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CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND EPHEMERAL ART: FEMINICIDE AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF MEMORY IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ, 1998-2008

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CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND EPHEMERAL ART:
FEMINICIDE AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF MEMORY IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ, 1998-
2008

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Arts and Sciences
at the University of Kentucky

By
Alice Laurel Driver

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Susan Carvalho, Professor of Hispanic Studies

Lexington, Kentucky

2011

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND EPHEMERAL ART: FEMINICIDE AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF MEMORY IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ, 1998- 2008

This dissertation examines representations of femicide victims in documentary film, novels, non-fiction, art, and graffiti and argues that these images express anxiety about the way women traverse and inhabit the geography of Ciudad Juárez, often giving precedence to the idea of the public female body as hypersexualized. In order to reclaim memory of the victims some cultural producers focus on the testimonial form in which victims' families and other activists share their stories or construct informal memorials in the city; these remembrances later appear in works of non-fiction, film, and art, as markers of the process of creating and preserving memory. My dissertation analyzes such works as the documentary *Señorita extraviada* (2001) by Lourdes Portillo, the non-fiction work *Huesos en el desierto* (2002) by Sergio González Rodríguez, and the novel *2666* (2004) by Roberto Bolaño, among other cultural expressions, to show how femicide victims and their families have been marked by and have challenged a pervasive public discourse about female sexuality.

KEYWORDS: Femicide; femicide; Ciudad Juárez; violence against women; cultural production

Alice Laurel Driver
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December 15, 2011
Date

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CHAPTER ONE

BEGINNINGS: FEMINICIDE AND MEMORY CREATION

“Reality is so bereft of humanity, so barbaric, that we cannot grasp it without the delicacy of art. Through art we can feel the loss, and we can understand it without falling prey to sensationalism.”

—Lourdes Portillo¹

“Even though you are in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico and I am in Lexington, Kentucky, I want you to know that you are part of my life,” I wrote. I finished my letter, and mailed it to a friend in El Paso who carried it across the border to Paula Flores. Paula and I had never met, but I began to learn about her in 2008, when I saw director Lourdes Portillo’s *Señorita extraviada* (2001), a documentary about feminicide in Ciudad Juárez. Paula’s daughter, María Sagrario was raped and murdered, and her body was dumped in an empty lot in 1998. Over the years, Paula became a prominent activist in the movement against feminicide, and she was interviewed for documentaries and book projects about the murdered women of Ciudad Juárez.² Until 2008, I was unaware of feminicide in

¹ Lourdes Portillo wrote this to me in an email on March 11, 2009.

² In 2010 a wave of violence against prominent anti-feminicide activists forced Paula Flores and her family to flee Ciudad Juárez and suspend the activities of La fundación María Sagrario, which was working on a community level to educate children and prevent violence. Other prominent activists that have been threatened or killed include Marisela Escobedo Ortiz, who was shot to death in December of 2010 in front of the governor’s palace in Chihuahua City while seeking justice for her daughter’s slaying. Susana Chávez Castillo, a poet and activist, was strangled to death in January of 2011. In February of 2011, someone set fire to the house of Marilu García, the leader of the anti-feminicide group Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa. On December 2, 2011 activist Norma Andrade was shot five times (she survived the incident).

Ciudad Juárez, but the documentary has haunted me ever since. Thus I began to research and write academically about feminicide.³



Figure 1.1. Maya Goded © 2004. The body of a feminicide victim was discovered in this lot in downtown Chihuahua. Feminicide is a growing problem in other areas of Mexico like Oaxaca and Veracruz. Courtesy of Maya Goded.

I met Paula time and again in documentaries and testimonial literature. I remember her as she stood in front of her house beside two caged parakeets, telling the story of how the birds became restless the day María Sagrario did not return from work at the *maquiladora* (*Señorita extraviada*). A black and white image of her grief-stricken face taken by Ciudad Juárez photographer Julián Cardona burned itself into my mind. If I had been contemporary artist Shepard Fairey, I would have taken that image and made

³ Although feminicide has been well documented in Ciudad Juárez, it is also a problem in other areas of Mexico. In a 2011 study on feminicide titled “Sistema de información geográfica de la violencia en el municipio de Juárez, Chihuahua: Geo-referenciación y su comportamiento espacial en el contexto urbano y rural (SIGVIDA).” Luis E. Cervera G. and Julia E. Monárrez Fragoso found that “Aunque el porcentaje de mujeres asesinadas sea menor al de hombres sus cifras no dejan de ser considerables, los dos primeros años del estudio el número de casos se mantuvo por encima de los mil feminicidios en el país, registrándose 1,298 en el 2006, en el 2007 fueron 1,083 y en el 2008 se acumularon 1,425” (7).

it part of worldwide graffiti culture.⁴ However, instead of scouring cities for abandoned lots to convert images into cultural currency, I found myself alone, writing about the geography of memory and the power of writers, filmmakers, and artists to promote justice for femicide victims and their families.

I wrote, knowing that I needed to advocate for change, but worrying that I could not do enough. Always I wrote with the shadow of Paula Flores following me and reminding me that courage, stoicism, and eloquence can produce change, inspire art, and influence individual lives, even if only my own. “Paula Flores has been a leading activist, and has had the wherewithal to do things that have some transcendence,” explained Lourdes Portillo during our interview. My work is dedicated to women like Paula who, in the face of overwhelming physical and economic violence, find the strength to inspire change.

FEMICIDE IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ

Some say that femicide in Ciudad Juárez began in 1993. Others say it began earlier, perhaps in 1991 or 1992.⁵ However, as pointed out by Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, a social sciences researcher at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Ciudad Juárez, there is a certain fallacy in picking a single date to mark the beginning of femicide. Monárrez Fragoso, who studies gender and violence, has been writing about femicide

⁴ Shepard Fairey is an American contemporary graphic artist well known for his graffiti images, and he is considered one of the most influential street artists in the world.

⁵ Although my analysis focuses on femicide in Ciudad Juárez, as Angélica Cházaro, Jennifer Casey, and Katherine Ruhl note in the article “Getting Away with Murder: Guatemala’s Failure to Protect Women and Rodi Alvarado’s Quest for Safety,” femicide is also a growing problem in Guatemala, where more than 2,200 women have been murdered since 2001 (93). This essay, included in the volume *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas*, is accompanied by other essays about femicide in Argentina and Costa Rica, pointing to the fact that femicide is a far-reaching problem.

for almost two decades. Any such artificial start date ignores the deep roots of the problem of violence against women, and the lack of institutional rights afforded to them that have led to the escalation of femicide in Ciudad Juárez. Perhaps hundreds of impoverished young women, perhaps thousands have been victims of femicide since the early 1990s.⁶



Figure 1.2. Maya Goded © 2004. This photo was taken at an elementary school in Ciudad Juárez where a young girl was abducted and later murdered. Courtesy of Maya Goded.

Reliable statistics on the early years of femicide are difficult to find. Even today, efforts to systematize death counts in the city are not initiated by officials in Ciudad Juárez. Rather, individuals like Monárrez Fragoso have been gathering, analyzing, and publishing femicide data independently. Indeed, one pressing argument made for the legalization of the term *feminicide*, which occurred in the state of Mexico in July 26,

⁶ According to statistics gathered by Cervera and Julia Monárrez Fragoso, “Los feminicidios comienzan a acumularse en cantidades superiores a los cien casos en los grupos de edad que van de los 15 a los 39 años” (“Sistema de información geográfica de la violencia en el municipio de Juárez, Chihuahua: Geo-referenciación y su comportamiento espacial en el contexto urbano y rural (SIGVIDA)” (9).

2011, was that it could force officials to recognize, record, and investigate the murder of women. Those convicted of the crime of femicide will receive a prison sentence from 20 to 60 years.⁷

María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba, the Director of the Center for Inter-American Border Studies and a professor at the University of Texas El Paso, has written extensively about femicide. Since 1992 she has also been a researcher at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, and in 1995 became a regional director at the school. During our 2010 interview she argued, “In Mexico if everything goes under *homicidio*, then it’s going to be very hard for you to find out how many women have been killed and what are the causes of death” (Personal Interview). Tabuenca Córdoba pointed to a system in which all deaths were filed as homicides, and the police often did not record the specific causes of death. Her statement has proven true given that the most accurate records of femicide are still kept by individuals, researchers, and journalists rather than by the police or a state or federal institution.

Mostly poor, young women – the target victims of femicide in Ciudad Juárez – are also marginalized geographically by economic constraints that push them to the edges of the city or limit them to a particular geographical area.⁸ In the areas where they live,

⁷ For further information consult the recent article “Cárcel de 20 y hasta 60 años por el *feminicidio*” by Leticia Fernández and Silvia Arellano <http://impreso.milenio.com/node/8998917>. Although the term is recognized in the state of Mexico including Mexico City, it is not recognized in all of the states of the country.

⁸ Alma Guillermoprieto describes the victims of femicide as follows: “dark-skinned, long-haired young girls waiting at a bus stop or emerging from a factory are likely to come from families that are poor and nearly defenseless in a bureaucratic, overloaded and user-hostile legal system” (84). However, Molly Molloy, the research librarian at New Mexico State University and one of the most avid recorders of homicide and femicide deaths in Ciudad Juárez, believes this description is inadequate because, “The majority of all females between a certain age are young, most of them are slim, and by far they all have dark hair. It is a profile of your basic woman in Juárez” (Personal Interview).

there is often little or no infrastructure – no city lights, no sanitation, no roads, no public transportation, and no electricity. Mónarrez Fragoso points out that

No es irrelevante, por ejemplo, en el caso de Ciudad Juárez, que cuando un cadáver de mujer es encontrado, tiene 80 por ciento de probabilidades de pertenecer a la zona del poniente de la ciudad, donde se encuentra el mayor déficit de infraestructura urbana en electricidad, agua potable, drenaje y pavimento; donde además se concentra la población inmigrante. (*Trama de una injusticia* 61)

Residents' lives are cut short by violence that reduces the average lifespan. Works of cultural production pose the question: to what extent are such fleeting lives represented in memory discourse, in the community of Ciudad Juárez and beyond? Addressing this issue in the present study, I analyze fiction and non-fiction works, collections of images, documentary films, and objects of art produced in response to femicide between 1998 and 2008. This analysis explores what techniques writers, filmmakers, academics, and artists have used in cultural production to portray the physical and human geography of memory. How has cultural production worked to change the sexist discourse around femicide, one that blames women for inhabiting public space, for walking alone, and for going out at night. In my analysis of cultural production and memory projects, I argue that representations of femicide victims in documentary film, novels, non-fiction, art, and graffiti express anxiety about the way women traverse and inhabit the geography of Ciudad Juárez, often giving precedence to the idea of the public female body as hypersexualized. In order to reclaim the victims' memory some cultural producers focus on the testimonial form in which families and other activists share their stories or construct informal memorials in the city; these remembrances later appear in works of non-fiction, film, and art, as markers of the process of creating and preserving memory.

The works included in this investigation are the photo essay *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* (1998) by Charles Bowden, the video essay *Performing the Border* (1999) by Ursula Biemann, the documentary *Señorita extraviada* (2001) by Lourdes Portillo, the investigative non-fiction work *Huesos en el desierto* (2002) by Sergio González Rodríguez, the novel *2666* (2004) by Roberto Bolaño, the documentary *La batalla de las cruces: protesta social y acciones colectivas en torno de la violencia sexual en Ciudad Juárez* (2005) by Patricia Ravelo Blancas and Rafael Bonilla, the art exhibit *Frontera 450+* (2006) curated by Rosalinda González at The Station Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston, Texas, and ephemeral art such as graffiti and local memorials.⁹ With regard to the latter, for example, I discuss the pink crosses erected in the *Campo Algodonero* where the bodies of eight women were discovered in 2001.¹⁰ Exploring the city for signs of *ecotestimonios*, subsequent chapters will investigate the significance of local monuments and crosses painted on telephone poles around the city, thus tracing the history of different groups working to define memory in public space.¹¹ In addition, my analysis relies on interviews that put academics and cultural producers into conversation about feminicide.

⁹ Another important non-fiction work is *Cosecha de mujeres: safari en el desierto mexicano* (2005) by journalist Diana Washington Valdez.

¹⁰ The Campo Algodonero is located on the eastern edge of the city at the intersection of Avenida Ejército Nacional and Avenida Paseo de la Victoria.

¹¹ As Diana Washington Valdez noted in the *El Paso Times* article “Juárez Mayor Plans Monument to Women Slain in Border City” on January 30, 2010, Ciudad Juárez Mayor José Reyes Ferriz announced that the city would accept proposals from artists across Mexico for a monument to memorialize victims of feminicide.



Figure. 1.3. Alice Driver © 2011. This cross, with nails representing each femicide victim, was installed in 2002 at the Paso del Norte Bridge, the main passage between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso.

In defining the role of a woman, dead or alive, in public space in Ciudad Juárez, it is necessary to address issues of sexuality and power. Femicide victims and their families have been marked by a pervasive public discourse about female sexuality, a discourse that has reappeared in many works of cultural production. My concept of power is intrinsically linked to sexuality, and is informed by Michel Foucault's study *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (1984). Foucault discusses how modern changes in the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality require "a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power" (5). Sex, which is at once taboo and ever-present in modern media societies, must be reframed in relationship to its ubiquity in cultural discourse. This need is clear in Ciudad Juárez, where victims of femicide are often criticized for being prostitutes, and the rape and mutilation of their bodies is implied to be a result of their profession or lifestyle. To participate in sex work as a woman is seemingly, according to public discourse, equally offensive as or more offensive than the

rape or murder of a woman. What sexual politics are at work in this relationship?

Monárrez Fragoso discusses how gender differences enter into Foucault's framework:

El sujeto/cuerpo, en una estructura binaria que atraviesa la sociedad no es neutral, para Foucault, siempre es un adversario de alguien, por eso hay dos grupos, dos categorías de individuos: hombres y mujeres. En esta dicotomía, las víctimas del feminicidio sexual sistémico siempre son analizadas y evaluadas en relación con su comportamiento, que se aleja de la objetivación del ideal femenino, o en la falta que cometieron al no cumplir con el papel asignado a los géneros. (*Trama de una injusticia* 206)

Women are confined to certain societal roles that also dictate how and when they should inhabit public space. For Foucault, "What is at issue, briefly, is the over-all 'discursive fact,' the way in which sex is put into discourse" (11). This is a central consideration in the study of femicide, because raped and mutilated female bodies become frequent fodder for discussion in cultural and media production. The media and other cultural producers often turn to images of naked, raped, mutilated bodies, as if a confession could be exacted from the body in that manner. Foucault points out that historically, "while the language may have been refined, the scope of the confession – the confession of the flesh – continually increased" (19). The demands placed on the female body in assessing and confining perceived sexuality in both life and death are evident in the discourse on femicide.

The theoretical term *femicide* was coined in England in 1801, and popularized almost two centuries later by the South African feminist writer and activist Diana E.H. Russell in the book *The Politics of Rape: The Victims Perspective* (1975) and in *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (1992), a book Russell wrote with Jill Radford. As Monárrez Fragoso explains, "[t]he term is defined as the misogynist killing of women by men and a form of continuity of sexual assault, where you must take into account: the

acts of violence, the motives and the imbalance of power between the sexes in political, social and economic environments” (“Serial Sexual Femicide” 9). In current debates on the killings, the terms *homicide*, *femicide*, and *feminicide* have been used interchangeably. As Kathleen Staudt, a professor of political science at the University of Texas El Paso, observes, “I actually think that there is quite a lot of confusion around the definition of *femicide* and *feminicide*. Is it just any murders of women? Is it misogynist driven? How can we prove that in a court of law?” (Personal Interview). Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, the editors of *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas* (2010), address these concerns. The authors argue that

[...] the level and extreme nature of violence against women requires a new concept such as *feminicide*, which can work as a conceptual tool not only for antiviolenace advocacy but to further a feminist analytics on gender-based violence. It is thus crucial that we build on the definition of *feminicide* with sufficient conceptual precision and clarify what can and should be considered feminicide. (7)

Fregoso and Bejarano argue that even though the terms *femicide* and *feminicide* have been used interchangeably, the term *feminicide* provides for an analysis of the murder of women based on gendered power structures and the inequalities created by social, political, and cultural institutions (3-4).¹²

¹² In the introduction to *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas* editors Fregoso and Bejarano discuss the terms *femicide* and *feminicide*, and argue for the use of *feminicide*. They explain, “[t]he concepts of feminicide and femicide are used interchangeably in the literature on gender-based violence and among the contributors to this volume. These are evolving concepts that, as noted in Bueno-Hansen’s chapter, are ‘still under construction.’ However, we will make a case for *feminicide* and, in the process, contribute some analytic tools for thinking about the concept in historical, theoretical, and political terms. In arguing for the use of the term *feminicide* over *femicide*, we draw from a feminist analytical perspective that interrupts essentialist notions of female identity that equate gender and biological sex and looks instead to the gendered nature of practices and behaviors, along with the performance of gender norms. As feminist thinkers have long contended, gender is a socially constructed category in which the performance of gender norms (rather than a natural biological essence) is what gives meaning to categories of the ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine.’ Instead of a scenario in which gender and sex necessarily concur, the concept of feminicide allows us to map the power dynamics and relations of gender, sexuality, race, and class underlying violence and, in so doing, shift the analytic focus to how gender norms, inequities, and power relationships increase women’s vulnerabilities to violence” (3-4).

My analysis of the term *feminicide* focuses on the relationship between language and unequal power relations, a relationship that is nowhere more evident than in cultural production. For example, many works of cultural production avoid the term *feminicide* entirely. In a 2004 article in *La Jornada* Jenaro Villamil discusses the position of author Carlos Monsiváis about feminicide. Monsiváis states his belief that feminicide should be classified as a hate crime: “El feminicidio es un término descriptivo, pero comenzar a clasificarlos como crímenes de odio nos obliga a hacer una reflexión seria en relación al machismo en su oprobio físico y en la investigación de los crímenes” (1). Since the time when Monsiváis made this comment, the term feminicide has evolved theoretically. In *Terrorizing Women* Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos, a profesor of Anthropology and Sociology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, defines feminicide as “one of the extreme forms of gender violence; it is constituted by the whole set of violent misogynist acts against women that involve a violation of their human rights, represent an attack on their safety, and endanger their lives. It culminates in the murder of girls and women” (xxiii).

In contrast to Monsiváis, author Charles Bowden believes that the terms *femicide* and *feminicide* are not useful for describing crimes (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 375). His perspective is evident in his photo essay, which discusses a myriad of forms of violence with no specific focus on feminicide. In our interview, Bowden explained that he preferred to use the term homicide to discuss the murder of both men and women (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 375). Like Bowden, Patricio Martínez, the governor of Chihuahua from 1998-2004, has expressed disbelief in the usefulness of the term *feminicide* or the theoretical views that underlie it; he asserts that,

because more men have been killed than women, there is no reason to view the women as particular targets of gender-based violence.¹³ As Monárrez Fragoso explains, Martínez “reafirma la posición falocéntrica de que, incluso en el feminicidio, el asesinato de mujeres sólo es importante y tiene que ver con relación primero a lo que ocurre con los hombres” (*Trama de una injusticia* 243). In addition, in “Death in a Transnational Metropolitan Region” Monárrez Fragoso notes that

[i]n the year 2003, when Amnesty International presented its report *Intolerable Killings* regarding *feminicide* in Chihuahua, Governor Patricio Martínez (1998-2004) refused to accept its recommendations. With cynicism, he made it seem as though Amnesty International was responsible for carelessness around the reporting of homicides. He asked the organization “How many of them [the assassinated] have been massacred by the mafias? And, what has Amnesty International done to stop it? Or is it that the executed dead persons have no human rights?” He forgot that he was the one responsible and accountable for the answers to these questions. (30)¹⁴

Both Governor Martínez and Chihuahua Governor Francisco Barrio Terrazas (1992-1998) have argued that the murder rate of women in Ciudad Juárez is similar to that of other cities in Mexico.¹⁵ This represents an attempt to normalize feminicide by informing the public that the seemingly high murder rate of women is normal. It also reflects the proliferation of contradictory statistics that exist about feminicide and suggests the elusive nature of the truth about violence against women.¹⁶

¹³ As Tabuenca Córdoba recorded in “Ghost Dance in Ciudad Juárez at the End/Beginning of the Millennium,” Governor Martínez, in a statement made to *El Diario* on November 18, 1998, discussed his Zero Tolerance Program to help curb feminicide: “I want Ciudad Juárez to go to sleep early; I want everyone to be home by 2:00 AM” (*Making a Killing* 108).

¹⁴ Monárrez Fragoso’s source for this information is the article “Trueno Patricio contra Amnistía Internacional” by Angélica Ulate published on August 13, 2003 in *El Diario* of Ciudad Juárez.

¹⁵ On December 2, 1997 Barrio Terrazas argued that the percentage of women murdered in Ciudad Juárez was “normal.” This and other statements made Barrio Terrazas about violence against women were reported in the article “Barrio Terrazas: dejó atrás el feminicidio y es embajador en Canadá” (2009) by Gladis Torres Ruiz.

¹⁶ Information on the number of feminicides is disparate and often contradictory. For example, the title of the 2006 museum exhibition *450+* reflects the idea that the official body count was at least 450 at that point in time. There is no official, accessible site to find police body counts, and the difficulty of counting feminicides is evidenced by the fact that multiple researchers have been forced to pore over Ciudad Juárez

Monárrez Fragoso, like many other academics and researchers writing about femicide, recognizes that

[a]simismo, debemos reconocer que estas agendas de opresión no solamente son para las mujeres, sino también para muchos grupos de hombres del llamado tercer mundo que son controlados y marginalizados en su total humanidad ya que, de ninguna manera, desde el análisis feminista, tenemos que pensar que el “hombre”, en el sentido de ver un género ganando nuevos privilegios y al mismo tiempo suprimiendo los del otro. (*Trama de una injusticia* 252)

The fact that Bowden sees a focus on femicide as antithetical to understanding broader issues of violence in the city is a point of view that posits the study of one kind of violence as oppositional to the study of another. However, there is no reason to believe that the focus on women detracts from an overall understanding of violence.

The overtly public nature of the crimes and the lack of credible suspects produced by the police highlight the inadequacy of the justice system.¹⁷ Kathleen Staudt describes how “[p]olice lose murder reports, evidence goes missing, cases are mysteriously closed or solved, and the number of mutilation-rape female homicides changes depending on which party controls state government” (*Violence and Activism* 33). This situation requires that families of the victims function in the interstices of the justice system; they create a parallel informal system for the investigation of crimes or the search for bodies of victims. Families also produce memorials, posters, paintings, and other works of public art to commemorate the memory of victims of femicide. These create a system of visual symbols that seek to remind women of the danger they face in public spaces.

newspapers to get an estimate of the potential body count. Molly Molloy, through the group Frontera List, provides the most widely used source of information about the daily, weekly, and monthly daily death tolls in Ciudad Juárez.

¹⁷ The bodies of victims have frequently been left in central locations in the city, sometimes in groups, as the bodies of eight women were left in the Campo Algodonero in 2001. A question that has been raised many times over the years is: How can bodies continually be left in public spaces with no witnesses?

Public space and the geography of the city are at the center of the feminicide debate because successive administrations and government officials of Ciudad Juárez, especially during the years of 1993-1998, focused anti-feminicide campaigns on the right and wrong ways in which a woman could inhabit public space. For example, as Tabuenca Córdoba discusses in “Ghost Dance in Ciudad Juárez at the End/Beginning of the Millenium,” in 1995 mayor Ramón Galindo started a publicity campaign in the local newspapers *El Diario* and *Norte* in which he gave women the following advice about their safety: “Carry a whistle. Do not dress provocatively. When you leave home, let everyone know where you are going and when you will be returning. If you are attacked, do not yell ‘Help.’ Instead yell, ‘Fire’ so more people will pay attention to your cry. Help us by taking care of yourself” (102). The message is clear: women need to consider very carefully when and where they go publicly.

In his 2003 study of the politics of memory *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Andreas Huyssen, a professor of German and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, discusses the relationship between memory and justice related to monuments constructed in Berlin, Buenos Aires, and New York. Huyssen describes how “[s]ecuring the past is no less risky an enterprise than securing the future. Memory, after all, can be no substitute for justice and justice itself will inevitably be entangled in the unreliability of memory” (28).¹⁸ In the case of Ciudad Juárez, the trauma of feminicide has inspired numerous local, national, and international works of art, literature, and film that have served as markers of symbolic justice. Given the absolute

¹⁸ For example, in his discussion of the Holocaust, he observes the importance of what is remembered, how it is remembered, and when it is remembered. He discusses how the artist Christo wrapped the Rieschtag in fabric – a veiling that simultaneously unveiled the landmark. For Huyssesn, Christo’s nomadic art installation, which lasted only a few days, is an example of a how to provoke memory of the Holocaust without invoking the nineteenth century monumental aesthetic of kitsch and mass culture (39).

lack of institutional justice, works of film, art, and literature have had to function as proxies for that justice. These works help families and victims regain authority over the narrative of their own lives by offering them a platform to rebut official rhetoric that tends to blame women for the violence they experience. This rhetoric, as Jane Caputi and Russell explain in the introduction to *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (1992), may be termed *victimology*. According to them, “Victimology is a way of explaining crime that is popular within criminology. It holds that those victimized by crime are often responsible for it” (5). Given that the tortured bodies of victims are a stark reminder of the failures of the police to investigate crimes and of the courts to persecute criminals in Ciudad Juárez, and, on a larger scale, Mexico, politicians and news outlets engage in tactics to divest corpses of their power.¹⁹ Melissa Wright, a professor of geography and women’s studies at Penn State, explores the politics of death in her article “Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico-U.S. Border.” She examines “how the wars over the political meaning of death in relation to both femicide and to the events called drug violence unfold through a gendering of space, of violence, and of subjectivity” (709). Necropolitics is nowhere more evident than in newspapers and news programs that gain access to crime sites in order to film the naked, violated bodies of the victims, thereby representing them as singularly sexual beings and stripping them of dignity.

My dissertation analyzes these issues in the subsequent four chapters. Chapter Two, “Representations of Femicide in Documentary Cinema: Searching for

¹⁹ President Felipe Calderón has responded to violence in Ciudad Juárez by militarizing the border town. The escalating violence and accusations of unethical and illegal behavior by troops call into questions whether Calderón’s plan is effectively addressing the central causes of the violence.

Ecotestimonios,” analyzes the city of Ciudad Juárez in two documentary films, *Señorita Extraviada* and *La batalla de las cruces* and one video essay, *Performing the Border*. I examine how these films represent *ecotestimonio*, symbolic testimony about feminicide that has been incorporated into the urban geography of Ciudad Juárez. The films show how activists make their mark on public space in order to promote memory of victims of feminicide. Chapter Three, “Of the Flesh: Graphic Depictions of Feminicide,” discusses representations of victims of feminicide in the photo essay *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future*, the non-fiction investigative work *Huesos en el desierto*, and the novel *2666*. It examines the ethics of graphic representations of violence as represented in these works, contrasting the use of sexist stereotypes in *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* with the focus on memory seen in the other two works. Chapter Four, “*Frontera 450+*: The Museum as a Memory Site,” looks at the role of the museum as a site for remembering, focusing on the first full museum exhibition on feminicide in the United States, *Frontera 450+*. Chapter Five presents my conclusions and is structured around analysis of graffiti and memorials in Ciudad Juárez.

SEARCHING FOR A DEFINITION OF FEMINICIDE

Feminicide is not new: it is and always has been a weapon of war (and, yes, there is a war in Ciudad Juárez. Anyone who has been to the city and seen the thousands of black-clad *federales* manning check points and driving through the city with machine guns and bullet-proof vests becomes aware of this). When I met with Julia Monárrez Fragoso in 2011, she observed, “En Ciudad Juárez tenemos un conflicto bélico, con los federales, con los militares, la gente que ha sido desplazada de Ciudad Juárez, el

abandono de muchos hogares, muchas casas. Las víctimas, las mujeres viudas, las familias desintegradas, eso es parte de un conflicto bélico” (Personal Interview). In addition, in her recent article “Death in a Transnational Metropolitan Region,” Monárrez Fragoso points out that “War is not a new word for this frontier, given the use of assault weapons and warlike discourse: the city’s homicides are describe as executions; and the parties to deaths are sometimes called troops, commanders, chiefs, or traitors” (29). What is new is the term *feminicide*, the codification of the violence and the idea that the murder of women merits a category unto itself. We have homicide, parricide, matricide, fratricide, and infanticide: why not also feminicide? There are cultural attitudes, societal beliefs, and types of violence that represent the station of women in society, and they should be codified and studied as such. One of the central problems in Ciudad Juárez and in other emerging areas of feminicide like Oaxaca and Guatemala City is that the circumstances of women’s deaths are not recorded. Women are murdered, but few advances are made in terms of understanding the underlying causes of their deaths or how to prevent such violence in the future.

