity continues

as the body count rises. The Drug War has drastically changed the dynamic of the U.S.-Mexico border by heightening the desperation of residents and expanding the regional network of crime and violence. Adding to the conflict are the deportations of thousands of criminals from the U.S. to border cities. Not only does this practice further complicate the overpopulation problem, but many of these deportees quickly link up with criminal networks on the border such as the Juárez Cartel.¹¹³ Activists are caught somewhere in the middle between drug cartels and the military, underfunded, harassed, and unsure of how best to proceed in *la lucha por la justicia*. In early April of 2012, a civic group called Nuestro México del Futuro released an online video called *Niños Incómodos*. The mockumentary shows a worst-case “day in the life” of Mexico, highlighting all of the country’s main problems, from pollution and petty crime to drug cartel violence and political corruption. And it does so with children playing all the roles: businessmen, corrupt politicians, cartel gunmen and victims. The tagline from the kids at the end translates to “If this is the future that awaits me, I don’t want it. Enough of working for your political parties instead of for us. We are tired of cosmetic changes.” Although the viral video has been controversial for its use of child actors in roles that negatively stereotype Mexican society, it effectively denounced Calderón’s government for failing in its efforts to dismantle the powerful drug cartels and to protect the women of Juárez. This example of performance activism, already viewed throughout Mexico, is only the most recent attempt by Mexican activists to put an end to the slaughter of thousands of men, women and children and improve the future of Ciudad Juárez.

¹¹³ National Public Radio. “Mexico: Deportations From U.S. Fuels Violence.” The Associated Press. (21 October 2011.) 17 April 2012.
<<http://warriortimes.com/2011/11/12/mexico-deportations-from-u-s-fuels-violence/>>.

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