This discussion of terminology is also relevant because over the course of the two years spent researching and writing this study, the term *femicide* evolved into *feminicide* in academic circles, and that evolution touched off debates among academics and cultural producers alike. Feminicide is a broad category encompassing many different types of violence against women. The type of feminicide most publicized in the media is what Monárrez Fragoso labels “serial sexual feminicide.” She defines these feminicides in the following manner:

The classification of serial femicide was based on the following indicators: the location where the victim was found, generally a vacant locality: if the

coroner's report indicated a rape had occurred; when no such information was available, the fact that the body was unclothed, the state in which the body was left as well as the various tortures or mutilations the body was subjected to were all taken into account. ("Serial Sexual Femicide" 15)²⁰

In Violencia contra las mujeres e inseguridad ciudadana en Ciudad Juárez, Monárrez

Fragoso defines a total of fourteen categories of femicide, including those resulting from causes such as youth violence, vengeance, robbery, drug trafficking, and familial violence.²¹

According to Monárrez Fragoso, of the 110 feminicides that took place between 1993 and 2001, 89 were serial sexual feminicides that involved rape or mutilation ("Serial Sexual Femicide" 17). Monárrez Fragoso argues that networks of patriarchal power maintain systems of impunity that protect those who participate in violence against women (*Trama de una injusticia* 217). These same systems relegate the victims of femicide to a secondary status in which their bodies are put on display as symbols of their overtly sexual nature. Works of cultural production employ various tactics to recover the full narratives of these women and to rescue their bodies from the monomania of a discourse that reduces women to the sum of their body parts.

It is important to point out that men, women, and children of all classes, though predominantly the poorest and darkest-skinned segments of the population, suffer from extreme violence in Ciudad Juárez.²² For example, in "Cinco historias" (2004) Julián

²⁰ In the article, Monárrez Fragoso describes the difficulty of finding reliable sources of data and explains why she had to rely on newspaper reports to categorize the types and numbers of femicide deaths: "The analysis presented in this paper is based on 'secondary' sources, which could invalidate this endeavor. Another question could be raised: what need is there to repeat what newspapers have been in charge of communicating throughout the years. Nevertheless, these secondary sources cease from being such and become 'primary' because they are the experiences of women concerned about the massacre of other women" (14)

²¹ These categories are displayed in a chart on page 417.

²² Although a majority of victims of femicide are poor, I do not mean to imply that all victims have been young and poor. As Bejarano and Fregoso note, "The girls and women murdered in Mexico had different

Cardona writes that in Ciudad Juárez, “todas las formas de violencia se entrelazan, no existe una sin la otra: la violencia entre pandillas emparentada con la del narcotráfico, y la violencia económica y física – contra la mujer en medio de ambas” (28). The violence is such that, between the violence and the subsequent fear-based flight, the city has lost a significant percentage of its population in recent years. In an August 2010 article, Randy Anaya reported that “[r]ecent provisional data from the INEGI show that Ciudad Juárez has lost about 24% of its population. A city of 1.3 million has shrunk to one million, and 60 thousand families have migrated to other areas of Mexico or to the U.S.” (1). The magnitude of the violence highlights the complexity of defining femicide or separating the causes of the murder of women from the violence that affects all citizens.²³ In 2009 Monárrez Fragoso published statistics on femicide in *Trama de una injusticia*. She recorded an estimated total number of femicides between 1993 and 2004, basing her statistics on information gathered from the *Diario de Juárez*. However, Monárrez Fragoso admits the difficulty of gathering reliable statistics: “considero que puede haber un mayor número de mujeres asesinadas” (*Trama de una injusticia* 9). In 2010 she worked with cartographer Luis Cervera, César M. Fuentes Flores, and Rodolfo Rubio Salas to produce the most advanced statistical analysis of femicide to date: *Violencia contra las mujeres e inseguridad ciudadana en Ciudad Juárez*. Her efforts underscore the

ages, and included girls, elderly women, young women, older women, and adolescents. They belonged to all social classes and socioeconomic strata; some were rich women, from the upper class and elite, though the majority were poor or marginal” (*Terrorizing Women* xviii). Bolaño’s *2666* is also critical of describing victims in such simplistic terms. Chucho Flores, a resident of Santa Teresa, says of the murdered women, “La mayoría son trabajadoras de las maquiladoras. Muchachas jóvenes y de pelo largo, Pero eso no es necesariamente la marca del asesino, en Santa Teresa casi todas las muchachas llevan el pelo largo” (363). In *Violencia contra las mujeres e inseguridad ciudadana en Ciudad Juárez* there is a map on page 437 that shows the residence (and thus the socio-economic status) of femicide victims found between 1993-2005. The victims live in predominantly poor *colonias* like Lomas de Poleo.

²³ However, according to Cervera and Monárrez Fragoso, “Los más vulnerados son hombres jóvenes, pobres, sin opciones de empleo, sin estudio ni oportunidades” (“Diagnostico geo-socio-económico de Ciudad Juárez y su sociedad” 11).

fact that, to date, no government agency has produced reliable statistics, forcing committed citizens and activists to step in and gather information themselves.

Molly Molloy, a librarian at New Mexico State University, tracks the overall death count in Ciudad Juárez and sends daily emails synthesizing information about border violence to hundreds of researchers, writers, and academics through the Frontera List. As described in a 2010 article by Ana Campoy in the *Wall Street Journal*, Molloy “spends most mornings sifting reports in the Mexican press to create a tally of drug-cartel-related killings in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. She is striving to fill a widening information gap about these homicides in Juárez, some 50 miles southeast of Las Cruces, across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas” (1). Molloy worked to compile statistics on homicide rates in Ciudad Juárez between 1993 and 2011, culling homicide statistics of both men and women from Ciudad Juárez newspapers like *Diario de Juárez* and *Norte de Ciudad Juárez*. Molloy questions the usefulness of the terms *femicide* and *feminicide*. For her, the “obsession with the specific killings of certain women in Juárez starting in the early 90s forward really obscures what’s actually going on, which is violence against so many more people” (Personal Interview).

Molloy stresses the difficulty of collecting data in a city where official reports on murder rates fluctuate wildly. She argues that

[t]here are no standard reliable numbers for such statistics in Juárez. I spoke to a Juárez journalist who keeps some statistics recently. He laughed at my desire to obtain “reliable official statistics” from the Procuraduría, the Chihuahua State prosecutor's office. He said that most journalists take these official reports with some measure of skepticism and that they try to augment these with their own tallies from media reports. Since almost none of the more than 4,700 murders since January 2008 have been prosecuted, nor will they ever be prosecuted, there really is no way to verify these statistics. (Email)

According to the statistics compiled by Monárrez Fragoso and Molloy, if the murders are analyzed in terms of gender, between 1993 and 2010 the number of women murdered makes up 18% or less of the total homicides in any given year (Monárrez Fragoso *Trama de una injusticia*; Molloy “Juárez Murders”). For example, in 1997 women were the victims of 32 of 215 officially reported homicides (“Diagnóstico geo-socio-económico de Ciudad Juárez y su sociedad” 279). How different people and organizations have interpreted these statistics varies greatly.

In *Murder City* (2010) Bowden argues that “Focusing on the dead women enables Americans to ignore the dead men, and ignoring the dead men enables the United States to ignore the failure of its free-trade schemes, which in Juárez are producing poor people and dead people faster than any product” (13-14). I disagree with Bowden’s interpretation of statistics because it pits attention paid to the death of women against that of the death of men. Any movement to end violence against women and femicide will also benefit families, children, and the community. As Cynthia Bejarano, assistant professor of Criminal Justice at New Mexico State University and the editor of *Terrorizing Women* asserts, “The importance of what we are arguing is that the terms *femicide* and *feminicide* should be understood as a broad base to argue all types of violence against women and girls. This is violence toward or against all community members” (Personal Interview). For example, she pointed out that many of the crime labs that have been funded as a result of the movement to resolve femicide deaths have benefited the entire community of Ciudad Juárez (Personal Interview).

Some politicians and writers question how and why the murder of men and women has been defined differently. In order to understand the issue, it is necessary to

consider the arguments for and against the use of the term *feminicide*. Radford, who wrote about femicide before the development of the term feminicide, believes that

Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of antifemale terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery (particularly prostitution), incestuous and extrafamilial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment (on the phone, in the office, and in the classroom), genital mutilation, (clitoridectomies, excision, infibulations), unnecessary gynecological operations (gratuitous hysterectomies), forced heterosexuality, forced sterilization, forced motherhood (by criminalizing contraception and abortion), psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, cosmetic surgery, and other mutilations in the name of beautification. Whenever these forms of terrorism result in a death, they become femicides. (*Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* 15)

Monárrez Fragoso believes that the term *feminicide* should be used “como un concepto político que describe a la mujer en el asesinato de que es objeto” (*Trama de una injusticia* 9). She emphasizes the political nature of the term, and points out that feminicide is a tool of patriarchal culture to maintain an environment in which women cannot feel safe in public space.

However, as Staudt points out feminicide is “a word that really jolts people because they hear genocide. It sounds like mass murder” (Personal Interview). During my interview with Staudt, which took place in her office at the University of Texas in El Paso, she pointed to a poster on her office wall and said, “Take a look at the Amnesty [International] poster. They use some of the same dramatic language. ‘Welcome to Juárez, 1.2 million inhabitants. Men are half the population. The women are all in the cemetery’” (Personal Interview).²⁴ As she points out, the use of exaggerated language on the Amnesty International poster misrepresents the situation. Cultural production that

²⁴ The Amnesty International poster shows a road sign next to a cemetery full of white crosses. The road sign reads, “Bienvenido a Cd. Juárez. Habitantes 1,218, 817. Hombres 613,064. The word “MUJERES” appears at the bottom of the sign with a large arrow pointing to the cemetery.

exaggerates or distorts the truth about femicide does not lead to a better understanding of the situation in Ciudad Juárez.

The terms *femicide* and *feminicide* have caused yet another type of confusion, since many people think they describe only the serial sexual killings, and exclude issues of domestic violence or other gender-motivated violence. However, *femicide* refers more generally to gender-motivated violence, and *feminicide* has evolved to include an analysis of violence that results from both gender and the performance of gender, as well as the power structures that create inequalities for women.²⁵ According to Staudt, “All the emphasis on femicide muted public attention to ‘ordinary’ domestic violence” (*Human Rights* 116). In many of the feminicide cases that have been “resolved” according to authorities, the victims’ husbands, partners, or family members have been implicated and jailed.²⁶ However, most cultural production about feminicide, including many of the works being analyzed here, although they mention domestic violence, often focus on unsolved cases that involve sexual violence.

The mystery of a serial killer or an unknown criminal has been a more compelling storyline for the media, but the problem of domestic violence and abuse also needs to be addressed in discussions of feminicide.²⁷ Staudt emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balanced discussion that includes domestic violence, something that this dissertation does not explore extensively due to the fact that the works of cultural

²⁵ The article “Violence and Transvestite/Transgender Sex Workers in Tijuana” by Debra A. Castillo, María Gudelia Rangel Gómez, and Armando Rosas Solís in *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (2010, Eds. Héctor Domínguez and Ignacio Corona) is one of the first to link the issues of feminicide, violence against women, and transgender subjects.

²⁶ *Bajo Juárez* (2006) by Alejandra Sánchez includes the testimony of David Maza, the cousin of Lilia Alejandra, a victim of feminicide. Maza, a resident of Chiapas, traveled to Ciudad Juárez to help his family search for Lilia Alejandra. However, despite the fact that he had not been in the city at the time of his cousin’s death, he was accused of her murder and imprisoned for three years.

²⁷ *16 en la lista* (1998) is an example of a film whose plot centers on a psychotic serial killer.

production included do not focus on domestic violence.²⁸ I do recognize the need for a serious discussion of domestic violence both in cultural production and in academic investigations. As Staudt observes, “Dramatic organizing, from informal mothers’ groups to NGOs on both sides of the border and transnational NGOs, framed their movements on the sexualized-torture murders, rather than the more ‘routine’ domestic violence murders” (*Violence and Activism* 116). In turn, filmmakers and writers who traveled to the area to conduct research saw the debate framed to focus on the sexualized nature of the murders, which influenced the resulting cultural production. A discussion of domestic violence requires preventive work such as that undertaken by Esther Chávez Cano, an activist who worked tirelessly to found the first domestic violence shelter in the city.²⁹ At *Casa Amiga*, Chávez Cano organized workshops for both men and women about how to prevent domestic violence. Monárrez Fragoso also talks about domestic violence highlighting how a discussion of one type of abuse sheds light on the other:

A la par, la violencia extrema que sufren las mujeres en Ciudad Juárez puso en la mesa de discusión otros abusos en contra ellas, que si bien no siempre terminan con la vida de las niñas y mujeres en esta frontera, sí ponen límites para vivir una existencia digna, en libertad e independiente de cualquier forma de maltrato: la violencia que sufren las mujeres en el ámbito doméstico por parte de sus parejas. (*Violencia contra las mujeres e inseguridad ciudadana en Ciudad Juárez* 567)

In contrast, the narrative of a mysterious killer or killers roaming the city is more sensational. It creates a situation in which anger is directed against a vague target, an ill-defined serial killer, deranged gang member, or bad cop.

²⁸ For more information on the relationship between femicide and domestic violence refer to the article “Surviving Domestic Violence in the Paso del Norte Border Region” (2010) by Kathleen Staudt and Rosalba Robles Peña.

²⁹ For more information on domestic violence in Ciudad Juárez refer to Kathleen Staudt’s 2000 article “Globalization and gender at border sites: Femicide and domestic violence in Ciudad Juárez” in *Gender and Global Restructuring: Signthings, Sites and Resistances*.

A DUAL DISCOURSE ON FEMINICIDE

A dual discourse surrounds the victims of femicide: 1) the public discourse of the media about out-of-control sexuality 2) the private discourse of families about responsible, hard-working daughters. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault recounts how sexuality evolved into an object of power, a means of codifying and controlling behavior. Power and pleasure are intimately connected, meaning that pleasure can be found both in seeking private information about peoples' sexual lives and in being able to evade this power. Sex is a locus of power in the femicide debate in Ciudad Juárez, and sexuality is used as a weapon to destroy and discredit victims of femicide.³⁰ Families of victims in Ciudad Juárez spend much of their time trying to protect the memory of victims from being marred by accusations related to their sexuality. To this end, many family members have participated in works of cultural production and given voice to their stories and memories. These works of cultural production evidence a rich counter-geography that contrasts with official discourse and represents a community of rememberers.

DID FEMINICIDE BEGIN IN 1993?

Newspaper articles and studies of femicide in Ciudad Juárez often state that the phenomenon began in 1993, the year before the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented. This date, rather than reflecting the beginning of femicide, is the year in which Ciudad Juárez activist Esther Chávez Cano noticed a trend in crimes

³⁰Ciudad Juárez has historically been portrayed in film, novels, and popular culture as a locus of sex, drugs, and alcohol. As Howard Campbell, a professor of sociology and anthropology at the University of Texas, El Paso describes, "Ciudad Juárez, like Tijuana, fabled in song and legend as a fleshpot and vice zone, is a city whose economy has relied on contraband smuggling and the provision of sex and drugs to a U.S. and Mexican market for approximately a hundred years" (97).

against women and began collecting data to better understand the issue. Cultural production is often forced to reference this date because it is when data began to be collected. However, as Roberto Bolaño's posthumously published novel *2666* (2004) emphasizes, the nature of the claim is arbitrary. The unidentified narrator of "La parte de los crímenes" in *2666* describes the first officially recorded feminicide, and then adds:

Esto ocurrió en 1993. En enero de 1993. A partir de esta muerte comenzaron a contarse los asesinatos de mujeres. Pero es probable que antes hubiera otras. La primera muerta se llamaba Esperanza Gómez Saldaña y tenía trece años. Pero es probable que no fuera la primera muerta. Tal vez por comodidad, por ser la primera asesinada en el año 1993, ella encabeza la lista. Aunque seguramente en 1992 murieron otras. (353)

This fictional work raises a question that has been repeated by academics such as Monárrez Fragoso and cultural producers such as filmmaker Lourdes Portillo: Did the crimes against women begin in 1993 or did they simply begin to be counted in that year? Certainly, in the mid-1990s the violence escalated when women's raped and mutilated bodies began to be dumped in numbers in abandoned lots and other public places. But in *Trama de una injusticia* Monárrez Fragoso details her efforts to prove that cases of feminicide occurred before 1993. She provides excerpts from newspaper articles published in 1991 and 1992 that describe the bodies of raped, murdered women dumped in public places (12-13).

The first year in which feminicides were recorded coincided with preparations for the implementation of NAFTA. The trade agreement resulted in the construction of hundreds of *maquiladoras* owned by transnational corporations like Sony and IBM in Ciudad Juárez and other border towns.³¹ Julián Cardona, a well-known photographer and

³¹ Offshore factories established by U.S. corporations in Mexico. Industries like electronics, clothing and automobiles, which traditionally have high labor costs, take advantage of low labor costs and decreased regulation in Mexico.

journalist in Ciudad Juárez, describes in darkly poetic terms the birth of NAFTA in the city. In a brochure introducing his 2006 photography exhibition “World Class City” at New Mexico State University, he wrote: “In the beginning, Ciudad Juárez barely glimmered in the pale light. Factories bloomed like cement flowers in the desert. Unemployment dwindled to the lowest rate in the hemisphere. Foreign investment boomed as world-class products were manufactured on every street corner” (1).³² However, the narrative of seemingly positive economic markers does not lead to peace and prosperity for those working in the factories. Cardona recounts: “Many who came to cash in on the bonanza saw their cardboard and pallet houses burn, their daughters disappear” (1). The factories were built to take advantage of cheap labor and duty-free or tariff-free zones. The possibility of work attracted men and women from all over Mexico and from neighboring countries.³³ In an environment in which women traversed great distances (on foot and on public transportation) to get to work, inhabited public spaces, made their own money, and pursued lives outside of the private sphere – the murders began, or, as Monárrez Fragoso and Bolaño suggest, began to increase.

Studies of femicide in Ciudad Juárez have cited the influence of Mexican political and institutional systems. For example, Monárrez Fragoso discusses how the State and other institutions with religious, economic, social, and political power seek to evaluate the suspect lifestyles of the victims rather than to investigate the crimes (*Trama de una*

³² For more information on Cardona’s life and work refer to the article “Camera of Dirt: Juárez Photographer Takes Forbidden Images in Foreign-Owned Factories” (2000) by Charles Bowden.

³³ The title given to victims of femicide in the news “Las muertas de Juárez” is not accurate (and perhaps a bit ironic) given the number of immigrants who have been victims of femicide. Many women migrated from impoverished rural areas in search of better opportunities. As Alicia Gaspar de Alba, an a professor of Chicana/o Studies at the University of California Los Angeles notes, “Una mayoría de las víctimas comparten las mismas características demográficas: ellas no eran, de hecho, hijas de Juárez, sino foráneas, mujeres emigrantes pobres de comunidades rurales y ciudades del interior de México, que llegaron a Juárez, no para cruzar la frontera sino para encontrar un trabajo en la maquiladora” (“The Maquiladora Murders” 4).

injusticia 38).³⁴ Both male and female politicians in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua have made statements indicating that women who work outside of the home or traverse public spaces at night are often assumed to be prostitutes.³⁵ Rosa-Linda Fregoso, a professor of Latin American and Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, suggests the need to take into consideration not only these cultural views, but also issues of power related to class and race (*MeXicana Encounters* 2). The physical violence of femicide can, to some extent, be linked to the economic violence inflicted by NAFTA.

IN BETWEEN PLACES

Ciudad Juárez has features that are unique to geographical borderlands: it is a conduit for goods, services, and people propelled by the engine of capitalist ideology. The border is a highly constructed place that gets reconstituted and reproduced through the crossing of people. Without people crossing, there is no border. Filmmaker Ursula Biemann suggests that the border is “the discursive space of the nation state” (*Performing the Border*). On the Mexican side of the border is a population dealing with underemployment and low wages, and on the United States side is an ever-growing demand for drugs and the money to buy them. As Monárrez Fragoso notes, “Space matters. Mexico is situated between the countries of the Andean region that produce

³⁴ For example, in “Ghost Dance in Ciudad Juárez at the End/Beginning of the Millennium” Tabuenca Córdoba discusses how “the investigations in Ciudad Juárez were already obstructed by two types of discourse that form part of Mexico’s everyday life: that of women as inferior beings or objects; and that of values, as former assistant attorney general Jorge López Molinar affirmed in an interview with the newspaper *El Nacional*: ‘All the victims were mischief makers or even prostitutes.’ Such views were also expounded by former governor Francisco Barrio Terrazas” (100).

³⁵ For example, Francisco Barrio Terrazas, governor of Chihuahua from 1992-1998, declared about the victims in 2001, “Las muchachas se mueven en ciertos lugares, frecuentan cierto tipo de gentes, y entran una cierta confianza con, pues, con mal vivientes, con gentes de bandas que luego se convierten en sus agresores” (*Señorita Extraviada*).

cocaine and the United States, which is the most lucrative market in the world for the consumption of illegal drugs and the largest consumer of cocaine; 90 percent of the cocaine consumed in the United States passes through México” (“Death in a Transnational Metropolitan Region” 33). Illicit activities such as the drug trade thus flourish along the border. With the drug trade comes the violence of cartels fighting to control the drug market. However, Cardona argues that, “para mí, el discurso de que se están matando por el Chapo [Guzmán] y Vicente [Carrillo] es un discurso hueco. No te permite explicar lo que pasa en la ciudad ni en el país” (Personal Interview May 25, 2011). Cardona believes that the discussion of the drug trade needs to be expanded to explore the link between rising local drug use and increased rates of violence. Currently, most of the discussion focuses on the influence of moving drugs across borders rather than on local drug use.³⁶

In addition to drug trafficking across borders, Cardona also points to the influence of the emerging local drug market on violence against women. Cardona believes that more research needs to be conducted on the connection between growing local drug use and violence against women. He believes, “Lo que cambió en los años 1990, empezó a subir el consumo de droga local, y eso vino aparejado con un mayor crecimiento de la violencia contra la mujer” (Personal Interview May 25, 2011). Although both Mexican and U.S. media outlets report frequently on problems with drug trafficking, there needs to be a specific discussion about growing drug use in Mexico. For Cardona, “No tiene que

³⁶ However, in her recent article “Death in a Transnational Metropolitan Region,” Monárrez Fragoso does discuss drug use in Ciudad Juárez. She points out, “Supposedly, drugs were just for the ‘Americans.’ [...] And statistics from the Encuesta Nacional de Adicciones [National Survey of Addictions], sampling more than 50,000 homes between 2002 and 2008, reveal that in only six years, the number of persons addicted to illegal drugs increased by 50 percent, and the number of those who had consumed illegal drugs within Mexican territory increased by 30 percent. Despite patrols in Ciudad Juárez by 2,000 soldiers plus the police and new recruits from campaigns offering higher salaries, crime has increased by 500 percent in 2008” (31).

ver sólo con el trafico de drogas, tiene que ver con el consumo en el lugar” (Personal Interview May 25, 2011). Few works of cultural production address the issue of local drug consumption.

MEMORY

In the liminal space of the borderland, memory seems as transient as the workers that pass through Ciudad Juárez. Families are fragmented by social and economic factors that force them into such places as the geographical no man’s land of peripheral *colonias* and tracts of informal housing that radiate out from the city center. Ciudad Juárez is a geographical space in constant flux, and the movement of people implies a certain fleetingness of memory. Do communities of rememberers exist despite the nomadic nature of life on the border? Have they adapted specific memory tactics to combat the ever-changing environment of the border?

Existing cultural production on femicide provides clues as to how the victims of femicide have been remembered and within which power structures community members work to preserve those memories. A complex network of power relationships surrounds the issue of how to remember femicide victims. Sometimes a community does form around the absence left by the victim, but poverty and other economic factors often force members of that community to leave Ciudad Juárez. What interests me is how this community of rememberers and victims has been represented in various works of creative expression. The surviving family and friends of the victim often find themselves fighting against apparent abandonment by the law. They exist in a state that Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes in *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*

(1998) as “bare life” which he posits in juxtaposition to political existence. People who exist in the state of bare life have been excluded from the political workings of society and stripped of the rights that make them citizens. According to Agamben, poverty and marginalization lead to the condition of bare life, while wealth and private property assure citizenship. In this state of bare life, Agamben describes the problem of “a primacy of the private over the public and of individual liberties over collective obligations” (122). Victims of femicide, and the community of family and friends that attempts to remember them, confront a political and judicial system that affords them few rights. However, through participation in cultural production ranging from locally organized projects to international documentaries, the community of rememberers finds ways to address issues of memory and justice.

CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Cultural production on femicide in Ciudad Juárez has been prolific.³⁷ Scores of films and documentaries, a TV miniseries, and multiple short films have been produced in addition to innumerable novels, works of non-fiction, poetry, short stories, and articles.³⁸ Many of the works on femicide produce melodramatic, sensationalist representations of the crimes against women. The TV miniseries *Ciudad Juárez: tan*

³⁷ Volumes of poetry include *Secrets in the Sand: The Young Women of Juárez* (2006) by Marjorie Agosín and the book *Ciudad Juárez: De este lado del puente* (2004) edited by Isable Vericat which includes a mixture of poetry and testimony written by mothers of victims of femicide. Alicia Partnoy and Rosa Aramburo, professors at Loyola Marymount University, are currently working on a volume of poetry written by Evangelina Arce, whose daughter Sylvia Arce was a victim of femicide.

³⁸ Films on femicide in Ciudad Juárez include the following: *Las muertas de Juárez* (2002), *Espejo retrovisor* (2002), *Femicidio, hecho en México* (2003), *Hecho en Juárez* (2003), *16 en la lista: crímenes en Juárez* (2004), *Juárez, México* (2005), *Juárez: Stages of Fear* (2005), *Bordertown* (2006), *The Virgin of Juárez* (2006), *Borderline Cult* (2007), *El traspasado* (2009).

infinito como el desierto (2004) used names and photographs of real victims of femicide without their permission in a fictional account of events. Thus, actual victims and their families had their experiences emptied of any semantic value and re portrayed in a different context without their permission. As Antonio Checa Godoy documents in the article “Ciudad Juárez: feminicidios, sociedad y medios”: “El Instituto Chihuahuense de la Mujer inició a las pocas semanas acciones legales contra TV Azteca por el uso de nombres y fotografías de víctimas, sin autorización de sus familiares” (208). Although 50 mothers and other family members of victims signed the legal document, TV Azteca did not respond to their demands (208). Victims and their families, without their permission, were re-represented in a fictional work, producing a situation in which the identity of victims was usurped and reused for entertainment purposes.

Director Rodolfo Rodoberti’s 2004 film *16 en la lista: crímenes en Juárez* tells the story of a wealthy white female lawyer, kidnapped by a psychotic serial killer who plans to make her his sixteenth victim. As Tabuenca Córdoba observes, “*16 en la lista* is narrated from the perspective of the police agents whose commitment to solving crime is reiterated from beginning to end. The thriller constructs an image of a police corporation devoted to the investigation of both femicide and drug trafficking” (“Representations of Femicide in Border Cinema” 88). This film, like many others, reflects myths about femicide rather than facts. Although the victims of femicide have been mostly poor and dark-skinned, a majority of the films on the topic rely on female actresses that are white and/or who portray wealthy women. Commonly represented myths about femicide include but are not limited to the following stereotypes: all of the feminicides have been committed by a serial killer, the killers use the women to make snuff films, the

killers harvest organs from the victim's bodies, and/or the killers belong to a satanic cult and use female bodies in ceremonial rituals.³⁹ *16 en la lista* promotes the idea that an insane/mentally ill individual is committing all of the crimes against women. In the 2007 horror movie *Borderline Cult*, three serial killers team up and go on a killing spree. The premise of the movie is that the three killers have killed over 400 women. This serial killer storyline effectively avoids addressing societal issues of misogyny, by representing the killer as someone so mentally unstable that he is not responsible for his actions.

Like the films, much of the fiction and non-fiction about feminicide exploits stereotypes and myths about feminicide. Some recent work has proved more nuanced in its analysis of the city and its citizens. For example, a book that looks beyond Ciudad Juárez as a locus of crime and expresses the hopes and dreams of residents is the travel sketch book *Viva la vida: los sueños en Ciudad Juárez* (2011) by French illustrators Edmond Baudoin and Jean-Marc Troubet. They went to Ciudad Juárez to walk the streets and ask residents about their dreams. Ericka Montañón Garfías, who reviewed the book for *La Jornada*, argued: “Este volumen es un libro de sueños, pero sin abandonar el contexto de violencia que se vive en esa urbe fronteriza. No es un libro ingenuo, pero al colocar los sueños al lado de las páginas de los periódicos, las *ejecuciones*, los *feminicidios*, esos sueños dejan una marca” (3A).

The works analyzed in this study were selected because they show how cultural producers can move beyond a sexist feminicide discourse that limits the ways in which women are represented and remembered in the physical geography of the city. Chapter Two considers Ciudad Juárez as a map of recent history in which public space is marked

³⁹ For more information about the various hypotheses surrounding feminicide refer to “La batalla de las cruces: crímenes contra mujeres en la frontera y sus intérpretes” (2003) by Patricia Ravelo Blancas and Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba.

by signs and symbols related to feminicide memory discourse. The same chapter also examines counter-geographies against feminicide as represented in three documentaries: *Performing the Border* (1999) by Ursula Biemann, *Señorita extraviada* (2001) by Lourdes Portillo, and *La batalla de las cruces: protesta social y acciones colectivas en torno de la violencia sexual en Ciudad Juárez* (2006) by Rafael Bonilla and Patricia Ravelo Blancas. I analyze these three documentaries because they focus on the empowerment of women and show how activists in the city reclaim particular geographies (for example, vacant lots where bodies were found) and take control of the feminicide narrative. I focus on the unofficial discourse that surrounds feminicide, a discourse that proliferates on street corners, telephone poles, abandoned walls, overpasses, and empty lots. Although no official monuments exist to memorialize the victims of feminicide, individual acts by citizens point to the presence of memory.

Karen E. Till, associate professor of Geography at the University of Minnesota, notes in *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (2005) that messages left at Holocaust sites by individual citizens pointed to the existence of the Holocaust in the national imaginary long before any official monuments were constructed to memorialize the victims (3). The same holds true for Ciudad Juárez, and an examination of how citizens have marked public space will explore a discourse that counters an official narrative of silence. This examination will be carried out through an analysis of public space as represented in cinematic production on feminicide.



Figure 1.4 Maya Goded © 2004. Family members of victims set up an informal memorial at the *Campo Algodonero* where the bodies of eight women were discovered in 2001. Courtesy of Maya Goded.

Chapter three, “Of the Flesh: Graphic Depictions of Femicide” is divided into two parts. The first analyzes the significance of Charles Bowden’s photo essay *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future*.⁴⁰ Both the author and the work call into question the category of femicide. The second part of chapter two focuses on a work of fiction and non-fiction – *2666* and *Huesos en el desierto*.⁴¹ These works were chosen because they operate on multiple levels and present a nuanced portrait of the relationship that developed between the two authors, Sergio González Rodríguez and Roberto Bolaño. The two authors, living respectively in Mexico and Spain, corresponded for two years about femicide while Bolaño was writing *2666*. They finally met in Barcelona in 2002,

⁴⁰ Another book that includes photos related to femicide is *Ciudad Juárez 2008-2010: A Photographic Testimony of Our Pain* (2010) by Guillermo Cervantes.

⁴¹ Fictional works about femicide include *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders* (2005) by Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *If I Die in Juárez* (2008) by Stella Pope Duarte, *Lost in Juárez* (2010) an ebook by Douglas Lindsay, *In the Shadows of Juárez: Victim 213* (2010) an ebook by Kathleen Smith O’Donnell, and *The Dead Women of Juárez* (2011) by Sam Hawken. Non-fiction works include *Las muertas de Juárez: crónica de una larga pesadilla* (2004) by Víctor Ronquillo, *Cosecha de mujeres: safari en el desierto mexicano* (2005) by Diana Washington Valdez, *Violence against Women and Femicide in Mexico* (2008) by Natalie Panther, and *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (2011) by Nancy Pineda-Madrid.

when González Rodríguez traveled to Spain for the publication of *Huesos en el desierto*. Both provide examples of the dysfunctional justice system in Ciudad Juárez and the different patriarchal power structures that prevented victims of violence from seeking justice.

Chapter Four, “*Frontera 450+*: The Museum as a Memory Site,” focuses on the exhibition *Frontera 450+* (2006) held at the Station Museum in Houston, Texas. It was the first full museum exhibition in the United States to address feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, and it legitimated a new space for resistance to feminicide. The seventeen artists who participated in the exhibition wrestled with how to represent victims of feminicide. While some artists were from Ciudad Juárez, many were international artists representing feminicide from the position of an outsider. This chapter analyzes how each artist constructed her or his own artistic vision of feminicide.

These three chapters examine representations of feminicide across a variety of artistic mediums to demonstrate how feminicide discourse has evolved as a consequence of the work of women and men in Ciudad Juárez to create memorials and memory projects in public space. This is not an analysis of perfectly balanced, empowered feminist works on feminicide. Many of the works examined challenge sexist feminicide discourse in some ways, but in others they cling to sexualized metaphors or stereotypes of women. I hope to contribute to a continuing discussion about the language and images that are used to represent feminicide, focusing on an alternate discourse that puts influential writers, photographers, academics, and artists into discussion. The negotiation of the meaning of feminicide, of the way in which it has been represented, is also a story of the relationship between feminicide, geography, and memory in Ciudad Juárez.

CHAPTER TWO

REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMINICIDE IN DOCUMENTARY CINEMA: SEARCHING FOR *ECOTESTIMONIOS*⁴²

“Juárez blows like cold wind through the windows of our souls and demands our attention. We embrace its images as if they could fill our own empty spaces, but we cannot hold on.”

—Julián Cardona, *World Class City* (1)



Figure 2.1. Maya Goded © 2004. One of the crosses constructed at the *Campo Algodonero* where the bodies of eight femicide victims were discovered in 2001. Courtesy of Maya Goded.

The geography of Ciudad Juárez is covered with *ecotestimonios* – graffiti, marches, and posters that witness a memoryscape for victims of femicide, an informal, nomadic recounting of events that contest official testimony. Testimony has traditionally been attached to a witness, as in the essential testimonial text *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1984). However, since Rigoberta Menchú published her autobiography, *testimonio* scholar John Beverley has questioned the ability

⁴² An edited version of this chapter titled “Ciudad Juárez as a Palimpsest: Searching for Ecotestimonios” will be published in *Pushing the Boundaries of Latin American Testimony: Meta-morphoses and Migrations* (January 2012).

of the genre to promote social change. In *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (2004) Beverley discusses his second thoughts on testimonio in light of historical events in Guatemala:

Testimonios like *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, or Omar Cabezas' *Fire from the Mountain* and Margaret Randall's *Sandinista's Daughters* from Nicaragua were very much part of the literary imaginary of international solidarity with or critical support for the Central American revolutions. So the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas, while it is certainly not absolute – there is still quite a bit of room for maneuver and struggle – must force us in any case to reconsider the relation between testimonio, liberation struggles, solidarity work, and academic pedagogy. (46)

Beverley's discussion refers to testimonial literature, but the same arguments are valid for *cine testimonio*: what is the relationship between testimony and social change? *Cine testimonio* forms part of the broader movement of New Latin American Cinema, which, as Michael T. Martin describes in *New Latin American Cinema*, is “a national and continental project (including the diasporic/exilic experience), committed to a social practice that at once opposes capitalist and foreign domination and affirms national and popular expression” (16).

Cine testimonio, which is different from novelistic testimonio, has its roots in the work of Mexican documentary filmmaker Eduardo Maldonado, founder of the Grupo Cine Testimonio in 1969. As Michael Chanan discusses in *The Social Documentary in Latin America* (1990), “According to Maldonado *cine testimonio* is concerned to put cinema at the service of social groups which lack access to the means of mass communication, in order to make their point of view public” (40). Of critical importance in analysis of both filmic and novelistic testimonio is the (often intellectual) third party who writes, records, or mediates the testimony. This idea of mediation has caused scholars like Beverley to shift their views on the power of testimonio. In *Novels of*

Testimony and Resistance from Central America, Linda J. Craft discusses how Beverley's estimation of the power of testimonio has changed over time:

Indeed, Beverley believes that its time has come and gone as a locus for the voices of the voiceless and that those voices are moving on to other, even more marginalized, forms of popular culture (1994). Subaltern study groups are examining these alternatives – graffiti, ballads, street theater, murals, to name a few – which do not depend so heavily on cultivated written form or on the intervention of an educated intermediary. (22)

Ecotestimonio is a term I use to provide ways to analyze these subaltern alternatives.

Given the extreme violence in Ciudad Juárez, it is unlikely that informal monuments or graffiti would get much notice without the help of filmmakers. For, in terms of traditional testimony, I argue that the testimony of mothers of victims in Ciudad Juárez is being exhausted in filmic discourse. By this I do not mean that the testimony of mothers of victims is no longer powerful. My argument is related to the ways in which certain filmmakers and television reporters focus only on the emotionally cathartic moments of mothers crying. Filmmakers who spend time getting to know the community and the mothers are more likely to get testimony that is less rehearsed. Over time, testimony can become a performance, and, when it does, it loses its power of authenticity. For Chanan, when the filmmaker is involved in the process of change with the masses:

This dialectic promotes a very different attitude toward both the idea and the criteria of truth, not because the masses are seen as repositories of truth in the mechanistic manner of lazy Marxism, to borrow Sartre's phrase, but because the filmmaker is involved in a process of *concientización* in which truth undergoes redefinition. (46)

This process of *concientización* or involvement on the part of the filmmaker is central to maintaining and understanding the power of testimony. In watching all of the documentaries on feminicide, I have seen the same mothers tell the same stories over and over. Given that I am more interested in the way mothers and other family members

inhabit public space and interact with urban space, I developed the term *ecotestimonio* to discuss how marginal groups mark geography with their testimony in the form of memorials, graffiti, and other artistic symbols. *Ecotestimonio* is marked by actions, by the intention to leave traces of a particular struggle or memory in public space. By tracing “voices” – graffiti, memorials, posters – etched into the geography of the city, one can see the way in which anti-femicide activists try to memorialize the victims of femicide.

Some documentaries such as *La carta* focus upon the story of one individual, while others like *Juárez: desierto de esperanza*, include a newslike voiceover that focuses upon imparting facts rather than letting individuals tell their own stories.⁴³ Many others, like *On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez* and *Juárez: desierto de esperanza* employ sensationalism to call attention to femicide.

The documentaries that I analyze focus upon women and the families of victims as activists rather than solely as victims. I chose these films that best explore the relationship between femicide, geography, and memory. These documentaries capture a rich counter-geography of local memory practices that are not limited to traditional testimony. Although less likely to make headlines than sensational images showing the

⁴³ Documentaries on femicide in Ciudad Juárez have been filmed between 1999 and 2010, all of which promote social justice and awareness of femicide include the following: *Performing the Border* (1999), *Ni una más* (short film, 2001), *Señorita extraviada* (2001), *Juárez: desierto de esperanza* (2002), *Dual Injustice: Femicide and Torture in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua* (short film, 2005), *Juárez Mothers Fight Femicide* (2005), *Preguntas sin respuestas: los asesinatos y desapariciones de Ciudad Juárez* (2005), *Bajo Juárez: la ciudad devorando a sus hijas* (2006), *Border Echos* (2006), *La batalla de las cruces: protesta social y acciones colectivas en torno de la violencia sexual en Ciudad Juárez* (2006), *On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez* (2006), *Juárez: The City Where Women are Disposable* (2007), *Silencio en Juárez* (2009), *La carta* (2010). *Ni una más* (2001) by Alejandra Sánchez is short documentary (14 minutes) that eventually became the full documentary *Bajo Juárez: la ciudad devorando a sus hijas* (2006). Many authors and academics have praised Sánchez’s work. For example, González Rodríguez noted that “En el caso de los productos fílmicos está el trabajo de Alejandra Sánchez. Es un trabajo de documental bastante bien equilibrado en el contenido, en la calidad, en la intención” (Personal Interview).

destroyed bodies of women, such counter-geographies appear in three documentaries: *Performing the Border* (1999) by Ursula Biemann, *Señorita extraviada* (2001) by Lourdes Portillo, and *La batalla de las cruces: protesta social y acciones colectivas en torno de la violencia sexual en Ciudad Juárez* (2005) by Rafael Bonilla and Patricia Ravelo Blancas. My discussion, informed by personal interviews conducted with the directors, focuses on the formation of *ecotestimonio* as represented in each documentary, and on the ethics of representation involved in portraying violated bodies.

Louis Bickford, writing on memory and authoritarian rule in Santiago, Chile, defines *memoryscape* as:

Public monuments, memorials, and museums shape the physical landscape of collective memory. They are “memoryscapes” that contest official truths of the authoritarian era and give voice to its victims and survivors. From statuary and war memorials, to public art commemorating past events, to roadside historical markers, to plaques highlighting the heroes or villains of history, to museums designed to remember but not repeat the authoritarian past, memoryscapes recapture public spaces and transform them into sites of memory and alternative truth-telling about the authoritarian past. (96)

Bickford argues that the power of certain monuments was generated by the meaningfulness of their location during the authoritarian era in Chile (102). Bickford’s definition includes mostly formal acts of remembering that are organized by the state, such as museums, monuments, and roadside historical markers. Bickford discusses how “reconstituted spaces provide sites for graffiti, performances, and public art installations that contest official versions of the past. Rallies often originate or end at these sites” (102). Since such formal acts of remembering have yet to appear in Ciudad Juárez, my use of the concept of memoryscape focuses more upon informal acts of remembering

such as graffiti, marches, posters, and signs or memorials painted/made by individuals in the community.⁴⁴

Public discourse in the media often focuses upon the violated body rather than the life of the victim, and seeks to generalize or make ambiguous the circumstances of the murders and victims so as to make them an unrecognizable mass rather than a group of individuals. For example, Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba, professor of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Texas, Austin and Ignacio Corona, Associate Professor of Latin American Literatures and Cultures at Ohio State University, in an analysis of the Ciudad Juárez newspaper *El Diario* between 2004 and 2005, noted that “[b]ecause the typical journalistic report focuses on action and characters, the lack of information generates a void of knowledge in reference to, among other essential elements, the identity of the killer and often of the victim” (*Gender Violence* 117). In addition, as Patricia Ravelo Blancas points out, discourses such as the use of the slogan “Las muertas de Juárez,” which identify victims in generalized terms and focus on their status as dead bodies, do little to promote the idea of victims as individuals worthy of respect (40). Benita Monárrez, mother of a victim of femicide, explained to Ravelo Blancas, “They [politicians] come out saying that it’s just one more death, or it’s the ‘Dead Women of Juárez.’ They are not merely dead women from Ciudad Juárez; they are our daughters, and they had names, dreams – they had everything” (40). Such testimonies have proved essential to keeping alive specific and meaningful sites of memory and redirecting the discussion of victims towards the meaning of their lives rather than the anonymity of their deaths.

⁴⁴ In November 7, 2011 Ciudad Juárez officials inaugurated an official monument to the victims of femicide at the *Campo Algodonero*. However, victims’ families attended in protest to bring attention to the fact that the feminicides had still never adequately been investigated.

In all three films under study the city acts as a protagonist whose spaces offer conflicting images and messages about the role of women in society and the significance of femicide victims. In their book about memory in Argentina Elizabeth Jelin and Victoria Lagland ask, “¿Existe una estética más ‘apropiada’ que otras para representar el horror? ¿Quiénes serán los que van a decidir las maneras de hacerlo?” (2). These questions are central to the debate about femicide in Ciudad Juárez because they address both the aesthetics of representing horror and the power relationship inherent in issues of representation and memory discourse. All three demonstrate how ephemeral art, such as memorials and makeshift cemeteries, can be read as *ecotestimonio*, the symbolic testimony of a diverse group of citizens trying to reclaim public space in order to promote memory.

Ciudad Juárez is a space where the traces of victims’ lives *seem* to be slowly erased from public space, official discourse, and geography. Often, as Paula Flores recounts in *La carta* (2010), the city government has painted over symbols of the anti-femicide movement. While standing near a government building Flores recounts that, “Aquí teníamos una cruz que tenía el símbolo de justicia como las cruces que están los postes. En el mes del septiembre del año pasado que fue cuando ya se inauguraron estas nuevas oficinas nos la quitaron.” In terms of geography, I am referring to tracts of desert like Lote Bravo and Lomas de Poleo in which the bodies of victims of femicide are often dumped.⁴⁵ For Monárrez Fragoso, “lo primero que llama la atención, es la manera

⁴⁵ In a 2010 study on violence in Ciudad Juárez, Luis Cervera and Monárrez Fragoso clarify that “En el espacio público es donde se han generado la mayor parte de los asesinatos, y hay una menor incidencia en lotes baldíos, parques, tapias y el transporte urbano. Las prácticas sociales que se realizan en la calle, como parte de la esfera pública, representan expresiones de relaciones de poder, y por ende de control, que denotan luchas entre diversos individuos y grupos en la arena social” (“Sistema de información geográfica” 11).

cómo se abandonan los cuerpos inertes y tiesos en un escenario unidimensional: en los escenarios sexualmente transgresores que son las zonas desérticas, los lotes baldíos, los arroyos, las alcantarillas y en los tiraderos de basura” (*Trama de una injusticia* 272). It is difficult to imagine how integral such vacant lots are to the geography of Ciudad Juárez without seeing a map of the city. These lots are not just on the periphery of the city: they form a patchwork no mans land all throughout the city, and often are controlled by gangs. The map below demonstrates their prevalence, and gives an idea of how residents must navigate them on a daily basis as they travel through the city. Given that many women walk long distances during the early hours of the morning or late hours of the night to reach public transportation, these vacant lots represent danger zones.

The sands of these deserts often swallow up bodies, clothing, shoes, and other evidence, robbing victims of their identity. In the article “Gender, Order, and Femicide: Reading the Popular Culture of Murder in Ciudad Juárez,” Steven S. Volk, a professor in the Department of History at Oberlin College, and Marian E. Schlotterbeck, Ph.D. candidate at the University of Santiago, Chile discuss the relationship between urban spaces, the desert, and abandoned lots in an analysis of works of cultural production. They describe how

The face of urban Juárez is pockmarked by empty lots (*lotes baldíos*) generated by the feverish land speculation that accompanied the first plants. Large parcels of urban space that never reached development stage were simply left vacant. In their movement through the city, poor women on foot traverse these *lotes baldíos*, spaces in which the bodies of murdered women are frequently found. As one journalist observed, “To walk through downtown Juárez is to know and deeply regret that you are a young woman.” (130)

Furthermore, the way in which perpetrators arrange victims’ bodies in public spaces suggests that they are disposable things.

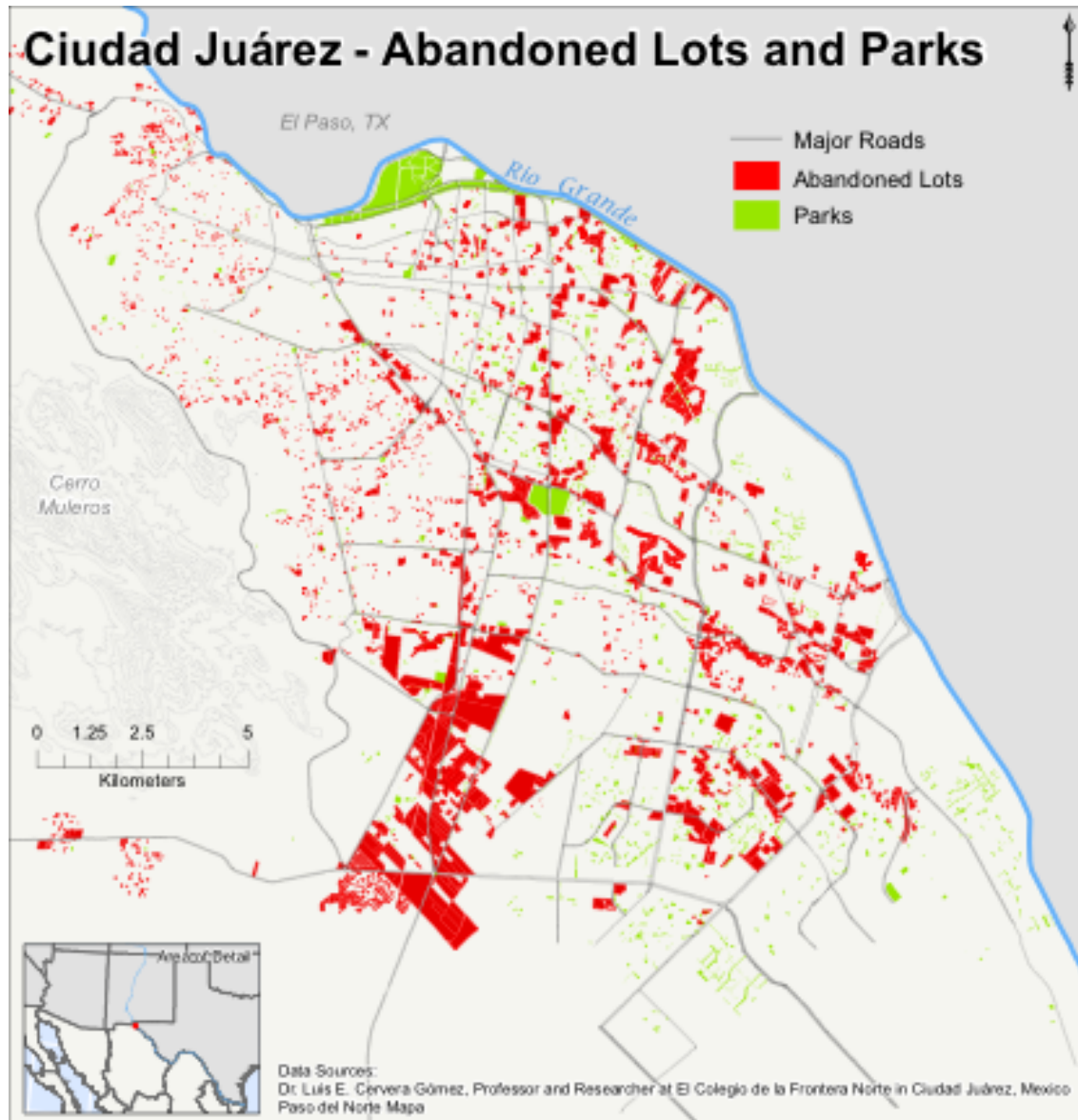


Figure 2.2. Jeff Levy © 2011. This map shows the distribution of vacant lots in Ciudad Juárez, highlighting the amount of space in the city that is deserted and must be traversed by citizens on a daily basis as they travel to work, school, and to the city center. According to Luis Cervera, 31.80 percent of femicide victims were found in vacant lots between 1993-2010 (“Sistema de información geográfica” 64). *Source:* Paso del Norte Mapa <http://www.pdnmapa.org/pdnmapa/HTML/datasets.htm>

PERFORMING THE BORDER

Swiss filmmaker, curator, and cultural theorist Ursula Biemann's video essay *Performing the Border* (1999) was the first documentary work to address femicide in Ciudad Juárez. *Performing the Border* is an interactive video essay characterized by the voice of the filmmaker, the filmmaker's formation of relationships with social actors, and the use of interviews. Biemann is an outside observer focuses upon the geographical space of the border and provides an introduction to issues such as the influence of NAFTA, *maquiladoras*, and the sex trade on the lives of women. The documentary is divided into four sections: "The Plant," "The Settlement," "Sex Work," and "The Killings." In each section Biemann explores how geography, technology, and globalization intersect in the borderlands to promote a culture of disposability. Much like the borderland itself, Biemann's video essay is a meeting of two distinct spaces or genres – the video and the essay – which are transformed by the writer/director into a hybrid work. Chanan discusses how in *cine testimonio* "Truth lies in the relationship with the audience, in the film's mode of address, because the meaning of what is shown depends on the viewer's position" (45). Biemann repositions and decenters the viewer by recreating the hybrid, disjointed experience of the border through film and sound techniques.

Performing the Border does not focus specifically on femicide and is a precursor to the kind of *ecotestimonio* seen in the other documentaries to be analyzed here. Indeed, when Biemann went to the border to film, she had been aware of the killings of women for only three months prior to her trip. In her words, "The killing was not the reason for me to go there. I had a much more long-term interest in working

women on the border and labor issues in the transnational context even ten years before I started this video” (Skype Interview). Once Biemann arrived in Ciudad Juárez, she learned that women working in *maquiladoras* and NGOs were talking about the killings. This topic became to be integrated into her project.

Biemann is the narrator of the video essay, but she also includes interviews with women living and working on the border. Her main interest is the geographical landscape of the border, and she includes maps of the area, panoramic shots of the border space, and a shot from a car window as she moves along the border in a car driven by Berta Jottar, a video artist from Mexico City. As Biemann noted in another 2008 essay on her film, “My work investigates global structural concerns, not those of subjectivity formation” (“Videographies of Navigating Geobodies” 129). *Performing the Border* dissects global structures that contribute to economic and physical violence against women rather than seeking to humanize victims and explore personal tragedies, as many other documentaries do.

Biemann’s cool and calm voice, and often accompanied by otherworldly music, narrates segments of the film. Speaking in English, she equates border culture with modernity and disposability: “By border culture we mean the robotic, repetitive process of assembly work, the intimate implication of the body with these technological functions, and the association of this process with the gendered, racialized body. Her body is fragmented, dehumanized, and turned into a disposable, exchangeable and marketable component” (*Performing the Border*). Biemann thus correlates the mechanical assembly-line culture of the *maquiladoras* with the disposability of women. Rather than representing feminicide victims as individuals, she emphasizes their anonymity by

running a series of case numbers across the screen, with written descriptions of the bodily violence suffered by each woman. She does this in order to emphasize the relationship between *maquiladora* culture, disposable women, and anonymous bodies.

Biemann's aesthetic practice was shaped by a lifetime of work as a visual artist, theorist, and curator. *Performing the Border*, her first film, was her chance to experiment with cinematic form. In an interview she explained, "For me *Performing the Border* was like a laboratory to find out what kind of films I would like to make. I didn't have a model" (Skype Interview). While she saw the film as an opportunity to marry practical and theoretical concerns, she did not wish to produce a traditional documentary. Chanan, In his discussion of the social documentary, argues that filmmakers need to "acquire new perspectives and seek a different filmic language than the archetypes of the documentary tradition. The didactic film must be seen as a new aesthetic category in which the artist and the pedagogue meet" (44). Biemann does this in her video essay, pursuing experimental practices that disjoint the traditionally cohesive narrative of a social documentary. In a separate essay, "The Video Essay in the Digital Age," Biemann defines the term *video essay* and discusses why it is different from traditional documentary form:

As a video essayist, I have a personal motivation to bring this particular video practice on the agenda. For a number of reasons, the essay situates itself somewhere between documentary video and video art. And as an in-between genre, these videos often fall through given categories at art events, film festivals and activist conferences. For a documentary, they are seen as too experimental, self-reflexive and subjective, and for an art video they stand out for being socially involved or explicitly political. (8)

Biemann studied at the Whitney Museum of Art Independent Study Program, which she describes as “a highly theorized, Marxist-driven program” and she locates her work within the frame of a Marxist feminist practice (Skype Interview).

The film is narrated by Biemann’s subjective “I” and introduces the viewer to the gendered space of the border. Contemporary art critic Angela Dimitrakaki addresses what she calls the films “detached architecture of the image,” and she analyzes how Biemann’s voice-over is rarely connected to any particular image (121). Dimitrakaki explains that “the video essayist’s speech (as a voice-over and text) typically does not pose questions: instead, it operates through the statement, which can be either continuous or discontinuous with the image” (121). For example, in the film’s introductory frames as a map of the border is shown, seemingly random words appear on the screen such as “soft money” and “hard realities.” This juxtaposition of voice and image/words draws attention to Biemann’s interest in artificial constructs created by borders, technology, and the video artist herself. Rosa-Linda Fregoso has discussed the effect of Biemann’s use of images:

The film’s focus on women’s bodies, rendered through experimental techniques – nonsynchronized sound and images, time-lapse filming uncoupling the image from real time, image enhancement, and a meditative voice-over. The effect of these neo-realist techniques is to distance and disturb the viewer’s relation to reality and to force us to contemplate the links between the exploitation and alienation of laboring bodies in various sites within global capitalism. (13)

This sense of alienation is increased by the way in which Biemann manipulates sound.

Biemann’s film is tightly constructed, and each editing or sound choice has a theoretical underpinning. For example, Biemann strips away all sounds from the natural environment and replaces them with what she describes as an “electronic sound carpet”

(Personal Interview). In the video essay this translates into a soundtrack of electronic noises that accompanies unrelated images, usually of the border landscape. For example, at the beginning night footage is accompanied by other-worldly electronic sounds. The 2008 essay discusses this choice:

I am not in search of reality – a notion that has proven to be a fiction in and of itself – but I am interested in generating an artificial construct. Most of my video footage is used without its original sound – no Mexican music, no diesel traffic. The border zone is a synthetic area, and this has been made perceptible through the manipulation and layering of images and an electronic soundscape. Ultimately, these drastic means are used as critical tools with which to sever the image from its signified and to shift the mode from documentary transparency to critical reflection. (*Ursula Biemann, Mission Reports* 15)

By separating the image from the diegetic sound, Biemann forces viewers to consider the border as an artificial construction and creates a surreal environment in which the sounds of daily life have been silenced and replaced by an electronic soundscape. For example, art critic Yvonne Volkart describes a nocturnal disco scene in which diegetic sound is replaced by electronic ambient sound: “At first Biemann shows the entertainment establishment in all its usual jarring din, then she abruptly replaces this noise with an electronic ambient sound, the flowing permeability of which has absolutely nothing to do with the women dancing to folkloristic music” (50). Volkart argues that the discrepancy between the tranquil music and the dancing female bodies opens up a space of hope and possibility (50).⁴⁶

Biemann made the decision to interview only women for her video essay.

Performance artist Berta Jottar and activist Esther Chávez Cano are among those interviewed. However, Biemann experiments with testimonial form and does not always

⁴⁶ In “Survival and Exploratarism: Re-mapping the Posthuman Experience” Volkart argues that, “At the heart of simulated but nevertheless lived transcendences the sound changes and draws us as female viewers once again in a completely different way into a nocturnal orgy of embodied ‘ecstasies’” (50).

show those interviewed while they are giving testimony. Sometimes Biemann shows the interviewee, but often she pairs their testimony with images of border geography. When Berta Jottar speaks, for example, sometimes she is shown sitting in a chair, but other times Biemann cuts directly to footage of a car driving along the border as Jottar discusses the border's discursive nature.

While it was a polemic move on Biemann's part to exclude men from the film, she did wish to demonstrate how central women had been to her research and experiences in Ciudad Juárez.

One reason is that you actually end up meeting a lot more women. The [*maquiladora*] workers are women to a great extent, and the NGOs who deal with the women are also women. From what I could see, there, guys just hang out being jobless. I don't think they are very important players in the global scenario. It is young girls who are the important actors. Why should I go and interview the bus drivers? (Skype Interview)

Biemann did not encounter men as central actors, and did not seek them out to participate in her video essay. Indeed, to date, there has yet to be a film produced that focuses on men as central actors in the anti-femicide movement. According to Monárrez Fragoso, "Hay una figura ausente que no ha sido analizada: ¿dónde está el padre?" (Personal Interview). The cultural and social implications of this absence are important.



Figure 2.3. Maya Goded © 2004. According to Goded, this image in a shoe store in Chihuahua caught her eye because of the juxtaposition of traditionally male boots in shades of pastel blue and yellow (Personal Interview). Courtesy of Maya Goded.

Although male figures are largely absent from such testimony, Monárrez Fragoso did pose one important question that helps explain such absence: “¿Quién va a estar proviniendo económicamente para que la otra parte de la pareja hable o grite o reclame la justicia?” (Personal Interview). In some of the victims’ cases, fathers and brothers work in the United States, or else work full-time in order to allow the mothers to pursue justice. In addition, Monárrez Fragoso presents the idea that “la discriminación de género no siempre actúa en forma negativa para las mujeres. Porque a las mujeres sí les permite llorar en público, y a las mujeres sí les permite gritar, y a los hombres no” (Personal Interview). Gender roles require that men react to femicide differently than women; they bury feelings rather than demonstrating them. According to Monárrez Fragoso, “Otra cuestión es: ¿estas mujeres tenían parejas o estaban sin parejas antes? Yo creo que son varios elementos los que se tienen que analizar allí, no solamente desde el género sino desde la cuestión económica” (Personal Interview).

To create the border's artificial space, Biemann relied on fieldwork and post-production editing. Dimitrakaki discusses the balance between production and post-production:

The video essays pay equal attention to production (traveling and investigating with a video camera, filming *in situ* and collecting "footage" from disparate sources) and post-production (the manipulation of the image, giving us frames within frames, split-screens, and the destabilization of the "documentary effect" of a hand-held camera, the wide range of combinations of image and text, or the voice-over and image. (116)

In an interview Biemann echoed these views by emphasizing that, after her fieldwork, she took a year to edit material for the documentary (Skype interview).

In the essay she wrote about her film, Biemann argues that Ciudad Juárez, "[i]s an entirely simulated place with simulated politics, a zone from which the idea of public has been thoroughly eradicated" (*Ursula Biemann, Mission Reports* 133). This is evidenced in the lack of infrastructure for citizens, which starkly contrasts with the infrastructure provided for corporations. Biemann describes a process in which "Housing, water, transportation, telephone wires, power supply, street lighting, sewage system, health care, childcare, and schooling become the responsibility of the individual and consequently the site of spontaneous community initiatives" (133). For her, the city's visible, physical surface is overlaid with the invisible presence of global capital and surveillance technology.

In terms of aesthetic concerns, Biemann knew that she did not want to reproduce overused imagery of women. She observed, for example, "I've seen in the news on CNN, for instance, how they deal with the killings. They just drag this mother of a missing girl in front of a camera until she cries and that is that. I don't think that is, politically

speaking, taking us anywhere” (Skype Interview). Other common imagery in films and news stories on femicide includes shots of their dead, damaged bodies. Is it necessary to represent horror realistically to give viewers an accurate, if graphic, depiction of the situation? Jelin and Lanland approach this aesthetic debate thus:

En este debate se juega la cuestión representacional (si la representación del horror sólo puede hacerse en una estética realista, si hay géneros más “apropiados” que otros, y quién tiene el poder para dictaminar), el debate entre lo representacional y lo preformativo y las expectativas acerca de la participación de la sociedad en ese espacio público. (9)

For Biemann, overused imagery of crying mothers forms an important part of the debate about the representation of femicide victims and their families and the ways in which their testimony should be recorded. *Performing the Border* creates a framework for the discussion of femicide by exploring the border’s geo-political formation. Due to Biemann’s nascent awareness of femicide, the video essay does not provide a fully formed discussion of femicide. But her experimentation with testimony as a form and the way she links it to the geography of Ciudad Juárez does provide the framework for the concept of *ecotestimonio*.

SEÑORITA EXTRAVIADA

Señorita extraviada, which appeared two years after *Performing the Border*, provides a detailed examination of femicide. It is a reflexive documentary, which as Julianne Burton describes is characterized by metacommentary made by the filmmaker, images used for purposes of reflection on the part of the filmmaker, and the use of strategies that generate an awareness of the cinematic apparatus (5). Director Lourdes

Portillo, a self-identified Chicana, narrates in Spanish her personal research.⁴⁷ She is both director and detective, searching through the lens of the camera for those responsible. For Portillo, whose family is from Chihuahua, the documentary was also a personal investigation. Her film exemplifies how directors become involved in the formation of social change. She is the film's director, narrator, detective, interviewer, and activist. Given Portillo's family connection to Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua, she was much more familiar with the city and news of femicide than Biemann. *Performing the Border* was the first documentary to include a discussion of femicide, but *Señorita extraviada*, with its focus on the testimony of victims' mothers and families, brought the issue to international attention. Claudia Sadowski-Smith discusses how Portillo's documentary influenced other Chicano/a artists and became "the catalyst for a surge in representations of the femicide" (77).⁴⁸

Señorita extraviada focuses on the relationship between city space, women, and femicide, and it is often described as a *melodocumysterio*, that is, a cross between a melodrama, documentary, and mystery. The experience affected Portillo in unexpected ways. During its eighteen months, fifty victims were found. After returning from Ciudad Juárez it took Portillo months to realize that she might be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder: "I never imagined that it would require such a concentrated effort on my part to carry the burden of being the person to bring such harsh news out of that area. The worst part was telling the stories that I knew and had heard. They had a cumulative

⁴⁷ Portillo was born in Chihuahua, Mexico but raised in Los Angeles. For Sadowski-Smith, *Señorita extraviada* "exemplifies an important milestone in this transnationalization of Chicano/a work, which adds developments outside the United States to an emphasis on the diasporic nature of Chicano/as and Latino/as in the United States" (76).

⁴⁸ In *Orden fálico* Juan Aliaga asserts that Biemann's video essay has not had as great an impact as Portillo's documentary: "Su trabajo, plenamente inserto en los circuitos de distribución artísticos minoritarios, no ha tenido la misma repercusión que el de Lourdes Portillo" (320).

effect on me. I believe that for a few years after the film was finished I was suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome” (Email). Portillo’s statement highlights the risks that cultural producers often take to tell the story of femicide victims.

Rosa-Linda Fregoso, who writes extensively on Portillo’s films, praises as empowering her representation of victim’s mothers, because it escapes the oft-used paradigm of victimization (*MeXicana Encounters* 26). Portillo challenges this paradigm by showing mothers as activists who work to create change. In the first interview presented in the documentary, for example, Evangelina Arce, mother of murdered Sylvia Arce, tells Portillo how she researched the murder of her own daughter. When Evangelina Arce realized that the police were not going to investigate, she went to local bars and taxi services to interview people and learn about her daughter’s fate. Fregoso also points out that, “Like her [Portillo’s] earlier film, *Las Madres, Señorita extraviada* emphasizes the process of radicalization rather than victimization. The narrative gives voice to the women’s agency, to the mothers and sisters who have emerged as protagonists in grassroots movements” (59). For her earlier film *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (1985), Portillo and co-director Suzana Muñoz had traveled to Argentina to record stories of the mothers of the disappeared and to reflect upon their protests at the Plaza de Mayo. *Señorita extraviada* is clearly influenced by Portillo’s interest in empowering women and showing how different groups use public space as a platform in order to address justice.

Portillo relies heavily upon the testimony of mothers from within their homes. During her interviews, she decenters the framing of her subjects so that their heads are always slightly off-center, an astute representation of how they have been marginalized

and decentered by official discourse. The documentary also seeks to reify the importance of daily life in the families of the murdered. Portillo interviews families in their homes, in the presence of children, in order to remind viewers of the murdered daughters' family life. Evangelina Arce, the first mother interviewed, is filmed sitting on a worn couch in her living room with a young child by her side. Portillo establishes that violence against women is part of a cycle that goes much farther back than 1993. Before talking about the disappearance of her daughter Sylvia, Evangelina discusses her own abduction and rape as a young woman. Portillo asks, "When she [Sylvia] grew up, why did it happen to her too?" Portillo challenges the idea that feminicide can be understood or combatted simply as a phenomenon that began in 1993.

Kathleen Staudt explores the role of the mother and her contributions to the city's symbolic geography. Her research demonstrates that "Mothers invented public icons and symbols seen everywhere in Ciudad Juárez: black crosses painted on a pink background on telephone poles and walls, especially visible on the main thoroughfares of Juárez" (115). Portillo represents family members' contributions, showing how they have become important social actors in the fight against feminicide. For example, she interviews Guillermina González Flores, sister to a feminicide victim, and herself a founder of the anti-feminicide group Voces Sin Eco.⁴⁹ As director of the group, she initiated the first campaign to paint crosses around the city. The March 20, 1999 edition of *El Diario* documented the group's work and described, based on an interview with González Flores, that the intention of the crosses "es mantener vigente todos los días del año un

⁴⁹ Voces Sin Eco, which was founded in 1998, disbanded after three years because González Flores believed that many groups (journalists, NGOs, the media) were trying to profit from the issue of feminicide. However, Guillermina and her mother Paula Flores continue to be active in the anti-feminicide movement.

recordatorio sobre el peligro que corren todas las mujeres que viven en Ciudad Juárez” (Carmen Sosa 8C). In *Señorita extraviada* Portillo shows González Flores first as a grieving sister standing in front of her family’s tiny house in Lomas de Poleo and later as an activist and organizer working the streets to paint crosses.

Señorita extraviada features prominently the black crosses painted on a pink background in public places throughout the city. But, as the director shows, these crosses have become incorporated into the cityscape to such an extent that some girls do not pay attention. Crosses are evident throughout the city in spaces where women were abducted or where bodies have been found. The map below shows the spatial distribution of vulnerability to femicide, highlighting the areas, like Lomas de Poleo on the northwestern edge of the city, where most bodies have been found.

The city in *Señorita extraviada* includes geographies of danger and empowerment, sometimes represented within the same physical space. For example, footage showing a street corner near a shoe store where a young girl disappeared includes the activist symbol of the cross, which demonstrates that community members are working to promote memory and awareness. But whenever Portillo interviews a girl on a busy street surrounded by flyers featuring the faces of missing girls and telephone poles with black crosses, the girl states that she is unaware that girls and women have been abducted in the vicinity.

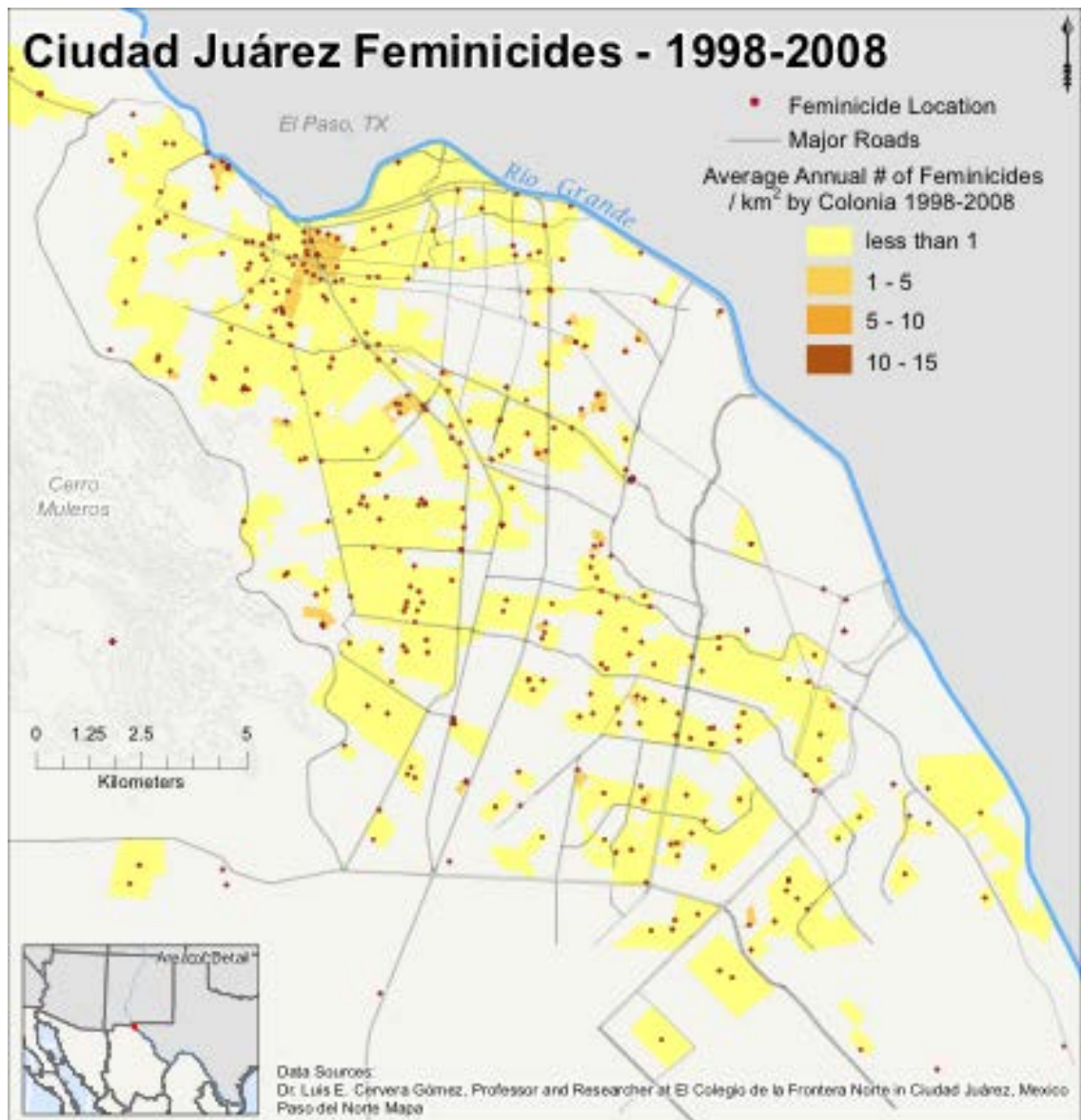


Figure 2.4. Jeff Levy © 2011. This map shows the spatial distribution of femicide between 1998 and 2008. As is evident, the highest concentration of femicides have occurred in Lomas de Poleo on the northwest edge of the city near the border. *Source:* Cartographer Luis Cervera at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.



Figure 2.5. Maya Goded © 2004. A young girl in Ciudad Juárez rests against a telephone pole decorated by a black cross on a pink background, a symbol of the anti-feminicide movement. Courtesy of Maya Goded.

In Portillo's film, women use crosses in order to transform a site of corporeal vulnerability into a locus of public action and awareness. The director represents the city as a site of symbolic action: black crosses painted on a pink background on telephone poles, posters of missing girls, small memorials constructed by families. Portillo makes it evident that citizens are working actively to displace images of necroart left by perpetrators who arrange bodies of feminicide victims. The families displace these images and create sites of subversive memory to memorialize the otherwise invisible victims. Portillo shows the efforts of citizens to inscribe their own story onto the urban landscape and often uses extreme close-ups to highlight small but meaningful details like black crosses painted on light posts, plastic flowers decorating a grave site, or the shoes of missing young women and girls.

Portillo describes Ciudad Juárez as a globalized city spinning out of control. She illustrates this concept in several hyper-accelerated frames that show cars speeding

around the city at dusk so quickly that they dissolve into a stream of lights that crisscross the city and make it a blur of neon lines. Conversely, other images are featured in slow motion or are doubled or tripled, as if the viewer were watching a mirage in a hot desert and grew unsure of the trustworthiness of her or his own vision. For example, the director shows the triplicate image of a young girl wandering in a deserted lot, making her looking like a ghost. To this end, Portillo as narrator states, “vine a Juárez a perseguir fantasmas y a escuchar el misterio que los rodea.” Her use of the blurred image of the young girl suggests that the dividing line between life and death for women in Ciudad Juárez has become so thin as to haunt the living. Sergio de la Mora, a professor of Chicano Studies at the University of California Davis, describes how “A través de *Señorita extraviada*, Portillo utiliza un diseño visual auto reflexivo que subraya que los documentales no reproducen la realidad neutralmente” (127). Portillo employs various techniques to make the viewer question the idea that an image can represent truth: she films through glass or uses extreme close-ups, distorting images. This questioning of the representation of truth is important, for, as Burton points out, “An image in a film, therefore, is not to be thought of as truthful because it pictures something real, even though the automatic mechanism of the camera would lead us to believe that there must indeed be some element of truth in this” (45). Sergio de la Mora details the specific film techniques used by Portillo:

Ella hace esto con una variedad de técnicas incluyendo grabar mujeres a través de un cristal (y no estoy hablando del lente de cámara fotográfica) que distorsiona levemente el original; acercamientos insertos del lente de una cámara fotográfica apuntada hacia el público incluyendo la presencia de reporteros y de equipo fotográfico durante una secuencia de la rueda de prensa; el uso de cámara en mano; la técnica de Portillo de filmar objetos en acercamientos extremos (como es el caso de flor artificial roja en un cementerio); travellings sobre la cabeza que le quitan lo familiar; edición

rápida y entrecortada de algunas secuencias de testimonio (la más notable es la de María). (127)

Techniques like decentralized travellings and rapidly edited sequences serve to make the viewer question all forms of testimony included in the documentary. Portillo wants viewers wonder: who is telling the truth? How can the truth be understood when so many contradictory testimonies are offered?

In terms of an aesthetic of representation of femicide victims, Portillo describes, “I decided that the most respectful thing to do was to treat them [the victims] like human beings at their best, the way we represent ourselves. I decided to use their names, to use the pictures that the mothers loved, and to never really show the destruction of their bodies. That begets more of the same thing” (Skype Interview). According to Elena Poniatowska, Portillo achieved her goals by representing “mujeres casi niñas que tenían una gran alegría de vivir y fueron importantes no sólo para su familia, sino para nosotros, para la sociedad” (“Esa larga cicatriz” 94).⁵⁰ The filmmaker presents images of the victims provided by their families: smiling young women surrounded by family and friends. In a 1998 interview with Fregoso, Portillo remarked, “Well, rather than try to convey political oppression, economic oppression, I think what I’m trying to do is, I’m trying to touch people’s humanity with the humanity I’m trying to portray (*Lourdes Portillo: The Devil Never Sleeps and Other Films* 29). By showing victims’ families as key social actors, Portillo creates a discourse to rival the official one that disseminates photos of dead bodies of victims and questions their morality. She also focuses on bringing memories of the victims to life via the testimony of mothers and other family members. Unlike Biemann’s film, Portillo’s seeks to portray the humanity of individual

⁵⁰ Poniatowska also praises the documentary *Juárez: desierto de esperanza* by Christina Michaus.

victims of violence. Portillo displays an interest in the power of individuals to create change in her films, especially in *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*.

Señorita extraviada highlights how memory is necessary in order to construct a safe future for women in Ciudad Juárez. The tension between memories of past victims of feminicide (maintained by families) and visions of the future (narrated by politicians) is central to the documentary. Can collective memory exist in a city with such tensions?

When asked about the presence of collective memory, the director replied:

There is some collective memory when the mothers get together. They are the keepers of memory. They do talk amongst themselves. I know that society is destroyed, the societal fabric. Everybody lives in fear. The children have become very violent. I don't know about collective memory. It's only when they get together – the families or the mothers. (Skype Interview)

After filming *Señorita extraviada*, Portillo continued to return to Ciudad Juárez to film the families that appeared in her documentary.⁵¹ During this process, she witnessed the disintegration of the social fabric as families suffered from overwhelming grief, violence, and harassment by the police. Portillo elaborates, “In following up all the stories – every person's story – is the destruction of community and family as we know it. The deaths of these girls have caused that” (Skype interview). This situation represents a real and continuing challenge to the permanence of memory.

Señorita extraviada is a self-reflexive documentary that, while relying on traditional testimony, also explicitly questions “the truth” of representations. Portillo understands the limits of *cine testimonio* and the ways in which truth can be manipulated by a camera. To this end she also documents more concrete actions of testimony in which activists and family members of victims write *ecotestimonios* on the urban landscape of

⁵¹ Portillo's complete footage is now archived at the Stanford University Library.

Ciudad Juárez. By focusing on testimony as a speech act and testimony as a physical act, Portillo reaffirms that the mothers are active social agents working for change.

LA BATALLA DE LAS CRUCES

La batalla de las cruces is an expository film characterized by the voice of an omniscient narrator. The title of filmmaker Rafael Bonilla and academic Patricia Ravelo Blancas' documentary collaboration, *La batalla de las cruces*, arose from an 2003 article authored by Ravelo Blancas and Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba on the most prevalent hypotheses related to feminicide. This title, like the film's images, represents the cross as a symbol of the anti-feminicide movement that has become incorporated into the memoryscape of Ciudad Juárez. *La batalla de las cruces* demonstrates how citizens find symbolic forms of expression in an environment that resists listening to their voices.⁵² Whereas *Performing the Border* and *Señorita extraviada* emphasize the process of research, *La batalla de las cruces* presents information through the seemingly more objective use of an impartial narrator. Narrated by a female "voice of God," the documentary is divided into twenty short chapters that examine feminicide through interviews with family members, academics, NGOs, politicians, activists and journalists. The polyphony of voices and opinions represented in the documentary captures the difficulty of understanding feminicide and the many different views regarding its causes.

Before *La batalla de las cruces* begins, the sentence "No persigue fines de lucro" flashes upon the screen. The directors make it clear that their project is not for profit,

⁵² The only review of the film "Reseña de feminismos, verdades y videos: comentarios al documental *La batalla de las cruces* de Rafael Bonilla" (2005) by Martha Patricia Castañeda Slagado appears in *Nóesis: revista de ciencias sociales y humanidades* of the Universidad Autónoma de Juárez.

perhaps in light of the fact that many mothers of victims began to complain that certain organizations and works of cultural production profit from their pain.⁵³ Almost any high-profile event to raise awareness about femicide in Ciudad Juárez has been labeled by local government officials as an attempt to make money from the tragedy, or, conversely, to ruin tourism for the city. Wright elicits this concept when she analyzes how the accusation of profiteering has entered into the wider debate. She discusses the process whereby private pain is converted into a commodity with the hopes of furthering both human rights and memory projects (60). She explains, “La clave es la transformación del dolor privado, para que pueda circular como evidencia de un derecho público que ha sido violado y, en este sentido, el dolor privado pasa a ser un bien público, consumido durante la producción de un movimiento internacional que intenta producir, a través de este consumo, la justicia en lugares específicos” (60).

In the film’s opening scene, Bonilla employs a point-of-view shot as he walks with a handheld camera through the desert landscape of Ciudad Juárez. The camera is tilted down toward the ground, and the movements are jerky. The opening shot is immediately overpowered by a female voice modeled on that of a newscaster. The voice sounds professional and authoritative, and the viewer immediately becomes aware that the voice is not that of someone personally involved in the femicide investigation. Unlike *Performing the Border* and *Señorita extraviada*, the voice is cold, formal, and intent on imparting facts. In *Performing the Border* and *Señorita extraviada*, the

⁵³ In the article “El lucro, la democracia y la mujer pública: estableciendo las conexiones” Melissa Wright explains, “La esencia de este discurso se manifiesta como una acusación dirigida a las protagonistas de Ni Una Más por haber ‘lucrado’ política y económicamente: por explotar el dolor de las familias de las víctimas al Mercado internacional, que siempre está buscando historias escandalosas que venden periódicos, que facilitan campañas políticas, que apoyan causas liberales y feministas, entre otras” (51).

filmmakers narrate everything themselves, and their personal and emotional connections to the work seep into the narrative. Although *La batalla de las cruces* is based on Ravelo Blancas' feminicide research from 1993-2003, the directors decided that they wanted an outside voice to synthesize and explain her research in the documentary.

The film, with a dramatic "voice of God" narration, shows on how families of victims and other citizens work to preserve the memory of the dead. The reliance on the voice-over makes *La batalla de las cruces* the most formally traditional of all the documentaries.⁵⁴ This form of indirect address, as Bill Nichols suggests, "invites risks of incomprehensibility (lacking the guiding hand of a narrator)" (*Ideology and Image* 183). Bonilla nevertheless decided to use the voice-over because "[d]e alguna manera la voz en off sintetiza los textos de Patricia. [...] Es una voz explicativa que trata de contextualizar el fenómeno" (Personal Interview). However, the voice-over's melodramatic nature proves problematic because the anonymous, authoritarian voice contrasts sharply with the film's personal nature. Voice-overs are usually associated with authoritarian, elitist, or paternalist discourses. Ravelo Blancas and Bonilla avoid the impression of paternalism by using a female voice-over. However, the fact still remains that the strong narrative voice often overshadows interviews with victims' mothers. Rather than complementing the interviews, the voice-over competes for authority.

The desert opening shot, narrated by the voice-over, fades out and is replaced by footage of an interview with Paula Flores, mother of María Sagrario, a 1998 feminicide victim. The director employs a long shot, and displays Paula Flores at a distance sitting

⁵⁴ In *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* Erik Barnouw discusses how in the 1930s "[t]he typical film of advocacy was shot like a silent film, with a 'voice-over' narration added. This had almost become the standard documentary form. Even the Spanish Luis Buñuel, associated with surrealism, made a voice-over documentary, the sardonic *Land Without Bread* (*Tierra Sin Pan* or *Las Hurdes*, 1932)" (131).

on a couch in her living room. Slowly Flores begins to speak, and the camera travels to a close up and eventually stops and frames her from the knees up. The long shot provides the viewer with an understanding of the scene while the ensuing close up establishes intimacy. This short interview is followed by more point-of-view footage of the desert, suggesting the narrative of a journey to understand feminicide.

The first time the crosses appear follows the Paula Flores interview. It was filmed in the *Campo Algodonero*, and a long shot with shallow focus that features the eight softly blurred pink memorial crosses. The crosses were erected in 2001 to remember the lives of eight feminicide victims who were discovered in the abandoned lot. The film's title appears in white letters on top of the image. This image and others of crosses punctuate the film and divide the many of the film's sections. Yet another important image features a close-up of pink crosses decorated with purple flowers and zooms in to show that "desconocida" is written on several of the crosses. In this instance community members have created a memory space that explicitly includes even the unidentified.

Yet another shot uses an extreme close-up to show the audience the spikes driven into a large cross erected at the Avenida Juárez International Bridge, the main route for citizens crossing the Mexico U.S. border. Tied to each spike is a pink ribbon with the name of a victim of feminicide, and "Ni una más" is written in the center of the cross. The juxtaposition of the metal spike with the soft pink background has the effect of reminding viewers how easily soft bodies can be pierced or damaged. The filmmakers also include a low angle shot of the cross that emphasizes its enormity and demonstrates reverence for the memorial. As the title of the film implies, a battle is being waged both for the control of public space and for memory discourse. How will the victims of

feminicide be remembered? Who will tell the story of their lives? For Bonilla and Ravelo Blancas, it was important that the families of victims appear to take control of the narrative and inscribe their narrative upon the city.

Featured prominently in the film's imagery is the desert. Panoramic shots of Lote Bravo give viewers an idea of the vastness of open desert tracts, abandoned lots, and dumps situated near informal housing. These spaces suggest the precariousness of life and the difficulty of inscribing memory upon such spaces. This desert's ability to erase or devour is evident in a scene that presents a close-up shot of the desert sand and reveals a missing person flier buried beneath the sand. The desert is shown to be a space where *ecotestimonio* becomes more difficult, given a geography that is particularly suited to erasure.

La batalla de las cruces employs a technique in which photos of feminicide victims are digitally superimposed onto the desert landscape in an attempt to counteract the erasure affected by the landscape on victims' bodies. Throughout the film, images of victims, whether from newspaper clippings or photographs, appear and then dissolve against the backdrop of Ciudad Juárez. At one point, as the narrator describes victims of feminicide, black and white photos of their faces appear on a desert background. Eventually the desert is covered completely by the faces of victims of feminicide. Bonilla and Ravelo Blancas point out that although the desert may cover up or erase signs of the victims, they can counteract this by sharing photos and testimony related to the victims' lives. The directors intentionally rely on photos of victims taken when they were living, rather than on pictures of dead bodies (Personal Interview).

As Ravelo Blancas discussed, she and Bonilla shared a particular view about the

ethics of representation:

Nuestra ética fueron varias cosas. En primera lugar no queríamos un trabajo ni amarillista ni morboso. Para que no fuera amarillista ni morboso necesitamos dejar de lado imágenes de cadáveres y demás. Entonces si tú te das cuenta en *La batalla* viene una sola escena donde está el cuerpo de Alejandra García Andrade: [el cuerpo] está en la banqueta pero cubierto totalmente. Es la única escena donde hay cadáveres y otras poquitos pero cuando alguien está explicando lo de los registros forenses. (Personal Interview)

Photos and crosses stand in symbolically for the missing bodies. In their interview, both Bonilla and Ravelo Blancas underscored the importance of avoiding imagery that would depict victimization, preferring to show how victims' families were making positive changes in the community.

Rather than relying on overused imagery of crying mothers, the directors filmed the mothers in their homes discussing their daughters' lives. Ravelo Blancas discussed the film's central aims:

Principalmente lo que nosotros queríamos era dejar una memoria histórica de esa década en ese documental. La segunda cosa muy importante es que ese material fue un material de esas mujeres y familias para que ellas en todas sus gestiones y actos de protesta pudieran decir "aquí está esta memoria histórica con toda la verdad." (Personal Interview)

La batalla de las cruces represents discourses on motherhood, domestic space, and power.

As has also been seen in the case of Portillo's *Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, the act of birthing a child holds a power all unto its own, such that motherhood establishes a space from which women can speak with authority. Their authority, usually limited to the domestic space, becomes all the more shocking and powerful when brought into the public sphere in the form of marches and protests. This maternal power is, however, a double-edged sword. The reason that mothers in Ciudad Juárez find themselves fighting for authority and demanding to be heard is that politicians and media

outlets have questioned the quality of their motherhood by blaming them for their daughters' disappearance and murder. As Monárrez Fragoso explained, in Ciudad Juárez “había un daño en la maternidad, una separación de ser amado. Hay una demostración [por parte de los políticos y los medios] de la madre, diciendo que no cumplió [la madre] con el papel de haber enseñado una serie de cosas” (Personal Interview). In the face of political rhetoric that blames mothers for the disappearance of their daughters, the mothers are forced to reclaim their maternal territory in order to prove that they are good mothers.⁵⁵

Ravelo Blancas and Bonilla balance footage of the testimony of mothers in their homes with footage of the mothers working to create social change. They do this in a section of the documentary titled “documentación y denuncia” where they enumerate the NGOs formed by mothers of victims and their community projects. Activist Esther Chávez Cano describes marches organized by mothers and then the filmmakers present footage of women carrying crosses in the streets, women with photos of their murdered daughters around their necks, and women searching for bodies in the desert. The filmmakers also interview Marisela Ortiz, mother of a femicide victim and founder of the NGO *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*.

In our interview Ravelo Blancas discussed the central role that the mothers played in the making and presenting of the film to an audience in Ciudad Juárez: “Las que presentaron el documental fueron Paula Flores, Benita Monárrez y Evangelina Arce. Ellas presentaron porque te digo que nuestra manera de trabajar es diferente. Nosotros

⁵⁵ In documentaries on Ciudad Juárez, memories of victims are often discussed in the cocoon of the home, the warm, womb-like domestic space that serves as a memory site for the mothers. The question arises: what if the mothers were interviewed at 2am under a streetlight? I believe that the power of their testimony would be blunted by the suggestion of illicit activity that accompanies women who traverse public spaces at night.

somos muy críticos de que las mamás las andan abusando y las andan excediendo y poniéndolos a llorar a todos lados” (Personal Interview). The directors were inspired by what they learned during the process of making *La batalla de las cruces*, and decided to make the life of Flores the subject of *La carta*, their next documentary.⁵⁶ This film, like *La batalla de las cruces*, forms part of historical memory of victims of femicide and shows the far-reaching influences of the crimes on families, citizens, and the city.

Beyond their cinematic work, Ravelo Blancas and Bonilla, like many of the mothers they interview, are activists. In addition to working through their films to promote justice, they also collaborate with community projects like those of Paula Flores. Ravelo Blancas has spent years working with NGOs and other organizations in Ciudad Juárez in order to prevent violence against women and fight against femicide.⁵⁷ Many of the other artists and academics who work with femicide have also become activists, leaving their mark on Ciudad Juárez through the organization of marches, protests, or other events. Examples include the academics María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba, Cynthia Bejarano, Kathleen Staudt, and Julia Monárrez Fragoso. In addition to writing extensively about the subject of femicide, these academics live and work in the El Paso and Ciudad Juárez area, and they collaborate with or have founded organizations to help fight for justice. The academics mentioned, like the filmmakers analyzed in this chapter, both write about and participate in the anti-femicide movement actively. Thus, in

⁵⁶ Ravelo Blancas discussed the importance of Paula Flores in the 2004 article “Entre las protestas callejeras y las acciones internacionales: diez años de activismo por la justicia social en Ciudad Juárez.” She wrote, “Consideramos que la trayectoria de Paula Flores ha sido importante. Es una mujer natal de Durango que llegó a ciudad Juárez con la ilusión de que su hijo estudiara y de que sus hijas tuvieran una mejor oportunidad de trabajo. Una mujer que, al llegar a Lomas de Poleo en ANAPRA (una ciudad ubicada en la periferia de la ciudad), pensaba como algo ajeno la violencia hacia las mujeres, hasta que inició su peregrinar por la justicia y posteriormente con el encuentro de su hija asesinada” (24).

⁵⁷ Ravelo’s work is funded by El Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS).

analyzing the cityscape, the filmmakers also inscribe themselves into the discourse being written and rewritten on the city surface.

La batalla de las cruces also highlights how the preservation of memory is linked to activism. Many of the family members of victims discuss groups or NGOs they have formed to fight for the rights of victims. Staudt, who is both an activist and an academic, points out that “[p]erformance is a useful conception around which to analyze anti-violence social movements at the border. In literal and figurative performance, activists have spurred the development of constituencies that press governments for change” (*Violence and Activism* 18). For example, in *La batalla de las cruces* Marisela Ortiz, mother of a femicide victim, discusses the purpose of the organization she founded, *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*. In addition, Paula Flores discusses how, until her daughter disappeared, she thought the violence only involved “others” (*La batalla de las cruces*). Her own daughter’s disappearance prompted her to become an activist. Ravelo Blancas asserts that in Ciudad Juárez, “no hay suficientes programas de educación, vivienda, salud, y trabajo, ni de servicios públicos” (*Entres las duras artistas* 32). With education in mind, Paula Flores founded an elementary school, named after her daughter María Sagrario, in her neighborhood. Flores ran the *Fundación María Sagrario*, which raised money for community projects, until threats of violence forced her to leave in 2010.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The film highlights the importance of mothers like Flores who turn their private pain into a tool for activism in the community. Flores’s projects address one important aspect of the multidimensional problem of violence – access to a quality education. For example, according to Shannon O’Neil in a report prepared for the Council on Foreign Relations, “Some 40 percent of Juárez youth neither work or study – leaving them without hope for a better future, and susceptible to the growing underworld of gangs and crime” (7).

In a 2005 article on the subject of femicide, Ravelo Blancas stated her belief that “las muertes violentas en esta frontera representan un *sufrimiento colectivo*, un *trauma social*, un *dolor histórico* que permanece en la memoria de la sociedad, en una *memoria lastimada y herida*” (“La costumbre de matar” 150-51). Thus Ravelo Blancas broaches the subject of collective memory and the idea that citizens in Ciudad Juárez, on some level, do maintain such a memory. In *La batalla de las cruces*, the guardians of collective memory are the victims’ mothers, and their testimony is a guiding force throughout the film. The mothers are filmed in the comfort of their kitchens and living rooms, surrounded by sunlight, looking comfortable but sad. Thus the home becomes a site of memory, a place where mothers, families, or community members gather to share stories about victims of femicide.

One of the most memorable shots of Bonilla and Ravelo Blancas’ film shows a large concrete drainage ditch on which “Las víctimas del capital en las maquiladoras están” is written in black graffiti; below it are 43 spray painted crosses.⁵⁹ This ambiguous message captures many key elements at once. Graffiti on public property represents of the work of a subversive element of society. The message is a riddle open to interpretations, expressing both confusion and desperation, as if whoever had scrawled it had been unable to contemplate so many years of impunity and think about it objectively. Although femicide cannot be reduced to a simple relationship between corporate abuse of women in *maquiladoras* and femicide, there is no doubt that *maquiladora* culture is one of many complex issues involved in the femicide question.

The symbol of the cross has proved a difficult image for some victims’ mothers. Juana Rodríguez Bermúdez, mother of Brenda Berenice, for example, contributed to

⁵⁹ Bonilla and Ravelo also included the same shot of graffiti in their newest documentary, *La carta*.

Ciudad Juárez: de este lado del puente, a volume of spoken word poetry that collected the experiences of five mothers of femicide victims. She expressed, “Le quité las cruces, le quité todo lo que era de Dios/...Me enojé mucho, le quité las cruces,/ No quise cruces, no quise nada” (Vericat 39). Rodríguez Bermúdez had difficulty reconciling the symbol of the cross and a reality in which concepts like God and justice appear to be absent.⁶⁰ However, this reaction to the symbol of the cross remains almost entirely obscured in documentaries produced on femicide. The symbol of the cross is presented in large part as something reappropriated by families of victims. Nowhere is this reappropriation more evident than in the *Campo Algodonero*, a site that features prominently in *La batalla de las cruces*.

At the June 22, 2010 meeting of the “Comisión especial para conocer y dar seguimiento puntual y exhaustivo a las acciones que han emprendido las autoridades competentes en relación a los feminicidios en México,” Mexican Parliament member Teresa Guadalupe Reyes Sahagún discussed an important memorial space, the *Campo Algodonero*, abandoned cotton fields where the bodies of eight women were discovered in 1998. She argued that, “La sentencia del Campo Algodonero no es una sentencia a los asesinos de estas mujeres o de estas niñas: es una sentencia al Estado mexicano.” In the absence of state justice meted out by the state, families and concerned citizens have had to create alternative systems in which to honor femicide victims. The *Campo Algodonero* is an emblem for the way in which dangerous spaces are reclaimed by victims’ families and other activists. *La batalla de las cruces* shows the way that this and other memorial spaces have become an important part of the city.

⁶⁰ For an analysis of femicide within a theoretical framework refer to *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juárez* (2011) by Nancy Pineda-Madrid.

The eight crosses in the cotton fields remained, for many years, an important visual marker of feminicide. Recently, as Julián Cardona discussed with me, the city built a new hotel on the lot, replacing a memory site with a generic non-place (Personal interview 24, May 2011).⁶¹ Ironically, the hotel is named Conquistador Inn. In a 2009 newspaper article Judith Torrea described how, due to the hotel's construction, "Las cruces rosas con los nombres de 8 jóvenes desaparecidas y muertas son sólo un recuerdo en fotos de archivo de periódicos" (1). Jelin and Lagland describe this process of transformation into non-place, noting that social actors can still instill a space with meaning despite attempts to erase certain memory sites. The authors describe how,

Estos espacios se convierten en lugares de luchas entre quienes intentan transformar su uso y de esa manera (o para) borrar las marcas identificatorias que revelan ese pasado, y otros actores sociales que promueven iniciativas para establecer inscripciones o marcas que los conviertan en "vehículos" de memoria, en lugares cargados de sentido (11).



Figure 2.6. Alice Driver © 2011. The Hotel Conquistador Inn was built on the site of the eight memorial crosses at the *Campo Algodonero*.

⁶¹ In *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Marc Augé defines a non-place as a construction like a mall, airport, hotel, or supermarket that is designed to be homogenous regardless of its location. According to him, "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place" (77).

This strategy of replacing sites of historical memory with non-places, a process of memory erasure, also can be observed in Argentina, where sites of mass graves have been replaced by non-places such as airports and shopping malls. In his discussion of memoryscapes in the Southern Cone, Bickford notes that, “Chile’s Villa Grimaldi might have been destroyed and replaced with a high rise condominium complex without the mobilization by a community of former prisoners. Such success was not achieved in Uruguay, where a former torture center is now an exclusive shopping mall” (102).⁶² Although building non-places on sites of historical memory constitutes an act of erasure, Bickford argues that the power of a historical place can survive such actions. He asserts:

By themselves and isolated from their context, monuments, memorials, and museums have little effect. Their power is generated by place, by the meaningfulness of their location during the authoritarian period, and perhaps even more importantly by the meaning brought to them through the public discourse they inspire and provoke. They represent in the present a wound opened by a historical act. But they bear the promise of a future scar when the healed wound is remembered. (102)

In the case of the cotton-field killings, the interests of urban development trumped those of citizens and families of victims. As Rubén Villalpando described in the 2010 article “Incumple el gobierno fallo de CIDH sobre feminicidio en Juárez,”

Durante una conferencia celebrada en lo que queda del campo algodonero – ya que en una parte se construyeron dos hoteles –, los manifestantes denunciaron que a nueve años de estos hechos, a las madres y familiares de las mujeres desaparecidas y asesinadas no se les ha hecho justicia ni reparado el daño, además de que las autoridades continúan actuando de forma negligente y discriminatoria en el caso.

⁶² Nancy Gates-Madsen provides another example in “Ruins of the Past” when she discusses how “The site of the former clandestine detention center El Club Atlético in Buenos Aires remains charged with the memory of past events. Torn down by the junta for the construction of a highway in 1977, Atlético detained hundreds of prisoners during the early period of the dictatorship” (110). Gates-Madsen also gives as an example the experience of an individual survivor: “While waiting for a bus in 1979, one survivor felt a threatening yet familiar sensation and turned to discover himself standing at the construction site for the highway that passed where the former prison once stood” (110).

While filming in Ciudad Juárez, Portillo witnessed similar acts of memory erasure. She stated, “You know that the mothers have built a couple of monuments to the victims, and the government tore them down” (Skype Interview). Jelin and Lagland describe the precariousness of maintaining memory through marking space: “Construir monumentos, marcar espacios, respetar y conservar ruinas son procesos que se desarrollan en el tiempo, que implican luchas sociales, y que producen (o fracasan en producir) esta semantización de los espacios materiales” (3-4). The hotel’s construction can perhaps be considered a lesser form of economic violence – the attempt to void an area of symbolic meaning. Bickford points out, however, that even though reconstituted spaces are not created to serve as memorials, “through time, they form part of the memory of the past for individuals and communities traumatized by the authoritarian regime’s repressive apparatus. Their meaning often proves opaque to passersby” (101). Bickford thus differentiates between the memories of those who experienced the trauma directly and those who perhaps only know about it as a historical fact.

La batalla de las cruces centers around imagery of the eight crosses on the cotton fields that were, for almost a decade, part of the Ciudad Juárez memoryscape. In an August 2010 interview academic Tabuenca Córdoba, who has lived and worked in the Ciudad Juárez/El Paso area all through her life, remembered, barely one day earlier, driving by the crosses in Ciudad Juárez. She paused just for one moment, shook her head, and said, “I tried to look for the crosses, and I didn’t see them. I’m not sure if they’re still there” (Personal Interview). Although they had been gone for at least a year by that time, the crosses still remained part of Tabuenca Córdoba’s memoryscape. Documentaries like *La batalla de las cruces* ensure that *ecotestimonios* like that of the crosses live on in the

collective memory of diverse populations long after they are removed from the physical landscape.

ECOTESTIMONIO AND THE FILMIC MEMORYSCAPE IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ

The filmmakers and documentaries analyzed in this chapter demonstrate that cultural production, activism, and the documentation of *ecotestimonios* have contributed to a collective memory of femicide victims. The city surface serves as a witness, a geographical body painted with crosses and littered with graffiti and other memorials made by victims' families. These three documentaries capture how possible it is for individual citizens to create and maintain memory sites in the city. Informal, nomadic memory sites that change with the landscape can and do serve to shape discourse about femicide in Ciudad Juárez.

Performing the Border, *Señorita Extraviada* and *La batalla de las cruces* document alternative testimonies that show families of femicide victims as activists rather than solely as victims. The documentaries work against the prevailing discourse in Ciudad Juárez that tries to ignore, erase, or rewrite the stories of femicide victims. By emphasizing the importance of symbols on the cityscape as well as through personal storytelling by the families of some victims, these films highlight how citizens have brought a discussion of femicide to the forefront. These films examine *ecotestimonios* and demonstrate the persistence of memory through a conglomeration of signs, voices, and actions that continue to reappear in order to contest official history.

CHAPTER THREE

OF THE FLESH: GRAPHIC DEPICTIONS OF FEMINICIDE IN CIUDAD

JUÁREZ⁶³

“The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own.”

—Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (26)



Figure 3.1. Maya Goded © 2004. A mural in El Mariscal, the red light district Ciudad Juárez. Courtesy of Maya Goded.

The word “flesh” implies vulnerability and carnality, two essential narratives surrounding the issue of femicide in Ciudad Juárez. The hundreds of women who have been murdered in the city since the early 1990s have been represented in cultural production such as films, newspapers, art exhibits, photography, and books that have

⁶³ An edited version of this chapter is forthcoming in *Restructuring Violence in the Spanish-Speaking World* (2012).

traced these narratives. In the introduction to *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media Representation and Public Response* (2010) Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Ignacio Corona assert that victims of femicide, “Doubly victimized by criminals and the system of impunity on the one hand and by available systems of representation of violence on the other, the victims become a morbid source of image production as the material evidence of psychological and physical violence” (9). In many cases either the women were exhibited as naked, destroyed bodies or they were described as prostitutes.⁶⁴ In her article “Memoria y anonimato: representaciones discursivas de las muertas de Ciudad Juárez” (2006) Núria Villanova, a professor of Latin American Literature and Cultural Studies at American University, captures the paradox of the relationship between bodily vulnerability, death, and memory. She explains:

Estas mujeres son, en definitiva, víctimas excluidas de una sociedad en la cual, tras su muerte, se inscribe su memoria. La memoria, de esta manera tan paradójica, se genera a partir de la muerte, ya que con ésta víctimas y victimarios, como dos piezas inseparables de un juego siniestro, pasan a formar parte de la memoria de la violencia y la muerte en Juárez. (145-46)

Villanova highlights the fact that most of the victims of femicide are first recognized or remembered by the media and society as dead bodies. Although their families have personal memories and photographs, the citizens of Ciudad Juárez and international audiences see their dead bodies in newspapers or on TV and, with little or no information provided by police, are asked to read the messages written on those bodies – to judge them by their style of clothing, their painted fingernails, or the position of their bodies.

This chapter analyzes depictions of femicide in the following works: the photo essay *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* (1998) by American Charles Bowden, the

⁶⁴ For a complete bibliography on academic articles and books analyzing femicide, refer to “La ciudad y el feminicidio en los textos académicos” (2010) by Juila E. Monárrez Frago, Raúl Flores Simental, and Diana Lizeth García Salinas.

non-fiction work *Huesos en el desierto* (2002) by Mexican Sergio González Rodríguez, and the posthumously published novel *2666* (2004) by Chilean Roberto Bolaño.⁶⁵ These works, though different in format and style, were chosen because they share the collective approach of focusing on the ravaged female body. Only one of these authors, however, uses the language developed to describe these types of crimes – femicide/feminicide/feminicidio. The violence against women is made real in graphic photos and/or explicit descriptions of rape, strangulation, suffocation, and other forms of torture, but in the realm of linguistics, the violence is often left unnamed. In his 2003 article “El feminicidio y la conversión de Ciudad Juárez en territorio de la impunidad” Carlos Monsiváis argues that, “El papel de los medios ha sido determinante en un sentido: situar los crímenes en la nota roja y no, como corresponde, en la primera plana. Con esto se subraya la culpabilidad de las víctimas, porque tampoco muertas logran defenderse” (15). However, some literary production, like *Huesos en el desierto*, has worked against this trend, and tried to humanize victims rather than sensationalize the stories of their deaths.

I argue that graphic, violent descriptions and images of feminicide, although they may be represented as an effort to preserve the memory of the dead or to promote justice, contribute to the exploitation and objectification of the female body and reify the idea of the spectral, ghostly condition in which women in Ciudad Juárez are depicted, hovering somewhere between life and death, a state that Judith Butler describes as “precarious life.” Works that contribute to the exploitation of the female body rely on gender stereotypes that reduce women to sexualized bodies and do not move beyond the realm of the flesh.

⁶⁵ The first theater production of *2666* was directed by Pablo Ley and Alex Rigola at Theater Lliure in Barcelona, Spain in 2007.

The photo essay, fiction, and non-fiction works being analyzed all represent femicide differently. Whereas Bowden relies on stereotypes of women in his discussion of Ciudad Juárez, González Rodríguez seeks to connect the bodies of victims with memories of their lives. In yet another representational strategy, Bolaño's femicide victims are decidedly spectral and anonymous, allowing him to explore the depths and meaning of horror.

It is important to examine the ethical implications of the aesthetic choices surrounding representations of graphic violence. Perhaps some balance can be achieved between descriptions and images of dead bodies and the lives the victims lived. This balance, or as Butler describes it "framing of images," puts the focus on the humanity of the Other. As she explains, "The derealization of loss – the insensitivity to human suffering and death – becomes the mechanism through which dehumanization is accomplished. This derealization takes place neither inside nor outside the image, but through the very framing by which the image is contained" (148). To ensure that an image or description of a dead body does not convert it into a *thing*, some framework or reference is necessary. An emphasis on the fetishized body of a woman who has suffered extreme violence, if that representation does not include her life story, can convert the victim into a ghost: a woman should be seen as more than the sum of the violence written on her body. In this spectral state the Other becomes a victimized body and joins a long list of anonymous or misidentified female bodies. The three works included in this analysis wrestle in different ways with the issue of violence written on the female body, and how most effectively to represent the victims' lives and deaths.

For Butler, “The question that preoccupies me in the light of recent global violence is, Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, *What makes a grievable life?*” (20). Butler poses these questions in light of the events of 9/11, and wonders if mourning can cross borders and overcome nationalism or if it will simply translate into anger and violence. Her thoughts are especially pertinent in the context of Ciudad Juárez, a city in which violence has been translated into ever more extreme forms of violence.⁶⁶ Even though femicide was first identified in the area in 1993, it took years for the issue to cross borders and come to the attention of an international audience.

In the context of border capitalism – which includes more protections for companies and goods than for people – the poverty of many of the victims of femicide marks them as less than human and less than grievable. According to Hermann Herlinghaus, professor of Latin American Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, “contemporary cultural conflicts over the borderlands can be understood, to an important degree, as rhetorical conflicts consisting of a struggle over the figurative potentials displayed by speech acts and bodies, and entangled with numerous practices of movement and exchange” (62). The struggle over speech acts and bodies is nowhere more evident than in Ciudad Juárez, a city in which the dead bodies of women often disappear, reappear, are anonymous, are misidentified, or are put on public display. This analysis focuses on the progression of depictions of femicide through the

⁶⁶ The increasing violence is reflected in overall homicide and femicide numbers, in the type of violence perpetrated, and in the circumstances in which individuals have been murdered. For example, in 2010 Marisela Escobedo Ortiz, one of the most vocal activists against femicide, was murdered in front of the Palace of Government in Chihuahua. Her body fell not far from a cross that had been placed in front of the Palace by the group Women in Black to remember victims of femicide. She was surrounded by police at the time of her murder. To be murdered in broad daylight, on government property, surrounded by police begs the question: who is safe?

theoretical framework of *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) by Judith Butler.

In a series of five essays Butler analyzes how the events of September 11, 2001 produced a public discourse in which certain deaths were seen as grievable and others were not. She examines how the media and a nationalist rhetoric exerted censorship over the type of images that could or could not be shown, and muted discussion about the violence waged against the non-American Other. Bowden, González Rodríguez, and Bolaño have taken risks to represent the victims of femicide given that nationalist discourse in Mexico and the U.S., for many years, refused to recognize these crimes against women.

The authors of most works of cultural production who have sought to document crimes against victims of femicide faced decisions regarding the ethics of representation and how to depict the violated body. What are the risks, challenges, and ethics of representing violence? Current memory debates often address the issue of whether horror can be represented without being reproduced. An analysis of representations of femicide brings to the forefront the complicated issue of fascination with the dead female body. In relation to that body, Butler asks a pertinent question: “Is there something to be learned about the geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability from our own brief and devastating exposure to this condition?” (29). The distribution of corporeal vulnerability in Ciudad Juárez points to the relationship between economic and physical violence, given that the victims have been primarily of lower

socio-economic status.⁶⁷ The works analyzed here provide ample evidence that the political discourse surrounding victims of femicide has been overtly sexual. In contrast, the deaths of men have involved very little discussion of their sexuality.⁶⁸

LINGUISTIC VIOLENCE

An analysis of the linguistic territory of this issue shows that what is at stake is not only physical violence, but also the violence of derealization in the realm of language. If the term *homicide* suffices to describe all murders, then key elements of the crimes have not been permitted to be named. Of note is the fact that only one of the works being analyzed employs the term(s) *femicide/feminicide/feminicidio* to describe the rape and/or murder of women. Bowden refers to them as “murdered girl[s]” (61) in his essay, González Rodríguez labels them “femicidio[s]” or “los homicidios contra mujeres,” (11 275), and Bolaño calls them “los asesinatos de mujeres” (444). Of the three authors, González Rodríguez has been the most active in acknowledging and discussing the differences between homicide and feminicide:

A los hombres no los matan por ser hombres. A las mujeres las matan por ser mujeres y son víctimas de la violencia masculina por ser mujeres. Es odio de género. Eso no podemos quitarlo de encima. Son crímenes de poder. Los hombres les pueden matar como moscas sí, pero no los matan por ser hombres. Las mujeres sí. (Personal Interview)

The Inter-American Court for Human Rights has recognized the legal use of feminicide, and on July 26, 2011 it was codified as a legal term in Mexico.

⁶⁷ On the last page of *Huesos en el desierto* González Rodríguez includes a map titled “Geografía de peligro” which shows the relationship between poverty, feminicide, and the physical geography of the city. The page that includes the map is not numbered: it appears directly after page 334.

⁶⁸ Bejarano observes that, “If men are being killed and being tortured for a number of days, what we hear and what we’re told is that men have been tortured and brutally tortured. There have been some arguments that some men have been raped as well although that’s sort of beneath the surface. You aren’t hearing very much about that” (Personal Interview).

The use of the term *feminicide* has experienced several years of evolution in which *homicide/femicide/feminicide* were used interchangeably or in different contexts by different groups.⁶⁹ For example, politicians and the police in Ciudad Juárez have generally use the term *homicide* to discuss the murders, whereas the mothers of victims and other activists use *femicide* or *feminicide*. As Fregoso and Bejarano point out, “Women’s rights advocates, researchers, and feminist legal scholars are using the terms *femicide* and *feminicide* to refer to this phenomenon” (3). Yet the evolution and growing power of the term *feminicide* is not present in two of the works being examined here.

The absence of this term could be due to several different factors, including the chronological evolution of the term and the academic and activist circles in which the word is generally used. Cynthia Bejarano discussed potential reasons for the absence or misuse of the term in particular works of cultural production. She explained:

Everybody has a different interpretation of what the term means. I think the most important thing is to think about the term as it has evolved. People who haven’t been immersed in the discourse of *femicide* or *feminicide* haven’t understood the evolution of the term and how scholars and academicians or activists have come to use the term. Unless you’re fully immersed in the issue, perhaps these individuals are coming at it from the periphery of either the movement or their involvement. (Personal Interview)

The stances of the three authors on the term *feminicide* are as follows: Bowden prefers to use the term *homicide*; González Rodríguez uses the term *femicidio* to discuss the murders; and in the writings and interviews of Bolaño, who died in 2003, I found no clues as to his opinion or knowledge of the term. Bowden’s avoidance of the term reflects his stance that the murder of women in Ciudad Juárez is closely related to other forms of violence that also affect men and thus does not merit the use of new a new term.

⁶⁹ Refer back to the introduction for a more in depth discussion of the term *feminicide*.

PORNO-MISERY

This analysis focuses on examining whether descriptions of bodily violence such as rape, mutilation, burning, and/or beating suffered by femicide victims fulfill the need to document the truth, and examines at what point such representations cross the line into porno-misery. *Pornomiseria* or porno-misery is a term coined by Colombian filmmakers Carlos Mayolo and Luis Ospina in *Agarrando pueblo* (1977), a short fake documentary that satirizes a group of filmmakers desperately looking for poverty in order to profit from its representation.⁷⁰ The directors used the term to denounce the “voyeuristic treatment of abjection” seen in 1970s Colombian films (Gómez and Vega-Hurtado 64). As film critic Christian León describes, “La pornomiseria juega con la pulsión voyeurista del espectador, explota con fines comerciales la fascinación por la violencia y la obscenidad de la obscenidad de la pobreza que subyace en los deseos del ciudadano y del consumidor” (77). In the face of overwhelming violence and the recreation of that violence in cultural production, the term *pornomiseria* brings together issues of violence and voyeurism, allowing for a discussion of how and why graphic descriptions of femicide can turn into just another facet of consumption.

The term *pornomiseria* is most commonly used in debates about aesthetics of film, but I think its application to photography and literature is justified. Although it may be argued that graphic depictions of femicide and misery are necessary to provoke awareness, it is also true that the content can be exploited. Monárrez Fragoso makes a connection between the media and use of pornographic images when she argues that “Los testimonios que proceden de la prensa son parte también de una descripción gráfica,

⁷⁰ For a more recent discussion of porno-misery refer to the following interview with Colombian filmmaker Víctor Gaviria: “Cinematic Realism and the Restoration of Everyday Life: An Interview with Víctor Gaviria” (2008) conducted by Alice Driver and Joshua Jennings Tweddell.

elaborada y pornográfica de los cuerpos de las víctimas; asimismo, de la degradación de familiares. Con los discursos se transforman las terribles cosas que se les hicieron a las asesinadas en un vacío moralizador” (*Trama de una injusticia* 209). The prostitution of female bodies thus continues even after death, when images of corpses are bought and sold as part of a sensationalist news cycle.

Although *pornomiseria* in itself seems awful and abject, it is also a part of the human condition. The reason images of bodies of femicide victims appear so frequently in the mass media and in works of cultural production is that they reflect our curiosity to see damaged bodies, to witness destruction in the most realistic way possible. The concept of *pornomiseria* also relates to the way the perpetrators of the crimes deal with the bodies of victims. The bodies aren’t dumped; they are arranged so as to present a necroart exhibit to the public. The arrangement of bodies is not done to desensitize but to sensitize, to gain attention and recognition for the perpetrator of the crime. Victim’s families displace the power of the perpetrators and the images of arranged bodies by constructing memorials at the sites where bodies have been found.

JUÁREZ: THE LABORATORY OF OUR FUTURE

Charles Bowden is the author of the central essay in *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* (1998).⁷¹ Bowden invited both American linguist and cognitive scientist

⁷¹ Bowden was the first to introduce the topic of the death of women in Ciudad Juárez to a U.S. audience. He did this in the 1996 article “While You Were Sleeping” in *Harper’s Magazine*. As Bowden commented, “It starts with the *Harper’s* piece. I arrived in Juárez and El Paso for a completely different story. I started seeing these tombstone ads of missing girls. I’m talking to people I’ve met in Juárez, and they don’t seem very concerned or alarmed, the people at *El Diario*. It struck me more than it probably would most people, because I spent years on a daily newspaper covering such crimes. I’ve been to prison rape therapy. I’ve been to pedophile therapy. I’ve interviewed victims for days. When I went to construct the article what

Noam Chomsky to write the Introduction and Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano to write the Epilogue. Several renowned Ciudad Juárez photographers contributed to the photo essay.⁷² During my interview with González Rodríguez, he discussed the photo essay and contended, “es un libro importante por el testimonio que ofrece” (Personal Interview). Bowden makes an epistemological claim about the photographs in the book: “What Mexicans see and taste is captured in the photographs in this book” (110). In *On Photography* Susan Sontag explores the nuances of the idea that photography represents truth, stating “Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we’re shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates” (5). However, Sontag argues that the relationship between photography and voyeurism introduces the complication of either the producer or the consumer being complicit or promoting what is happening (12). She notes that “[p]hotographs shock insofar as they show something novel. Unfortunately, the ante keeps getting raised – partly through the very proliferation of such images of horror” (19).

When discussing the evolution of his photo essay, Bowden spoke of going to Ciudad Juárez for another assignment but getting sidetracked while searching for a particular negative from a local photographer (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 375). The roots of the photo essay reside in that serendipitous encounter, which led Bowden to Ciudad Juárez (375). As for the choice he made to display images of the bodies of dead women, Bowden explained,

really interested me was the level of violence and poverty in the city” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 371-72).

⁷² The photo essay features the photography of Jaime Murietta, Julián Cardona, Javier Aguilar, Jaime Bailleres, Gabriel Cardona, Alfredo Carillo, Raúl Lodoza, Miguel Perea, Margarita Reyes, Ernesto Rodríguez, Manuel Sáenz, Lucio Soria Espino, and Aurelio Suárez Núñez.

The city [Ciudad Juárez] was then kind of a poster child for the new free trade policy. Then I made a decision like everybody does, and that was to tell the story. I thought if I used photography readers would identify more because it is an art form, and that if I used dead girls instead of dead boys that they'd pay more attention. That's it. ("Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence" 372)

According to Butler, "The demand for a truer image, for more images, for images that convey the full horror and reality of the suffering has its place and importance" (146).

However, whether it is a valid tactic to use girls' bodies to gain more attention for Ciudad Juárez's critical situation is open to discussion. Bowden is darkly poetic in his descriptions of the economic and physical violence of the city, and his apocalyptic vision provides a nuanced look at the host of problems plaguing Ciudad Juárez.⁷³ For example, Bowden describes, "You are running down a dark street, you left the car door flung open when you lurched out and smelled the cool pavement of night smearing your face, and you are very alive as you race toward someone very dead. You are a cop, you are a reporter, you are a photographer, you are a man, you are a woman" (41). Although the book addresses the issue of the killings of women, it focuses more generally on Ciudad Juárez as a locus of ever multiplying forms of horror.⁷⁴

Bowden addresses subjects that no one – neither the government of Mexico nor that of the U.S. – wants to discuss. He pursues the gritty reality of crime and death produced by the capitalist ethos and international corporations in Ciudad Juárez. The author takes risks by compiling and narrating images that few want to recognize or take

⁷³ Both Bowden and Cardona used the term "economic violence" during their interviews to describe the way international corporations, with low wages and little concern for the rights of workers or the environment, forced workers into substandard living conditions. Some examples of economic violence include the fact that workers at many maquiladoras, due to extremely low wages, are forced to live on the periphery of the city in informal housing more prone to crime and more likely to be ravaged by fire.

⁷⁴ Bowden's fascination with the relationship between life/death and extreme violence is evident in his other work. For example, *Some of the Dead are Still Breathing: Living in the Future* (2009) looks at site of horror and extreme violence in a personal and non-linear reflection.

responsibility for. In some ways he is like the Antigone described by Butler: “Antigone, risking death herself by burying her brother against the edict of Creon, exemplified the political risks in defying the ban against public grief during times of increased sovereign power and hegemonic national unity” (46). However, rather than burying the bodies, Bowden drags them out into the open and leaves them out. What is lacking is a sense of closure, of the honor and peace conferred by a burial, symbolic or otherwise. The metaphorical burial that I speak of is some memorial act to honor the victims for their humanity, to show that they are more than evidence of a crime, more than a sensationalist call to arms.

Bowden addresses many of the concerns raised by Butler, in terms of not allowing nationalism (that of the U.S. or that of Mexico) to influence his narrative. Butler discusses the nationalist censorship of images that followed 9/11 and the subsequent war in Iraq, and points out how images were always chosen in order to minimize the impact of those events on the Iraqi population: “Indeed, the graphic photos of U.S. soldiers dead and decapitated in Iraq, and then the photos of children maimed and killed by U.S. bombs, were both refused by the mainstream media, supplanted with footage that always took an aerial view, an aerial view whose perspective is established and maintained by state power” (149). Bowden’s tactics swing to the other end of the pendulum regarding his treatment of the Other. He describes in graphic detail for a U.S. audience the economic and physical violence experienced by residents of Ciudad Juárez. He seems to be seeking an answer to Butler’s question: “But what media will let us know and feel that frailty, know and feel at the limits of representation as it is currently cultivated and maintained?”

(151). Although violence may evoke horror, stun, or incite change, making that violence real is merely the first step to bringing alive the humanity of the Other.

Bowden, who does not like to use the terms *femicide* or *feminicide*, was prescient when he wrote “I think that they [the photographers] are capturing something: the look of the future, and the future to me looks like the face of a murdered girl” (*Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* 61). When asked later about this statement in relation to feminicide, Bowden replied, “Frankly, the book invented the subject inadvertently” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 375). Bowden’s essay relies on narratives of vulnerability and carnality. He employs sexualized imagery to discuss women, reducing many of his subjects to fetishes or fantasies. In one passage he admits, “Sometimes I drift into fantasy about a whore I met in Juárez and the life we will build together” (103). It is a colonial narrative in which a white man swoops in and saves a sexualized brown body. In Bowden’s fantasy, they marry and she goes to college. On the subject of women, Bowden rarely moves past the sensational. Steven S. Volk and Marian E. Schlotterbeck discuss how Bowden’s work plays into traditional stereotypes, explaining:

When Debbie Nathan writes of “maquila sexuality [which] spills out of the plants during time off,” and Charles Bowden connects the exploitable aspects of the female body by arguing that “the only cheap thing in Mexico is flesh, human bodies you can fornicate with or work to death,” they often come unwittingly close to reproducing the logic of Mexican officials who attempt to explain the disappearances of young women in Juárez. City officials have often asserted that the disappeared led *una doble vida*, a double life: “Many of the murdered women worked in factories during the week and as prostitutes during the weekend in order to make more money.” (131)

Clearly, life on the border cannot be reduced to fornicating and overworked bodies.

Both the author and the work call into question the category of feminicide. In an interview Bowden explained to me, “When I told you that I questioned the use of the

term femicide, it's just that I don't find it a very good analytical term" ("Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence" 375).⁷⁵ Bowden prefers to use the term homicide. However, as Fregoso and Bejarano point out,

The scale and range of the violence in general and the specific brutality and severity of rape, sexual torture, and mutilation suggest high levels of misogyny and dehumanization of women. Treating feminicide as the gendered form of homicide is thus misleading, given that it obscures the power differentials that feminist theorists have long contended increase women's vulnerability to violence. (*Terrorizing Women* 7)

Although Bowden's book makes obvious his criticism of the fact that certain lives are not grievable in the global capitalist system, he does not explore the gendered nature of inequality.

Bowden describes his aims in the essay in the following fashion: "I want to know about *over there*. I want to know the smell of the streets at 2 A.M., the taste of the whore under the streetlight, the greasy feel of the juice rolling down my chin from the taco bought at a stand near dawn" (*Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* 29). Bowden's use of italics on the term *over there* highlights the otherness of the place, creating a separation between the author and the Other, the inhabitants of *over there*. The first aspect of the city that Bowden wants to know is the smell of the streets, and the next is the "taste of the whore under the streetlight" (29). His use of language here, which in the interview he argued was "Whitmanesque," points to two facts: first of all, *over there* is a place defined by whores, and second, he is curious about their taste.⁷⁶ According to

⁷⁵ In an earlier email Bowden wrote to me, "I question both the category of femicide and the focus by media on the murder of women in Ciudad Juarez" (Email).

⁷⁶ In response to my questions about his use of language Bowden replied, "Do you think when Emerson wrote 'Brahma' and 'I turn and pass and kill again' that he wanted to know about killing?" ("Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence" 374). Bowden is using Emerson's quotation as an example of how a writer has poetic license within his work and should not necessarily be interpreted literally. He is cautioning me

Bowden, he used the verb taste to describe how he wanted to “know their lives” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 374).⁷⁷ However, of the many word choices possible, “taste” does not accurately describe, or imply, how to learn about a prostitute’s life. It is problematic because it plays into existing stereotypes of Ciudad Juárez and of the women who live there. It represents them as sexualized objects whose essence can be discovered either metaphorically or physically through a sex act.

In response to a question about his frequent use of the term “whore” Bowden explained, “The fact is that I don’t think that if you talked to those women they would use the equivalent in Spanish of prostitute to say what they were” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 373). According to Bowden, women working in the streets would call themselves *putas* as opposed to *prostitutas* or *sexo-servidoras*. The author’s use of the term whore is representative of the treatment of women in the essay as a whole – sexualized or dead female bodies are of central interest, while the nuances of life for individual victims are not. In *MeXicana Encounters* Rosa-Linda Fregoso criticizes Bowden’s representation of women. She argues that “Bowden’s perversity, his racist and colonialist gaze, constructs border women as abject” (15). Similarly, I argue that the women in Bowden’s work are not fully realized subjects but rather objects – bodies, whores, or victims.

against my literal interpretation of his statement that he would like to know “the taste of the whore under the streetlight” (*Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* 29).

⁷⁷ Bowden also uses the verb “to taste” to describe horror. He writes, “You are tasting something we seldom talk about: horror slapping our systems awake and making us feel more alive than the gardens we cultivate with love during the better hours” (*Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* 41).

If there is any one sign that ties Bowden's essay together, it is the female body. Bowden both begins and ends the essay with graphic descriptions of women's ravaged bodies. In the first chapter he describes one of the photographs he has reviewed:

One photograph in particular keeps taking over my mind [...]: in this image a young woman, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, I can't say for sure, lies on the ground stone-dead. Her face is clearly visible and it is caked with streams of fresh blood. A rock, and a good-sized rock, has been stuffed in her mouth, and now her lips look like an inner tube wrapped around the rock. You can hear the teeth breaking. (*Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* 25)

The body, in this description and others, is a signifier without a signified. The description in itself is not problematic, but the lack of information, the lack of a narrative, a name, an identifying mark, is. Bowden certainly brings human suffering and death to light and spares no detail. But, in the case of these impoverished, unknown women, it seems that their death both is and is not his interest. He confronts the reader with descriptions of their bodies, as if he could force them to see what remains hidden. Unlike many other works of cultural production, Bowden does not interview family members of femicide victims or search for the story of the bodies beyond the photos. With a fury of flesh and blood, Bowden charges towards the apocalypse.

Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future exposes the horrors of economic and physical violence caused by NAFTA and globalization, and the violence against women is only one element of Bowden's analysis. Both Bowden and Cardona expressed concern that people fixate on the physical violence more than on the economic roots of the violence (Personal Interview August 20, 2010). In *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* both Cardona and Bowden work to undo the NAFTA success myth promoted by the media, and violence against women is one facet of the underworld they seek to expose.

Julián Cardona, a renowned photographer from Ciudad Juárez who collaborated with Bowden on the book, pointed out in an interview that only 20% of the photos in the book deal with physical violence, and the rest depict economic violence (Personal Interview August 20, 2010).

In the process of my investigation, I initially criticized Bowden for his occasionally sparse photo captions, especially the one that accompanied the burned-out face of a woman and simply stated: “A raped and murdered woman found in Chamizal Park” (66).⁷⁸ This photograph, described at various points in the essay and also in the last sentence of the essay, becomes a focal point for the story Bowden is telling.⁷⁹ Photographs such as this one seem sensationalist, and have generated criticism. However, Cardona explained that, of the photographers who participated in the photo-essay,

[...] es gente que ha estado siempre en Juárez viviendo porque aman Juárez. Sí el libro trataba de llamar la atención sobre un sistema que se estableció en Juárez que a nuestro juicio era muy cuestionable y que generaba una sociedad violenta. Incipiente en ese momento pero ya evidente. Ahora se registra con una crudeza tal que ha llegado a extremos inimaginables. (Personal Interview August 20, 2010)

Cardona points out that, although to an outsider some of the photographs may seem sensationalist, to the photographers, it is a daily reality that cannot be ignored. In a

⁷⁸ When asked about the sparse captions on some photographs Bowden commented, “I think some of these guys wouldn’t even know. Jaime Murieta rolls around like a war machine all night just snapping photos. I mean it. I don’t think he keeps records of real consequence. When I knew him he had a bunch of negatives piled up like spaghetti in a box not even in jackets” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 378).

⁷⁹ The photograph was taken by Jaime Bailleres. María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba, who is a friend of Bailleres, recounted the following conversation with him that highlights the difficulties of the ethics of representation for a photographer: “We were talking about issues of representation, and I said, ‘I don’t know why you have to publish all those bloody pictures.’ It was a time when they didn’t even publish that many bloody pictures in the newspapers, when there was still a little bit more of a sense of humanity I would say. Then I told him, ‘For example, to me something that is suggestive is more powerful than looking at the picture [of the dead body]. I’m going to give you an example. I read once in the newspapers that a kid had been drowned in the pool, and the picture that accompanied the article was a picture of his friends crying. The pain and the sorrow of those kids made me feel really bad, and it caused me more impact than if I saw the corpse of a kid floating in a pool.’ Then he asked me, ‘Did you really like that picture?’ and I said ‘yes.’ He replied, ‘it was mine. They didn’t want to publish it because I didn’t have a corpse.’ To me it was the best red page picture I have seen in my life” (Personal Interview).

similar vein, Butler, in her analysis of use of the face in war imagery, looks at how the U.S. has employed photos of women in Afghanistan. She argues that, “although we might want to champion the suddenly bared faces of the young Afghan women as the celebration of the human, *we have to ask in what narrative function these images are mobilized*, whether the incursion into Afghanistan was really in the name of feminism, and in what form of feminism did it belatedly clothe itself?” (143).⁸⁰ I think the same question can be asked of the photographs used in Bowden’s essay. What is the narrative function of the photographs? Bowden’s image of the dead woman, raped and burned, is mobilized as part of a narrative function to shock, as part of a show of horrors. There is no caption providing information about the victim or about the circumstances of the crime.

Bowden discussed the editorial choice to display dead bodies. He explained that the photographers were upset that more graphic photos were not included: “Over 50% of the 3,000 negatives were of dead people [...] So I go back there and the photographers are like, ‘Jesus, we go to all this trouble, and you put out this *Alice in Wonderland* version or Pollyanna version’” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 372). While to some readers the photo-essay seems sensational, to photographers living in the city and witnessing the multiplication of dead bodies, the photo essay appears to be a white-washing of the actual level of violence.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) Sontag avers, “And all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their caption” (10). This is most painfully evident in the caption of the raped woman, which provides almost no information about the victim. However, Bowden stated that he had no influence over the choice of photos or photo

⁸⁰ The italics are my emphasis, not the author’s.

captions, emphasizing at various times that the editor at Aperture, the editorial press, chose the photos for the book.⁸¹ Cardona also stated that each photographer wrote his own captions (Personal Interview August 20, 2010). This perhaps explains the difference in tone between the photographs, which depict both economic and physical violence, and the text, which at times describes exultantly the excitement of life in Ciudad Juárez.⁸² Bowden describes, for example, the rush of adrenaline the photographers experience as they go about their work in a violent city. He writes, “[...] we take photographs and we listen, and, oh my God, do we feel alive amid the screams...I believe that Juárez is one of the most exciting places in the world” (*Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* 41). This description implies, to a certain degree, that pleasure or the voyeurism of porno-misery also plays a part in the process of documenting the city’s problems.⁸³

When discussing Bowden’s work, filmmaker Lourdes Portillo observed, “First of all, let me just say something about Charles Bowden. After reading his work and seeing the pictures that were in *The Laboratory of Our Future*, I thought that Charles Bowden had really benefited from making Ciudad Juárez into a kind of hellhole. That’s his thing”

⁸¹ Bowden conceived the book after meeting the photographers in Ciudad Juárez, and he was instrumental in bringing thousands of photographs to the attention of Aperture. In addition, he also described the photos to the editor of Aperture at the time. He explained, “What I did, I was in New York, and I sat down with Melissa Harris, the then head of Aperture’s publications. She had 3,000 negatives from the people in Juarez, and I sat there for hours while she flashed them on the screen telling her what they were” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 372). However, he said he had no control over which pictures were included in the book.

⁸² Julián Cardona said that each photographer wrote his own captions, but that he reviewed most of the captions to make sure they were as complete as possible (Personal Interview). Bowden stated that he did not participate in the choice of the photos or of the captions (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 377).

⁸³ When talking about this seeming contradiction between the tone of the essay and the photographs Bowden responded, “I don’t know how you could read the book and think that I thought it was exciting because of crime. What I say in the book is that this is the laboratory of the future, and things are being decided there. That’s why I got the introduction by Chomsky and I wanted the afterword by Galeano. That was my motivation. If you’re asking me, ‘Is it exciting because of murder?’ No. I’d covered so many murders before I ever got to Juárez that I never wanted to see another one. I did homicides for three years on a daily paper too. That’s why I quit newspapers. I couldn’t take it any more – the rapes and murders. You do it on a daily basis. It’s not fun. I went to Juárez for something else. I got sidetracked” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 374).

(Skype Interview). However, in separate interviews both Bowden and Cardona emphasized their commitment to documenting violence in order to promote awareness and justice. Cardona explained:

Y ahora se ve como una realidad la que representa el libro, si tú la ves y la hablas con cualquier persona de la ciudad, incluso que no conozca el libro, lo que pasaba y lo que recogía el libro es algo poco violento comparado con lo que es ahora. Tenemos una violencia ahora que es diez, quince veces peor de lo que coge el libro. El propósito del libro fundamentalmente no era hacer una crítica de Juárez. La gente participaba en el libro, específicamente yo – soy una gente que ama tanto Juárez que vivo en Juárez. (Personal Interview August 20, 2010)

For Cardona, the book represents the undeniable reality of violence in the city, violence that has only continued to multiply since the publication of the photo-essay. However, Cardona also recognizes the limits of photography. As he explained, “Mira, ahorita he empezado a escribir más porque en el tipo de circunstancia que se da en Juárez la fotografía como tal muestra sus límites. Ahorita con sólo fotografía es prácticamente imposible retratar lo que está pasando en Juárez” (Personal Interview August 20, 2010).

When I asked Bowden about the implications of representing graphic violence, he replied, “You don’t know and I don’t know. We don’t know the consequences of that. Look, it depends on the moment and time and what you’re trying to say” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 378).⁸⁴ Butler for her part argues against the prohibition of images of violence, but in favor of a framing of those images that emphasizes the humanity of those depicted. She finds that “[t]he erasure of suffering through the prohibition of images and representations circumscribes more generally the sphere of appearance, what we can see and what we can know” (146). Bowden did find the term porno-misery apposite to the discussion of violent imagery and commented:

⁸⁴ Bowden also commented, “There are no rules on that. People may make up rules” (“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence” 378).

Porno-misery I find more useful. When the term is used it means that you use it [violence] so much it deadens people. The assumption is that pornography is deadening. That's why we have a distinction in language between eroticism and pornography. Eroticism is supposed to stir people whether you approve of it or not. Pornography is absolutely redundant imagery. Porno-misery exists when you produce enough of these images that people don't react to them. It's kind of like somebody in a bar having one too many drinks. There isn't a rule. ("Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence" 378)

His comments raise questions about at what point violent imagery and descriptions become redundant. There is no easy formula, no quick measure for judgment.

In one particularly brutal description of the photograph of "a raped and murdered woman" Bowden describes how the photographer "Jaime Bailleres has projected a beautiful black carved mask on the screen. The head is tilted and the face is smooth with craftsmanship. The hair is long and black. It takes me a moment for me to get past this beauty and realize the face is not a mask" (*Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* 67). We are left with an image of a destroyed woman, but not with a name, a life story, a sign of the life that once was. What, if anything, is gained from recreating this horror? In the final words of his essay Bowden states, "She stares at me. The skin is smooth, almost carved and sanded, but much too dark. And the screams are simply too deafening" (105). Bowden records and writes leaving ghosts in his wake, broken women who can be identified only by their smooth skin or violence written on their bodies.

FEMINICIDE: A SHARED OBSESSION

While Bowden was the first writer in the U.S. to address the issue of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, in Mexico the first non-fiction work produced was *Huesos en el desierto* (2002) by Sergio González Rodríguez, a journalist and novelist from Mexico City.

González Rodríguez began writing for the Mexico City newspaper *Reforma* in 1993, and in 1996 he traveled to Ciudad Juárez to investigate the disappearance and murder of girls and women.⁸⁵ By the summer of 1999 his research began to show the involvement of policemen and politicians in the murders, and in June of that year he was kidnapped in Mexico City, beaten, and left on the side of the street. It was just after the kidnapping that the relationship between González Rodríguez and Bolaño began.⁸⁶ According to book editor and journalist Marcela Valdes:

The year that González Rodríguez was first attacked, Bolaño had been working on his demented tangle for more than half a decade. Searching for information about Juárez, Bolaño e-mailed his friends in Mexico, asking more and more detailed questions about the murders. Finally, tired of these gruesome inquiries, his friends put him in touch with González Rodríguez, who, they said, knew more about the crimes than anyone in Mexico. Bolaño first e-mailed him around the time that González Rodríguez decided to write a nonfiction book about his investigation. (3)

González Rodríguez had already decided to use his extensive research in a non-fiction book, *Huesos en el desierto*, which would eventually be published by the editorial Anagrama in Spain. Thus, he and Bolaño nurtured a friendship based on a common obsession with the murders of women.⁸⁷ As writers, they both faced the ethical question

⁸⁵ In *Huesos en el desierto* González Rodríguez states, “Comencé a interesarme en los homicidios contra mujeres en Ciudad Juárez durante 1995. Una mañana de 1996, salí de la Ciudad de México hacia la frontera norte. Y hallé un rastro de sangre. Desde entonces, lo he seguido” (284).

⁸⁶ González Rodríguez described how he got to know Bolaño stating, “Yo conocí a Roberto Bolaño personalmente en Blanes en el año 2002. Yo no tuve relación con él cuando él estuvo en México. Yo pertenecía a un grupo de rock y a la vez estudiaba. Los ambientes son absolutamente convergentes. Básicamente donde nos desenvolvíamos, lo que describe en la novela *Los detectives salvajes* el ámbito de la colonia Roma, Condesa, el centro, algunas otras partes de la ciudad. Todos son trayectos que existían en esa época como puntos de desplazamiento de los jóvenes músicos, artistas, literarios de la época. Pero yo no lo conocí entonces. Yo lo conocí a raíz de la investigación que estaba haciendo para mi libro *Huesos en el desierto* y a través del correo electrónico. Fue aproximadamente en el año 99 hasta el 2000” (Personal Interview).

⁸⁷ Jorge Herralde, editor of Anagrama and long-time friend of Bolaño discussed the relationship between Bolaño and González Rodríguez a 2004 interview with *El Periódico* of Barcelona. He stated, “El tema de 2666 salía en cada conversación en los últimos años. Me hablaba, por ejemplo, de sus numerosas consultas vía email a Sergio González Rodríguez, el escritor mexicano que investigó los crímenes de Ciudad Juárez y publicó el extraordinario reportaje *Huesos en el desierto*, acerca de ellos” (64).

of how to represent graphic violence. Bolaño, who had never visited Ciudad Juárez, relied on González Rodríguez to answer questions about the exact details of the murders.⁸⁸ The friendship proved influential to Bolaño, and he included González Rodríguez as a character in his posthumously published novel *2666*.⁸⁹ In the essay “Sergio González Rodríguez In the Eye of the Storm,” written between 2002 and 2003, Bolaño describes how

A few years ago, my friends in Mexico got tired of me asking for information – more and more detailed information, too – about the killings of women in Ciudad Juárez, and they decide, apparently by common accord, to hand the job over to Sergio González Rodríguez, who is a novelist, essayist, reporter, and probably all kinds of other things besides, and who, according to my friends, was the person who knew most about this case, a unique case in the annals of Latin American crime: more than three hundred women raped and killed in an extremely short period of time, between 1993-2002, in a city on the U.S. border with a population of just under one million. (*Between Parentheses* 231)

Bolaño also discusses their relationship and thanks González Rodríguez for his substantial “technical help” in the writing of *2666* (231).

The relationship between these two works proves pivotal because Bolaño’s fiction feeds off the reality and statistics of femicide violence as researched and documented by González Rodríguez. For example, femicide researcher Monárrez Fragoso, upon reading *2666*, noted the striking similarities between Bolaño’s descriptions and the original list of femicide victims prepared by *Casa Amiga*, the first rape crisis center in Ciudad Juárez founded by Esther Chávez Cano in 1991. She noted “las similitudes entre cómo va Bolaño describiendo cada asesinato de una mujer” and added, “no es una creación original” (Personal Interview). In a 2004 interview included in *Para Roberto*

⁸⁸ Bolaño, who was born in Chile, spent the years of his youth in Mexico. During his many years in Mexico he never visited Ciudad Juárez. In 1977 he left Mexico for Paris and never returned, spending the last years of his life in Blanes, Spain.

⁸⁹ The character is named Sergio González Rodríguez.

Bolaño, Jorge Herralde, editor of Anagrama and long-time friend of Bolaño, also discussed Bolaño's fascination with femicide, highlighting the similarities between his descriptions of the victims and a forensic report. Herralde explained,

Bolaño había vivido mucho tiempo en México: años decisivos, como se constata en *Los detectives salvajes* y otros libros. Le apasionaba el tema, los crímenes de Ciudad Juárez, los centenares o miles de mujeres raptadas, violadas, mutiladas y finalmente asesinadas con total impunidad: el Mal más escalofriante. Y los crímenes de Ciudad Juárez (Santa Teresa en la novela) son, en efecto, el ensangrentado telón de fondo de cuatro de las novelas de 2666 y el tema específico de otra de ellas, la penúltima, *La parte de los crímenes*. Una descripción minuciosa y aséptica de las mujeres asesinadas, como un informe forense. (71)

Bolaño thus challenges readers with a eerily accurate fictional account of events rooted in a violent reality.

Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Corona note the relationship between bodies and signs, arguing that the body becomes part of the discourse on femicide and produces “a collective endeavor of a literary discourse in which ‘fiction’ is crisscrossed by references to factual events” (*Gender Violence* 5). 2666 is such a work, and, as González Rodríguez said of his communication with Bolaño, “Le llegué a transcribir actas judiciales referentes a algún caso de asesinato de una víctima, pues quería saber cómo se describía en lenguaje forense uno de aquellos crímenes” (Email). When I asked González Rodríguez about the relationship between *Huesos en el desierto* and 2666, he replied, “Aspiro sólo a que *Huesos en el desierto* sea leído como el reverso indicial-documental de la gran novela de Bolaño 2666” (Email). What he means by this is perhaps unclear until one considers how the two authors treat memory. González Rodríguez writes *Huesos en el desierto* to create a historically accurate document that gives testament to the lives of femicide victims. Bolaño, on the other hand, recreates the situation in

which we, as humans, get desensitized to violence and cannot continue to function; we cannot continue to read, hear about, or see images of senseless violence. We shut down. His tactics are the opposite of those of Gonzalez Rodriguez. Bolaño seeks to show us how easily we forget or look away from violence. He creates a situation in which one can see how difficult it is to maintain memory, to not look away, to continue to read of dead bodies and to feel that one person can make a difference in the face of such violence. González Rodríguez and Bolaño, though their techniques are different, raise similar questions about whose lives are seen as grievable. They show how “It is not just that a death is poorly marked, but that it is unremarkable” (Butler 35). They describe how victims of femicide have been treated as anonymous piles of flesh in public discourse.

HUESOS EN EL DESIERTO

The title *Huesos en el desierto* alludes to the bodies of victims of femicide found in the unforgiving landscape of Ciudad Juárez in abandoned lots within the city as well as on the periphery. The geography of the city is complicit in, or at least representative of, the memory problem: “La geografía que los devora acepta, como horizonte último, el sentido del desarraigo y el abandono de la memoria comunitaria de una tierra adentro que los ha expulsado” (*Huesos en el desierto* 87). As an influx of migrants looking for work continues to arrive in Ciudad Juárez, they are greeted by silence on the subject of the killings. In a short poem included in the book the author writes, “No pasa nada, dirá ella. Nada, repetirán los que vengan./ Nada./ Como el silencio

del desierto./ Nada./ Como los huesos de las víctimas dispersos en la noche” (231).⁹⁰ The theme of the desert as a geography of forgetfulness is evident throughout the work. The author describes Lomas de Poleo, a tract of informal housing and dumps on the northwest edge of the city near the U.S. border where many bodies of femicide victims have been found, as “aquella tierra suelta que repele la memoria” (26).



Figure 3.2. Alice Driver © 2011. The desert around Lomas de Poleo is littered with debris as seen in this photo. Many bodies were found among the informal dumps in the area.

However, for the author, the book’s title also has another meaning. As he describes,

Me parece que es una figura muy ilustrativa de lo que ha sucedido allá con las víctimas de asesinatos sistemáticos. Mujeres cuyo cuerpo quedó abandonado en el desierto y por lo tanto son huesos en el desierto. No me refiero solamente al hecho geográfico, al hecho telúrico, ni siquiera la figura del desierto como representación de lo contrario a la civilización. Me refiero al desierto de instituciones allá. (Personal Interview)

González Rodríguez lays bare the dysfunction of state institutions, alluding to the condition of bare life described by Giorgio Agamben. In the state of bare life, which

⁹⁰ The author talks about the precariousness of the lives of all migrants, not just women. He expresses, “Cualquier frontera del norte de México conforma un territorio idóneo que urde el anonimato radical de los migrantes. Para los menos de ellos, la ‘línea’ fronteriza implica una nueva identidad, para los más, aquella encarna la experiencia del tránsito de México hacia Estados Unidos, la pérdida de la identidad natal y la búsqueda de otra nueva, volátil, proclive a enfrentar riesgos. Una golpiza policiaca, estafas, robos, cohechos, o hasta la muerte” (*Huesos en el desierto* 13).

Butler also discusses, citizens are denied a political life protected by the laws of the state and become mere bodies living in an in-between place where they are more vulnerable to violence (67). For Butler, “In other words, the suspension of the life of a political animal, the suspension of standing before the law, is itself a tactical exercise, and must be understood in terms of the larger aims of power” (68). González Rodríguez analyzes the power structures at work in Ciudad Juárez and demonstrates how state institutions are responsible for allowing femicide to continue. He describes how a dysfunctional justice system contributes to the spectrality of victims of femicide.

In the preface to the book, González Rodríguez discusses how authorities claim to have resolved 80% of the 300 femicides. And yet, he objects “Se distingue allí el efecto decisivo de las acciones y omisiones de las autoridades: su imposibilidad de hacer cumplir la ley o aplicar la justicia” (11). The authorities seem to believe that through speech acts they can manifest a semblance of justice, as if declaring a case resolved after forcing a confession through torture would amount to the same thing as applying the law.⁹¹ For González Rodríguez, beyond the lack of institutional justice and the statistics on femicide, there are two important points to make. He outlines, “Más allá de las cifras, semejantes crímenes dejan traslucir dos hechos de análoga gravedad ahora y hacia el futuro: la inadvertencia o amnesia global ante un fenómeno extremo de signo anárquico; y el impulso de normalizar la barbarie en las sociedades contemporáneas” (12).

⁹¹ In the case of many suspects who have been arrested for femicide, there has been evidence of torture and forced confession. According to González Rodríguez, Sharif Sharif, the main suspect in multiple femicide cases, “sostiene que fabricar testigos y declaraciones falsas es una práctica común en México. Y también falsificar firmas en declaraciones, o asentar testigos que luego nunca reaparecen. La tortura, ya sea física o psicológica, insiste, no ha sido erradicada, y se recurre a ella con frecuencia” (*Huesos en el desierto* 99).

González Rodríguez thus makes a blunt political statement: without memory, we all become potentially subject to the ravages of bare life.

In the absence of investigation, victims of femicide are often forced to be associated with objects – shoes, clothing, and lipstick – rather than with names.

González Rodríguez discusses how this exchange contributes to the anonymity of both the body and the life of femicide victims (153). He suggests that bodies become identified by symbols surrounding the circumstances of their death, symbols that ultimately fail to identify or make real the lost lives. As he describes, “Los zapatos y las ruedas intercambian o fantasmagorizan su valor de uso y su valor de fetiches. La muerte surge como incidencia vehicular. Una desgracia veloz y depredadora. La aspereza del desierto que se uniera al salvajismo del asfalto” (153). The desert, abandoned roads, shoes – these have become the protagonists of femicide, things that appear in photos alongside the bodies of unidentified women. Butler argues that “It is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense *our own* and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies” (25). However, this becomes infinitely more difficult in death, leading to questions about how unidentified bodies are treated. Do not these bodies, even without names, have human rights? Does death convert them into public property? The answer, it would seem, is that bodies, especially the bodies of the poor, become a part of public space, free to be displayed as the media and the market deem necessary.

In terms of structure, González Rodríguez’s book is a vehicle for memory, for collecting facts, figures, and for telling the stories of victims in an attempt to lend some shape to the senseless narrative of femicide. The book is divided into 18 short chapters

followed by an epilogue, a list of the author's sources, a list of important figures related to femicide. It also includes a map of Ciudad Juárez titled "Geografía de peligro" that shows where high concentrations of victims of femicide have been found. González Rodríguez discusses the importance of memory and explains: "Para mí es mucho mas importante que cualquier giro formal o aspiración narrativa que quede una constancia de los hechos desde luego" (Personal Interview). His focus is on reconstructing bodies and putting them in context, finding out their names, the story of their lives, and how politicians and other institutional figures may enter into the equation. According to the author, "la única forma de que estos hechos no se vuelvan a repetirse es que tengamos memoria de ellos. Es muy importante la memoria. Al menos es lo único que nos queda" (Personal Interview).



Figure 3.3. Alice Driver © 2011. Although for years families had to print their own missing person flyers, the government now has taken some responsibility for the issue. This flyer was taped to a telephone pole near the plaza mayor in Ciudad Juárez in May of 2011.

The chapter “La vida inconclusa” in *Huesos en el desierto* structurally mirrors “La parte de los crímenes” in 2666 in several aspects. Both chapters recount in exacting detail the murders of dozens of women. González Rodríguez records details about victims starting in the year 2002 and moving back in time to 1993. He provides the date of death, the name of the victim (when possible), and a description of the violence suffered. For example, the chapter begins as follows: “23/09/02, Erika Pérez, entre 25 y 30 años, cabello color castaño, blusa estampada con flores, pantalón y pantaletas debajo de las rodillas, correa del bolso alrededor del cuello, camino de terracería a partir del crucero de las calles Paseo del Río y Camino San Lorenzo” (257). The number of entries that begin with the words “no identificada” reminds the reader how many bodies remain unidentified. In 2666 Bolaño begins the chapter by describing feminicides from 1993 to 1997. Whereas González Rodríguez succinctly lists dates of death, names, and the cause of death, Bolaño couches stories within stories, showing the way in which gruesome deaths can get lost or buried among the layers of disparate information that make up media-driven societies.⁹²

Both works also deal with memory and its ephemeral quality. In the epilogue to *Huesos en el desierto*, González Rodríguez reflects on the role of memory, stating, “Rememorar cosas pretéritas otorga los beneficios del pensamiento analógico, es decir, de la aptitud de trazar analogías, asociaciones, puentes en los hechos que la vida cotidiana presenta a gran velocidad, inconexos, en medio del caos noticioso y bajo el riesgo de la amnesia generalizada” (282). He is, through his writing, combating this national amnesia.

⁹² In “La apretada red oculta” Elvio E. Gandolfo describes Bolaño’s mania for writing stories and anecdotes within other stories as an essential characteristic of his work: “El tono parejo que une todo es la bulimia argumental, que devora decenas y cientos de hilos temáticos, anecdóticos en cada libro” (117).

Bolaño, for his part, pursues a well-documented and life-long obsession on the relationship between literature, horror, and the human condition.

According to Cynthia Bejarano, feminicide makes evident that “There is a politics in killing, and there is a politics in death” (Personal Interview). González Rodríguez captures one angle of the politics of death in *Huesos en el desierto* when he describes how state and federal authorities try to downplay the crimes or blame the victims. For example, González Rodríguez describes how in 1995 the spokesman for the judicial police of the state of Chihuahua, Ernesto García, declared, “Alertamos a la comunidad para evitar que las mujeres transiten por lugares desconocidos o a oscuras. Que vayan acompañadas y de ser posible carguen un *spray* de gas lacrimógeno para defenderse” (15). This statement displays how the police, as state agents who are sworn to protect the population from violence, are warning women that they are responsible for their own safety. As Butler describes, what is evident is that “[c]ertain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as ‘grievable’” (32). In the case of victims of feminicide, statements made by public officials between 1993 and 1995 and recorded by González Rodríguez in *Huesos en el desierto* mark the victims as less than grievable.

Taking into account the initial statements by officials in Ciudad Juárez, the truth to be learned is that a lone woman who traverses public spaces risks rape that will end in death. *Huesos en el desierto* provides a record of statements made by local and municipal authorities ranging from the governor to police chiefs, a record that demonstrates the belief that a female in public invites violence upon herself. By collecting and recording a

range of public statements made on feminicide, the author shows how female sexuality can be used to dispossess both victims and potential victims of their personhood. Butler describes this condition as follows: “As a mode of relation, neither gender nor sexuality is precisely a possession, but, rather, is a mode of being dispossessed, a way of being *for* another or *by virtue* of another” (23-4). González Rodríguez shows the devastating progression of this dispossession as he documents social, cultural, and global factors that have contributed to the problem of feminicide.

In the chapter “Campos de algodón” the author tells the story of the discovery in 2001 of the bodies of eight women dumped in an cotton field in Ciudad Juárez. He describes how “diversas organizaciones civiles se manifestaron frente a las oficinas de la Fiscalía Especial, efectuaron una clausura simbólica y demandaron una investigación científica de los homicidios” (233). His focus on how the actions of local individuals and organizations demand justice in the face of impunity is an example of how individual citizens can and do influence local and national discourse.

The treatment of bodies in *Huesos en el desierto* and *2666* are similar in their efforts to record the graphic nature of the violence against women. However, González Rodríguez’s goal in writing the book is to leave testimony of the economic, political, and social forces that have contributed to the violence exercised against women, whereas Bolaño’s work explores more generally the metaphysics of horror and evil without articulating any stated goals related to fomenting social change in Ciudad Juárez. González Rodríguez asserts that it was important to him to record information and sources related to feminicide, “Porque ya en el futuro nadie podrá decir, ‘Esto nunca sucedió’” (Personal Interview). The author acknowledged that he could have written the

book in many different formats or even written it as a novel. However, “era más imperativo la información, la memoria, el relato de hechos y la convergencia de las voces de testimonios” (Personal Interview). The text depicts the tenuous relationship between memory and anonymity that plagues victims of feminicide.

The chapter “Muertas sin fin” illustrates the spectral nature of disappearing women in Ciudad Juárez. Although photos of the faces of missing women and victims are plastered around the city, often the bodies of victims remain anonymous due to poor collection of evidence or the decomposed state of the body. Thus the names and faces of victims often become separated from their actual bodies in death. When discussing the flyers that display faces of missing girls and litter the streets and signposts of the city, González Rodríguez describes the “montaje espectral de rostros, datos, señales, manchas imposibles” (143). The flyers represent disembodied faces, thus causing those women to take on a ghostly quality. Even when bodies are found, they are, as the author describes when he lists the dead, “no identificada” (257). Through these observations González Rodríguez captures the difficulty of memory and remembering in the presence of anonymity.

2666 AND THE AESTHETICS OF HORROR

2666 is not about memory, but about the lack thereof, about what happens when humanity is swallowed up by a black hole. The title of the novel is a seemingly mysterious number that is not mentioned in any of the chapters. It is taken from Bolaño’s 1999 novel *Amuleto* which tells the story of Auxilio Lacoutre, a Uruguayan living illegally in Mexico who gets trapped in a bathroom at the Universidad Nacional

Autónoma de México when the Mexican army takes over the campus in the days leading up to the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre. While trapped, Auxilio sifts through her memories, and describes a time when she was following two people (one of them Belano, the *alter ego* of the author) through Mexico City. She says:

Y los seguí. Los vi caminar a paso ligero por Bucareli hasta Reforma y luego los vi cruzar Reforma sin esperar la luz verde, ambos con el pelo largo y arremolinado porque a esa hora por Reforma corre el viento nocturno que le sobra a la noche, la avenida Reforma se transforma en un tubo transparente, en un pulmón de forma cuneiforme por donde pasan las exhalaciones imaginarias de la ciudad, y luego empezamos a caminar por la avenida Guerrero, ellos un poco más despacio que antes, yo un poco más de prisa que antes, la Guerrero, a esa hora, se parece sobre todas las cosas a un cementerio, pero no a un cementerio de 1968, ni a un cementerio de 1975, sino a un cementerio de 2666, un cementerio olvidado debajo de un párpado muerto o nonato, las acuosidades desapasionadas de un ojo que por querer olvidar algo ha terminado por olvidarlo todo. (76-7)

The title sets the tone for a novel of apocalyptic horror in which Bolaño forces readers to examine issues they would rather forget. The epigraph of *2666*, a quotation of poet Charles Baudelaire, reads “Un oasis de horror en medio de un desierto de aburrimiento.”⁹³

Although the date 2666 is never mentioned explicitly, the novel is replete with references to the city of Santa Teresa as a place of death. Peter Elmore, a professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Colorado, points out that, “El año 2000 y la cifra del Anticristo [666] se funden en el título, que indica el encuentro inestable, extraño – de la crónica de lo contemporáneo con el registro visionario. En ambos casos, la clave temporal es la de la crisis: los signos de la violencia y del conflicto

⁹³ The word oasis is referenced several times in *2666*, one of the most pertinent being a conversation between Florita Almada, a woman with visions about the future and premonitions of what is happening to women in Santa Teresa and Reinaldo, a television host. Reinaldo explains that Florita, “Dijo que había visto mujeres muertas y niñas muertas. Un desierto. Un oasis” (545).

son los que marcan el mundo representado” (261). For Elmore, Santa Teresa represents “el teatro post-utópico de una pesadilla” (261). In “La parte de los críticos” Liz Norton describes Santa Teresa as “esa ciudad horrible” and in “La parte de Amalfitano” Amalfitano calls it “esta ciudad infecta” (191, 258). Amalfitano, who came to Santa Teresa with his daughter Rosa, also asks, “¿qué me impulsó a venir aquí? ¿Por qué traje a mi hija a esta ciudad maltita? ¿Por qué era uno de los pocos agujeros del mundo que me faltaba por conocer? ¿Por qué lo que deseo, en el fondo, es morirme?” (252). Bolaño is making reference to the first line of Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955) with the line “¿Por qué traje a mi hija a esta ciudad maltita?” In Rulfo’s novel, it is a mother who brings her son to a city of ghosts. In Bolaño’s novel, a father brings his daughter to what he will soon realize is a city of ghosts. “La parte de los crímenes” is replete with references to Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo*. In one of a multitude of crime stories in the chapter, Mary Sue Bravo is looking for a friend, Kelly, who has disappeared in Santa Teresa, and she meets with detective Loya. When asked if Kelly is dead, Loya tells her, “más o menos” (779). In response, Mary Sue Bravo shouts, “¿Cómo que más o menos? [...] ¡O sea está muerto o no se está muerto, chingados (779). However, as Loya clarifies, “En México uno puede estar más o menos muerto” (779). When Mary Sue Bravo responds to Loya she says, “Estoy harta de los mexicanos que hablan y se comportan como si todo esto fuera *Pedro Páramo*.” Loya replies, “Es que tal vez lo sea” (779-80). Bolaño is retelling the quintessential Mexican novel, a story of haunting and of death, in light of femicide in Ciudad Juárez.

References to the city as a cemetery are evident in “La parte de Fate” when Chucho Flores, a resident of Santa Teresa, tells the American reporter Fate that what is

lacking in the city is “el jodido tiempo” (362). Fate responds with a question: “¿Tiempo para que esta mierda, a mitad de camino entre un cementerio olvidado y un basurero, se convierta en una especie de Detroit?” (362). By describing Santa Teresa as a cemetery and sort of hell on earth, Bolaño sets the stage to introduce ghosts. The victims described in the chapter are often more or less dead, given that there is no reliable system in place to find, identify, and investigate the disappearances and murders of women. This is, in a sense, purgatory, an in-between state that leads to dehumanization. Although Butler discusses dehumanization in reference to the indefinite detention of terror suspects, the indefinite detention seen in *2666* is equally dehumanizing (xiv). To remain unsure if your daughter, sister, or wife is dead or alive is to be pursued daily by terror. For Butler, “It is crucial to ask under what conditions some human lives cease to become eligible for basic, if not universal, human rights” (57). In Santa Teresa, death and disappearance have become naturalized to such an extent that families of victims often don’t know whether the missing are alive, dead, or misidentified.

The rape, torture, and murder of women in Ciudad Juárez, like the fluid that seeps from under the eyelids of the dead, is so pregnant with horror that it leaves one wondering if and how civilization can continue. As Ignacio Echevarría, the Spanish literary critic and long time friend of Bolaño, commented in the notes to the first edition of *2666*, “Esa cifra enigmática, 2666 – una fecha en realidad –, que actúa como punto de fuga en el que se ordenan las diferentes partes de la novela. Sin este punto de fuga, la perspectiva del conjunto quedaría coja, irresuelta, suspendida en la nada” (1123). The title, like the black hole that Bolaño so frequently references in his novel, pulls us towards a dark and uncertain future. In the words of the character Azucena Esquivel

Plata, a member of parliament and a friend of a disappeared woman, “Qué puta sidosa más caliente es la realidad” (734). *2666* is a novel that actively pursues horror.

Anonymous and spectral bodies are the tools for analyzing what, for Bolaño, was life-long fascination with horror.

2666, at just over 1,000 pages, is a literary behemoth divided into five parts: “La parte de los críticos,” “La parte de Amalfitano,” “La parte de Fate,” “La parte de los crímenes,” and “La parte de Archimboldi.” Each part is narrated by a third person omniscient narrator, who, like a phantom, escorts the reader through the graveyard of *2666*. Echevarría notes that, “Entre las notaciones de Bolaño relativas a *2666* se lee, en un apunte aislado: ‘El narrador de *2666* es Arturo Belano’” (1125). Arturo Belano, the author’s alter ego, first appeared as a character in Bolaño’s novel *Los detectives salvajes* (1998).⁹⁴

The first part follows the lives of four European academics obsessed with the little-known fictional German author Benno von Archimboldi. The second is about the life of Amalfitano, a Chilean philosophy professor who recently left Europe to teach at the University of Santa Teresa in Mexico. In the third part, American journalist Oscar Fate is sent to Santa Teresa to cover a boxing match, and, while there, he becomes aware of the killing of women. The fourth part, which unites each of the other sections of the book “opens in January 1993 with the description of the corpse of a 13-year-old girl and ends 108 bodies later during Christmas 1997” (Valdés 2). The fifth and last part recounts the story of Hans Reiter, a Prussian born in 1920 who becomes the writer Benno von

⁹⁴ Echevarría discusses the connection between the two works: “La escritura de *2666* ocupó a Bolaño los últimos años de su vida. Pero la concepción y el diseño de la novela son muy anteriores, y retrospectivamente cabe reconocer sus latidos en este y aquel libro de Bolaño, más en particular entre los que fue publicando a partir de la conclusión de *Los detectives salvajes* (1998), que no por casualidad concluye en el desierto de Sonora” (1123).

Archimboldi. The novel spans decades and continents, and considers the question of horror as an inherent element of humanity that blossoms like a flower of blood with a force and regularity that few care to acknowledge.

The present analysis focuses primarily on “La parte de los crímenes” the section that constitutes the crux of the novel and the chapter that deals most directly with femicide. Ángeles Donoso of the Universidad Católica de Chile discusses the importance of part four of the novel in relation to the other three:

Lo que finalmente une, de una u otra manera, a todos los personajes son los asesinatos que se suceden inexplicablemente en la ciudad de Santa Teresa (trasunto de Ciudad Juárez en la novela). Todos los personajes llegan a Santa Teresa por diferentes motivos: los críticos de literatura que buscan a Archimboldi: Amalfitano, el profesor chileno que trabaja en la Universidad de Santa Teresa: Oscar Fate, el reportero norteamericano que viene a cubrir un partido de box: y, finalmente Archimboldi mismo. Todos se implican y son testigos de la horrorosa realidad en la que viven las mujeres de esta ciudad, presas del pánico de ser la siguiente víctima. (“Violencia” 1)

On a basic level, reading 108 exquisitely detailed descriptions of mutilated, dead female bodies makes me think of the term *contando los muertos* (*counting the dead*) which is a “derogatory phrase often used to describe human rights work as the relentless cataloging of depressing statistics” (26).⁹⁵ At what point does Bolaño move beyond counting the dead, beyond the messages of the flesh?

According to González Rodríguez the novel goes far beyond counting the dead. He explained, “Desde luego en un segundo nivel sí es una reflexión metafísica sobre el mal, pero Bolaño es muy claro al respecto en su libro, está muy clara la crítica a las

⁹⁵ This phrase is discussed in the context of Colombia in *Counting the Dead: The Culture and Politics of Human Rights Activism in Colombia* (2007) by Winifred Tate. The full quotation is as follows: “The title of this work comes from the derogatory phrase often used to describe human rights work as the relentless cataloging of depressing statistics, *contando muertos*, counting the dead. However, the practice of human rights activism involves more than simply counting the dead; it is also making the dead count” (26). The phrase provides a way to open a discussion about the meaning of Bolaño’s counting of the dead.

autoridades, está muy clara la crítica al propio funcionamiento institucional en Santa Teresa” (Personal interview). The criticism of authorities that González Rodríguez mentions is omnipresent, but it is most evident in the way Bolaño represents the media. For example, the chapter on femicide offers a description of how the newspapers focus more on the crimes committed by a man who defecates in churches than on femicide. The omniscient narrator states, “El ataque a las iglesias de San Rafael y de San Taedo tuvo mayor eco en la prensa local que las mujeres asesinadas en los meses procedentes” (459). Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Corona, who analyze how the media has portrayed femicide, point out that, “For most citizens the media have been the main source of images and information about the femicides in Ciudad Juárez. This fact affords them an important role that could be used to avoid further production of discourses that perpetuate violence” (9). 2666 represents with irony many aspects of Mexican society that have contributed to femicide in Santa Teresa.

In a biting critique in “La parte de los crímenes”, Elvira Campos, the head of the insane asylum in Santa Teresa, discusses misogyny: “O la ginefobia que es el miedo a la mujer y que lo padecen, naturalmente, sólo los hombres. Extendidísimo en México, aunque disfrazado con los ropajes más diversos” (478). These elements and many more make up the map of horror that Bolaño traces. In another scene, the narrator describes how, after taking prostitutes to the police station to question them, “En las otras celdas los policías estaban violando a las putas de La Riviera” (502). In yet another, a police office investigating the murder of a woman “investigó primero entre las putas caras de Santa Teresa a ver si alguien conocía a la muerta, y luego, ante el escaso éxito de sus

pesquisa, entre las putas baratas [...]” (488). In Bolaño’s novel, the police, at every turn, associate feminicide with prostitution or the sexualized female body.

For Bolaño, the message is in the flesh, and the criticisms toward the police and other institutions of justice stem from comments and actions those officials have made in reference to the dead bodies. Thus he purposely grounds the text in the anonymity of death, in the creation of ghosts. “La parte de los crímenes” opens and closes with an anonymous death, and as the bodies pile up, the police get distracted from feminicide by a man who desecrates churches with his feces. How easily we turn away from murder, Bolaño seems to say. Donoso argues that Bolaño employs tactics that rescue victims from anonymity:

[e]l narrador de 2666 primero cuenta la historia del crimen que volvió anónimos los cuerpos de estas víctimas, y luego rescata a las víctimas de su anonimato: les devuelve sus nombres. Para eso, el narrador repite una y otra vez el crimen perpetrado sobre las víctimas, al tiempo que las nombra y describe de modo detallado sus fisonomías. Mediante la repetición el relato logra restituir la identidad perdida del cuerpo desaparecido y posteriormente encontrado. (“Éstetica” 132)

Although the act of naming the bodies is important, I disagree with Donoso that the narrator, by repeated and detailed descriptions of the crimes, helps restore their identity. By repeating physical details such as hair color and eye color, clothing, and the victims’ possessions, Bolaño provides only those surface details that would be available in a forensics report. He provides fragments of information, but in the end, those details fall short. Neither the names nor the descriptive details give the reader an idea of who the women were in terms of the lives they lived. Consider the following description of items found near the victim’s body: “También se encontró un pintalabios, polvos, rímel, unos pañuelos de papel, una cajetilla de cigarrillos a medias y un paquete de condones (446).

The details are cold, methodical terms meant to turn the women into the ultimate representation of horror – an anonymous pile of dismembered bodies.

In “La parte de los crímenes” whole paragraphs are written as if they were a forensics report and include detailed descriptions of the violence perpetrated, of the posture of the body, and of the victims’ clothing. *Huesos en el desierto* describes in spectral terms but combats that spectrality by collecting the voices of family members of victims and moving beyond the narrative of the dead body. *2666*, on the other hand, treats the dead bodies of victims of feminicide as a way to explore the concept of horror. Leonor Arfuch, a researcher in the social sciences at the University of Buenos Aires, address the connection between art, memory, and the disappeared in the context of Argentina asks, “¿Qué puede impresionarnos, después de ver el día a día de los estallidos, los atentados, los frentes de guerra, las hambrunas? ¿Qué potencialidad de cuerpo y alma podrá despertar la obra artística?” (*Pretérito imperfecto* 112). These questions are particularly relevant in discussing Bolaño’s formal and stylistic choices in describing feminicide.

In a journalistic account, for example, the unnamed narrator of a chapter of *2666* describes the body of a 10-year-old girl in the following manner: “Llevaba zapatilla de plástico transparente, atadas con una hebilla de metal. Tenía el pelo castaño, más claro en la parte que le cubría la frente, como si lo llevara teñido. En el cuerpo se apreciaron ocho heridas de cuchillo, tres a la altura del corazón” (627). Another description details, “Tanto la vagina como el ano mostraban señales de abrasiones” (631). Bolaño also describes fractured skulls, loss of brain matter, faces smashed beyond recognition, and the mutilation of breasts. The 350-page chapter includes scores of such descriptions, so

many that they become uncountable masses of bodies rather than individual women, which has a deadening effect for the reader. Bolaño's descriptions could be seen as simply transmitting the reality of overwhelming death, but their graphic nature raises questions about what can be accomplished through such descriptions of unrelenting violence. Roberto Cabrera, a professor at the Universidad Católica del Maule in Chile, in his 2005 article "Literatura + enfermedad = 2666," points out that the women in "La parte de los crímenes" suffer dehumanization: "La disolución del componente humano se ve apoyada en la abundancia de detalles narrados, propios del ambiente forense y policial, en tanto el énfasis en este punto que, tras un primer acercamiento al texto, suele perderse la cuenta de mujeres asesinadas; otra vez las identidades son puestas en cuestionamiento" (199). Readers are faced with the question of how to combat such overwhelming violence. This graphic assault on the reader represents women as a mass of bodies, wounds being their main identifying characteristics. As Valdés describes, "reading 'The Part About the Crimes' feels like staring into the abyss. Strangling, shooting, stabbing, burning, rape, whipping, mutilation, bribery and treachery are all detailed in deadpan prose" (20).

The bodies in Bolaño's narrative have been detached from history and often family, leaving only the messages written on their bodies for readers to decipher. Although memories of their lives don't haunt readers, visions of their tortured bodies do. Descriptions of the corporeal propel the narrative, demonstrating how the victimized "Other" is a captive of descriptions of her body. For Butler, "The derealization of the 'Other' means that it is neither dead nor alive, but interminably spectral" (33). In Bolaño's fiction the victims of feminicide are spectral figures, given the obsessive focus

on the dead female body. However, the repetition of violence is also a case where form and function work together to reproduce a perceived reality – the indifference or inability of citizens to relate to such overwhelming violence. Bolaño exploits spectrality to get to the roots of horror, to the roots of a society which can witness the death of so many without ever really paying attention.

Donoso makes a connection between the last chapter, “La parte de Archimboldi,” which addresses the horrors of World War II, and “La parte de los crímenes,” the chapter about feminicide. He explains, “Lo político tiene que ver aquí con la repetición en la enunciación de la serialización característica de dos tipos de crímenes en principio distintos – feminicidio y genocidio –, repetición que genera al mismo tiempo una *indistinción* y una *diferencia*” (132). Bolaño points to the nature of horror as a historical fact that repeats itself. At the end of the novel, when the mysterious Archimboldi finally reveals himself, he thinks “que la historia, que es una puta sencilla, no tiene momentos determinantes sino que es una proliferación de instantes, de brevedades que compiten entre sí en monstruosidad” (993). Santa Teresa may be the current locus of horror, but it is not the only one.

“La parte de los crímenes” produces a numbness associated with porno-misery, but, at the same time, forces the reader to recognize violence that has surpassed all known or imagined limits. According to González Rodríguez, 2666 “es una reflexión metafísica sobre el mal, pero Bolaño es muy claro al respecto en su libro. Está muy claro la crítica a las autoridades y al propio funcionamiento institucional en Santa Teresa” (Personal Interview). Literary critic Adam Kirsch defends Bolaño, arguing that he “succeeds in restoring to physical violence some of its genuine evil” (1). I disagree with Kirsch, and

question this idea of restoration given the already publicized nature of the victimized female body in Ciudad Juárez. As Butler points out, “The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear, and the regulation of the sphere of appearance is one way to establish what will count as reality, and what will not” (xx). The line between restoration of genuine evil and exploitation of the female body is thin in Bolaño’s narrative.

However, as journalist Lev Grossman argues,

the relentless gratuitousness of *2666* has its own logic and its own power, which builds into something overwhelming that hits you all the harder because you don't see it coming. This is a dangerous book, and you can get lost in it. How can art, Bolaño is asking, a medium of form and meaning, reflect a world that is blessed with neither? (1)

And yet, Bolaño does manage to reflect horror in both form and meaning, and the horror is nowhere more evident than in the lives of women; it is written on the flesh of unidentified, abandoned bodies that have been raped, burned, or strangled.

“La parte de los crímenes” ends with a description of the last feminicide victim of 1997. Despite the number of years, the investigations, the claims against the way the police have treated women, and protests and marches to bring attention to impunity, the description of how the police view the bodies of victims has not progressed. The narrator states, “El cuerpo estaba desnudo, pero en el interior de la bolsa se encontraron un par de zapatos de tacón alto, de cuero, de buena calidad, por lo que se pensó que podía tratarse de una puta” (791). The discourse of the sexualized body continues, and Bolaño closes the chapter on that note. After a lackluster investigation of the last death, “Las navidades en Santa Teresa se celebraron de la forma usual. Se hicieron posadas, se rompieron piñatas, se bebió tequila y cerveza” (791). Even after years of horror and piles of bodies, on some level life goes on.

The metaphor that Bolaño pursues to represent horror is a black hole, an ever-present part of the constellations that allows nothing, not even light, to escape. This vision of Ciudad Juárez is problematic for feminicide researcher Monárrez Fragoso because “hay algo que me molesta, es como si estuviera leyendo en penumbra como una ciudad muy sombría y sin elementos éticos” (Personal Interview). The black hole in the novel, the force that pulls in and routinely devours bodies, things, ideas – is the city itself, Santa Teresa. Echeverría, who compiled the first edition of 2666 as per the instructions left by Bolaño in his notes, reveals,

En una de sus abundantes notas relativas a 2666 Bolaño señala la existencia en la obra de un “centro oculto” que se escondería debajo de lo que cabe considerar, por así decirlo, su “centro físico.” Hay razones para pensar que ese centro físico sería la ciudad de Santa Teresa, fiel trasunto de Ciudad Juárez en la frontera de México con los Estados Unidos. (1123)

If the black hole is Santa Teresa, at its center is the date 2666, a date from which no one will seemingly escape.⁹⁶ In the last sentence of “La parte de los crímenes” the narrator describes, “Algunas de estas calles más humildes se oía a la gente reír. Algunas de estas calles eran totalmente oscuras, similares a agujeros negros, y las risas que salían de no se sabe dónde eran la única señal, la única información que tenían los vecinos y los extraños para no perderse” (791). The streets are like black holes, and the only sign that remains is laughter. Perhaps, in the end, Bolaño does offer hope, for the black hole has not swallowed up everything and has allowed, at least momentarily, that a guiding sign remain for humanity. Among the ghosts, the darkness, the bodies, the blood, the rape, the hate, the corruption, perhaps the sign will be discovered. However, what Bolaño makes clear is that black holes are a permanent part of the human constellation of life, and

⁹⁶ Echeverría adds that, “En cuanto al ‘centro oculto’ ..., ¿no lo estaría indicando precisamente esa fecha, 2666, que ampara la novela entera?” (1123).

periodically, the blackness overwhelms us with war, murder, and hatred, but we generally do not recognize it because we are too distracted, because it is easier to look away and forget.

MOVING BEYOND THE FLESH

Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future, *Huesos en el desierto*, and *2666* thus exhibit different narrative strategies in terms of the representation of victims of feminicide. *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* focuses on a narrative that emphasizes the violated and/or sexualized female body, leading to a separation between the flesh and the life story of victims. This contributes to a sense that the victims are unreal because there is no personal history to accompany the dead body so prominently featured. Butler correctly asserts that, “If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated” (33). In *2666* the victims form an anonymous mass, the emphasis being on exploring the nature of horror rather than on creating a sense of empathy for the victims. Bolaño enlists the female corpse to challenge readers; he dares them to try to remember victims, to continue to focus on seemingly endless violence. González Rodríguez moves beyond the narratives of vulnerability and carnality by recognizing and reflecting on the complex relationship between memory and anonymity.

The evolution of representations of feminicide seen in these three works makes evident the difficulty of uniting the narrative of the dead, victimized female body with that of a voice to represent her life story. In *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* women are present as bodies of desire and, in one famous photo, as the burned face of a

raped and murdered woman. Bowden's description of the photo gives precedence to the trope of the female dead body as an object of aesthetic beauty. We have been shown the face of a woman, and yet she is unrecognizable. This is an example of what Butler describes as being "turned away from the face" (150). She argues that, "We cannot, under contemporary conditions of representation, hear the agonized cry or be compelled or commanded by the face" (150). What Butler proposes is challenging: to show the dead, the Other; to show the face, the body, the violence suffered; but to do it in a way that also makes clear "the limits of representation" (151).

Huesos en el desierto moves beyond this trope by combining forensic descriptions of femicide victims with the testimony of family and community members, uniting flesh and memory and moving past the spectral. *2666* is a novel that makes no claims about promoting justice or collective memory; femicide and the violence committed against its victims are tools for analyzing the meaning of horror. By focusing on the bodies of nameless femicide victims, Bolaño creates anonymous specters that haunt the reader.

These works by Bowden, González Rodríguez, and Bolaño exhibit how the geography of vulnerability described by Butler becomes even more precarious at death. To honor the rights of the living and the dead is to recognize the importance of making whole the bodies of femicide victims by moving beyond the narrative of the flesh and into the territory of memory. As González Rodríguez reflects in the last line of *Huesos en el desierto*, "Tengo una certeza: contra la nada, perdurará el destino. O la memoria. Al fin y al cabo, la vida de cada quien es un desafío misterioso en aquello que nos sobrevivirá" (286).

CHAPTER FOUR

FRONTERA 450+: THE MUSEUM AS A MEMORY SITE

“Inevitably, every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence.”

—Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts* (4)

This chapter shifts from an analysis of literary and cinematic representations of femicide as seen in the works of Bowden, González Rodríguez, and Bolaño to an examination of representations of femicide in the physical world of objects as seen in exhibition *Frontera 450+* at the Station Museum in Houston, Texas.⁹⁷ *Frontera 450+*, the first full museum exhibition on femicide in the United States, October 21, 2006 – January 28, 2007, at the Station Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston, Texas. The exhibit included 17 artists from Ciudad Juárez, El Paso, and beyond, and provided a nuanced look at how artists represent the relationship between femicide, geography, and memory.⁹⁸ In addition, it survives online as a virtual exhibit, which is, in fact, how I

⁹⁷ Other museum exhibits about femicide in Ciudad Juárez include but are not limited to the 2009 exhibits “Off the Beaten Path: Violence, Women, and Art” curated by Randy Jane Rosenburg at The Stenersen Museum in Oslo, Norway and “Rastros y Crónicas: Women of Juárez” curated by Dolores Mercado and Linda Xóchitl Tortolero at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago. In November of 2010 the “400 Women” project curated by Tamsyn Challenger featured portraits of victims of femicide by various artists at Shoreditch Town Hall in East London. On a smaller scale many exhibits have been organized. For example, University of El Paso Museum of Art curator Sandra Salas organized “Peace of Art: Design for Change” in July 2010 to create awareness about the situation of violence in Ciudad Juárez. In Mexico smaller exhibits include “Contra la violencia, el arte: una oración por Juárez” curated by Pilar Rodríguez in Mexico City during March and April of 2010 and “Más allá del dolor” organized by El Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social which was shown in El Paso and Ciudad Juárez 2005.

⁹⁸ The 17 artists in the show are Carmen Montoya (Ciudad Juárez, Mexico), Susan Plum (United States), David Krueger (United States), Celia Álvarez Muñoz (United States), Arturo Rivera (Mexico City, Mexico), Margarita Cabrera (Monterrey, Mexico), Teresa Serrano (Mexico City, Mexico), Sharon Kopriva (United States), Maya Goded (Mexico City, Mexico), Kaneem Smith (United States), Lise Bjorne (Norway), Teresa Margolles (Mexico City, Mexico), Sara Maniero (Venezuela), Angela Dillon (United States), Coco Fusco (United States), Elia Arce (Costa Rica), Luis Jiménez (United States). Many of the artists born in the U.S. or Mexico have lived or currently live near the border.

first experienced it. I did not begin my research until 2009, and I discovered *Frontera 450+* while conducting research online. The fact that the exhibit continues to be available in virtual form is important in terms of its long-term potential to promote memory of feminicide.

Rosalinda González, curator of the exhibit, described the museum space to me. The entrance to the museum was modified so that only ten people at a time could enter. The modified entrance, created by the installation of two white walls, created a space for “reflection and cleansing,” an interstitial space between outside life and inside the museum that allowed visitors a moment of silence (Personal Interview). Several of the 17 works, like those of Kaneem Smith and Teresa Margolles, were large-scale installations. Others, like the video of Teresa Serrano, were shown separately from other due to its violent content. The photographs of Maya Goded were displayed on a white wall in the center of the museum space while the sewn labels with victims’ names made by Lise Bjørne were shown on one of the museum walls.

The exhibit represented an encounter with the recent past, the unstable present, and an ominous future. The museum itself served as a place of reflection about the past but also, to a greater extent, as a call to action against violence against women and the institutional injustice which has made resolution of feminicide so elusive. While some of the objects and artwork in *Frontera 450+* move beyond the sexualized discourse on the body of feminicide victims, and instead offer up symbolic renderings of the violence, others do not. I argue that, in some cases, these symbolic representations create an important link between art, social justice, and political awareness. Each artist had to

decide if and how to represent the trauma of feminicide in order to convey a particular message.

Museums, as officially sanctioned institutions that collect artifacts, can confer validity to memory debates by providing a space devoted to the act of remembering. Literature professor Didier Maleuvre, in his research on the cultural significance of museums, found that, “From its official inception near the turn of the nineteenth century, the museum has been more than a mere historical object; it has manufactured an image of history. By collecting past artifacts, the museum gives shape and presence to history, inventing it, in effect, by defining the space of a ritual encounter with the past” (1). Maleuvre argues that art museums are fundamentally different from other museum spaces such as aeronautical or sports museums. He pinpoints “the emancipatory thrust of art itself” and the ability of art to *make* history (3-4). This point is particularly important to my argument, as I am looking at artwork about feminicide not so much as a collection of historical artifacts, but as objects with the potential to promote social change. In *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* Barbara Bolt, a professor of visual media at the University of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia takes this argument even further. She suggests that, “through creative practice, a dynamic material exchange can occur between objects, bodies and images. In the dynamic productivity of material practice, reality can get into images. Imaging, in turn, can produce real material effects in the world” (8). In this chapter I analyze how the artists who participated in *Frontera 450+* worked to varying degrees of success to connect objects, bodies, and images.

MUSEAL CULTURE

Museal culture presents a problematic situation in which objects are, in a sense, disconnected from a particular context, and enshrined for the visitor's gaze. Maleuvre, citing the German philosopher Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, observes, "the German word *museal* bears an unpleasant affinity with necrology, with a culture of death, mausolea, and sepulchres. The museification of art has been taken as a symptom that art in the modern period is no longer an integrated living praxis but an object fit only for historians, connoisseurs, curators, and cultural officials" (2).⁹⁹ In his 1953 essay "Valery Proust Adorno compared museums and sepulchers." For Adorno, "Museums are like the family sepulchers of works of art" (175). In the same vein, German philosopher Martin Heidegger argued in "The Origin of the Work of Art" that placing art in a museum collection "has withdrawn them from their own world" (39). In order to combine art and activism, museum works must therefore bridge the gap between the work of art and the greater social and political context. The artist faces the difficult task of imbuing the museum-bound object with life, a soul of sorts that will communicate place, time, and the urgency for action.

To communicate this urgency, artists sometimes resort to addressing violence in terms of trauma. However, Andreas Huyssen, in his discussion of memory projects in Buenos Aires, New York, and Berlin, warns against addressing violence only in terms of trauma and testimony, a central discourse in the 1990s (8).¹⁰⁰ He argues that "to collapse

⁹⁹ As Maleuvre notes, "In sepulchral museum culture, history itself seems to bow to the verdict of its own obsolescence. It agrees with the touristic mindset which holds that culture does not really pertain to the present but to a glorious past – which is a feeble past because it cannot survive unaided in the present" (17).

¹⁰⁰ Arfuch also discusses this trend in *Crítica cultural entre política y poética* how: "desde hace más de dos décadas, la memoria, sobre todo traumática, se ha convertido en objeto privilegiado de indagación y lematización, en un arco que va de reflexión teórica a la política, del espacio mediático a las prácticas

memory into trauma, I think, would unduly confine our understanding of memory, marking it too exclusively in terms of pain, suffering, and loss” (8).¹⁰¹ Some of the works in *Frontera 450+* exercise tactics that move beyond a traumatic discourse into the more productive realms of discussion and action. For example, Lise Bjørne and Susan Plum created artwork through a series of workshops that promoted knowledge about feminicide. In an exhibit as overtly political as *Frontera 450+*, it became important to address not only the aesthetics of the artwork but the social messages the work embodies. The act of creation, of the artist birthing an object into the world, can have repercussions far beyond the exhibit space.

In *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) French curator and art critic Nicholas Bourriaud argues that the museum is an interstice that offers space for thought and reflection apart from the mundane rhythms of daily life. According to Bourriaud:

[...] it is well worth reconsidering the place of artworks in the overall economic system, be it symbolic or material, which governs contemporary society. Over and above its mercantile nature and its semantic value, the work of art represents a social *interstice*. This *interstice* term was used by Karl Marx to describe trading communities that elude the capitalist economic context by being removed from the law of profit: barter, merchandising, autarkic types of production, etc. The interstice is a space in human relations which fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, but suggests other trading possibilities than those in effect within the system. This is the precise nature of the contemporary art exhibition in the arena of representational commerce: it creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the “communication zones” that are imposed upon us. (16)

artísticas, del testimonio a la biografía a la narrativa ficcional, del interior del museo a la intervención en la superficie territorial y urbana” (161).

¹⁰¹ Filmmaker Ursula Biemann also expressed the need to move beyond emotionality to produce discussion. When talking about a film shown at the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar in 2008 she stated, “I noticed that kind of emotional filmmaking at the Flaherty Seminar with the film *The Betrayal* (2008) by Ellen Kuras about the Laotian Thavisouk Phrasavath. The film was made in a cathartic way, and it was a very sentimental story. The audience was all extremely touched by the film, but it did not trigger a discussion at all. We were not able to speak about anything. This is exactly what I mean” (Skype Interview).

Museum spaces thus serve as a potential catalysts – spaces in which ideas can circulate freely, unhindered by the exigencies of daily life. Bourriaud argues that art is relational, and that the meaning artwork is negotiated rather than fixed with each audience: “The possibility of a *relational* art (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space), points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art” (14). Negotiations assign museum visitors an active role in the formation of meaning.

In *Heidegger Reframed: Interpreting Key Thinkers for the Arts* (2011) Barbara Bolt discusses how Bourriaud contributed to a renovation of the understanding of the aesthetic experience:

The “new” aesthetics locates the aesthetic experience in the relations and transactions between participants (both human and non-human) engaged in the work, rather than in the enjoyment of a material object or artwork. Nicholas Bourriaud’s (2002) theorisation of relation aesthetics and Michael Serre’s (1995) network-inspired processual aesthetics have laid the foundations for the refiguration of aesthetics [...] Here, aesthetic experience is not the sensuous apprehension of an art object by an individual art viewer or connoisseur. Aesthetic experience is concerned with relations and connections. Aesthetic value is established through the effectiveness of these connections. (126)

González worked to create an artistic experience within the museum space focused on connections and relations. These choices are evident in both González’s organization of the museum space and in her choice of artists such as Arce, Margolles, and Goded who work to make connections between their art and femicide victims.

In the article “The Victims of Ciudad Juárez Feminicide: Sexually Fetishized Commodities” Monárrez Fragoso draws a parallel between the bodies of victims of feminicide and exhibit spaces. As she explains,

The hieroglyphic analysis of the body of the assassinated woman is dual. For those who assassinate, the body is an object of the décor in which it is exhibited; it is part of a museum where the collector/collectors decorate the wide-open scene with the free exhibition of their genitals and sexuality. At the same time, the collector or collectors call for the assassinated woman to be rethought in other terms: as the one desired by the unstoppable sexual instincts of those who commit the feminicide, those who she herself convoked by doubly exposing herself, in a double life, down a trail of broken families. (*Terrorizing Women* 66)

As Monárrez Fragoso points out, in the absence of sound forensic techniques and a competent investigation by the police, many female bodies do become an exhibit space in which markers of sexuality take on overwhelming importance. Thus, art installations like that of Teresa Margolles, which attempt to take the body out of the equation, make a statement about priorities. The body’s absence forms part of a narrative that draws attention back to the role of the justice system and unresolved cases. In an untitled installation, the fiber-based sculptor Kaneem Smith hung destroyed, burned shirts on a clothing rack against a stark white wall. According to Smith, “The materials I chose to work with are associated with cultural memories that transform ‘space’ without altering its integrity with thought-provoking installations that deal with the notion of loss of ‘self’ through inevitable change” (“Kaneem Smith”). Although the works from Margolles and Smith centered on the body’s absence, other participants did rely on the oft-exhibited female body in their work, thus making a more direct connection between memory and the bodies of victims.

ART, AGENCY, AND ACTION

Station Museum director James Harithas wrote an emotional introduction to the show in which he revealed, “When I think about the grisly unsolved murders of the 450+ young women in Juárez, a city situated on the Mexican side of the Texas border, I go into shock at the enormity of these crimes” (“Introduction to *Frontera 450+*”). He also makes the invocation personal by adding, “I have daughters.” The title can be read as a warning in which the + symbol indicates the potential for the rape and murder of women to continue if action is not taken.

In the introduction to the show, Harithas also discusses the exhibit’s aims and significance. He frames the show in political terms and does not attempt to maintain any sense of objectivity: this is a show that aims at socio-political change. As the director describes,

This exhibition consists of the work of seventeen distinguished artists who are bringing their art to bear on these horrendous crimes. It is the first full museum exhibition to focus on this mass murder. Some of the artists deal with an aspect of these unsolved murders, be it male rage against poor, powerless women, the complicity of corrupt police and drug gangs, the inaction of both governments, or the role of U.S. and European owned factories where nearly all of the dead women worked. Others create works that reflect and ritualize their own emotions and represent their passionate attempt to bring some sanity and transparency to this madness. (“Introduction to *Frontera 450+*”)

Harithas also uses starkly political language to point out the responsibility of the U.S. to help resolve an issue effecting both Americans and Mexicans.¹⁰² He mentions President Bush by name, saying that he should work with Mexican President Vicente Fox to resolve the situation. The director states, “While the majority of the women are Mexican,

¹⁰² Although, as always, statistics on this subject are incomplete, I am aware of only one European femicide victim, Hester Van Nierop, from Holland, who was killed in 1998. An American U.S. Consulate worker was killed in 2010 in a drive by shooting.

a good number of them are American citizens. I would think that Mr. Bush and Mr. Fox would do something about these crimes, but their silence is deafening and their inaction as mysterious as their commitment to their respective peoples” (Introduction to *Frontera 450+*). I disagree with the statement that “a good number of them are American citizens.” Data shows that very few femicide victims are from the United States.¹⁰³ The show brought together local and international artists, many of whom created original work focusing on different aspects of femicide including “misogyny, las maquilas, globalization, the mother’s movement for justice, los desaparecidos, and the role of the Mexican government and media as well as the involvement of United States” (“Introduction to *Frontera 450+*”). While some of the works focus on issues related directly to femicide, others are more loosely related (for example, the work of Coco Fusco was inspired by an experience in Tijuana, not Ciudad Juárez).

The contemporary obsession with memory and the collection of artifacts also has the potential to destabilize the museum’s power. As Huyssen argues, “Musealization itself is sucked into the vortex of an ever-accelerating circulation of images, spectacles, events, and is thus always in danger of losing its ability to guarantee cultural stability over time” (24). Museums compete with a culture already visually overwhelmed or rendered blind to nuances of horror by a 24-hour news cycle. When Harithas discussed organizing a show about Palestine at The Station Museum, he argued for the importance

¹⁰³ Aside from the interconnected nature of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso in terms of families, businesses, and international corporations, there have been incidences of violence against U.S. citizens in Ciudad Juárez. For example, on March 13, 2010 two U.S. citizens who were linked to the U.S. consulate in Ciudad Juárez were killed in a drive-by shooting. The victims included a pregnant U.S. government employee, her husband, and a Mexican citizen. For more information consult the article “Three with links to U.S. Consulate in Juárez are slain” (2010) by Mary Beth Sheridan. According to Molly Molloy, “More than 15 U.S. citizens have been killed this year [2011] and about 50 since the beginning of 2010 in Juárez” (“U.S. Citizens Recently Killed in Juárez” Email).

of politically charged art: “I believe that it’s a moral obligation to make this kind of artistic information available to a public that has been rendered somewhat clueless by constant commercial and government propaganda” (“In Conversation: James Harithas with Rafael Rubenstein”). Harithas also discussed the political nature of many of the shows held at The Station Museum, explaining the ways in which exhibitions such as *Frontera 450+* attempt to clarify the connection between pressing social issues and the art being exhibited. He talked about how the

[...] exhibition is an attempt to reach our audience with critical political and social information. It involves shows like the Nicaragua exhibition about the Sandinista revolution, *Made in Palestine* about the intifada and the occupation, *Apertura Columbia* about the ongoing war, *Frontera 450+* about the mass murders of young women on the Texas border, *Defending Democracy* about the teacher’s strike and the democracy movement in Oaxaca. All these exhibitions are accompanied by films and lectures. (“In Conversation”).

In this case, the signifier and the signified are brought together in the museum space. The artwork serves as a symbolic representation of feminicide, and the information and lectures accompanying the show make a connection to real-world information and action. González also discusses how “informing the public was primary” to her goals as curator of the show (Personal Interview). González spent time traveling to Ciudad Juárez and to Mexico City to meet with human rights groups, NGOs, and artists.

THE POLITICS OF ART

Frontera 450+ was also shaped by discussions between the director and the curator about the number of male versus female artists to be included. González explained, “It seems like a trite conversation, but when you think about museum institutions and the fact that you’re doing work that is original and trying to represent

contemporary ideas, those conversations come up” (Personal Interview). Harithas did not want to have an all women’s show. González however, told him that the show’s composition, which was originally all female, was not intentional (Personal Interview). In the end, three male artists – David Krueger, Arturo Rivera, and Luis Jimenéz – were included while the remaining fourteen artists were women. The director and the curator also had a similar discussion about the ratio of local versus international artists and stressed the need to include local artists, regardless of gender.

The museum space is subject to a number of variables, including the politics of contracting artists, the budget, the physical constraints of the space on a particular artistic vision, and the interaction of the public with the art. Harithas discussed his misgivings about the mission of museums, arguing that, “In general, museums are as much involved in fashion and economics as they are art. But I must say I’m interested in artists not museums. I think museums have failed to reach most of the people. We need new kinds of museums” (“In Conversation”). Harithas laments the fact that most museums do not reach a working class audience. However, the Station Museum has the potential to reach a wide audience because it does not charge an entrance fee. *Frontera 450+* provided a space in which to consider the role art could play in increasing awareness of femicide.

Much current trauma and memory theory relates to the Southern Cone, the dictatorships that have plagued the region, and their aftermath. The discussions presented by Leonor Arfuch, although made in the context of Argentina, is pertinent to femicide. She argues that art has a central role to play in representing violence. In an era saturated with images from 24-hour news cycles, she advocates the necessity of art:

Quizá, en una época tan fuertemente “representativa”, donde hasta la ficción se torna hacia la autenticación de la “propia” experiencia, cabría

volver una vez más hacia la imagen del arte, aquella que, en renuncia expresa a la representación, trabaja sobre la cualidad de la metáfora, ese impacto que se produce al aproximar realidades distantes que tiene, sin embargo, algo en común – impacto tanto mayor cuanto más distantes, según el célebre *dictum* surrealista –, produciendo así un corrimiento del sentido (común), un “ver el mundo de otra manera”. Dimensión cognoscitiva de la metáfora, ya valorada por Aristóteles, que, al producir un desplazamiento radical de lo esperable, nos solicita también – como la imagen misma – un mayor compromiso, racional y afectivo, en la interpretación. (*Crítica cultural* 186)

Arfuch also discusses the responsibility of the gaze, analyzing what, if anything, is required of those who witness terror via an image (photography, artwork). Her analysis of images focuses on photos of the disappeared, the some 10,000 who were killed in Argentina’s Dirty War from 1976-83 during the reign of dictator Jorge Rafael Videla. She describes, “Las fotos, con su aire familiar, sus gestos y poses reconocibles, en vecindad con la historia de cada quien, se transformaron así en marcas de resistencia, en bastiones contra el olvido, en monumento móvil y cambiante, en apuesta ética, estética y política” (42). The photographs, like those of the mothers of victims of femicide taken by Maya Goded, have become emblematic of a movement, a tool to combat the slow creeping of forgetfulness.

FRONTERA 450+

The artwork in *Frontera 450+*, though diverse, can be divided into four general categories useful for analyzing the relationship between the artwork and creation of memory about femicide: artwork that incorporates testimony or objects from Ciudad Juárez (Elia Arce, Teresa Margolles, Maya Goded, Carmen Montoya); artwork that includes explicit educational objectives (Lise Bjørne, Susan Plum); artwork that represents horror in general or a topic tangential to femicide (Arturo Rivera, Celia

Álvarez Muñoz, Margarita Cabrera, Kaneem Smith, Sara Marinero, Angela Dillon, Luis Jimenez, Coco Fusco); and artwork that relies unconsciously on sexist stereotypes to represent feminicide (David Krueger, Teresa Serrano, Sharon Kopriva). In my analysis of the artwork, I explore the intersection of aesthetics, death, geography, and the female body, focusing on how artists move beyond the trope of the sexualized female body. I analyze both the artwork and the practice of creation, and I consider the artistic process to provide important clues as to the relationship between the artwork as an object and its potential influence beyond the museum space. Bolt argues for the inclusion of artistic process in the investigation of art:

I suspect that by focusing on enunciative practices, that is, the systems of fabrication rather than the systems of signification, there is a possibility of investigating the field of an “art of practice” starting from the bottom, rather than from the top down. It is through an analysis of the subtle logic of artistic process that we can begin to articulate the logic of practice. This logic follows on from practice rather than prescribing it. (*Art Beyond Representation* 7)

The artwork in *Frontera 450+* can be analyzed for its value as both symbols and processes of creation. Artists who went to Ciudad Juárez, spent time with families of victims, and incorporated those experiences into their artwork produce a different artistic and aesthetic symbol than artists who did not. In an analysis of the representation of feminicide in academic texts, authors Julia Estela Monárrez Fragoso, Raúl Flores Simental and Diana Lizeth García Salinas point out that “Ciudad Juárez y el feminicidio son elementos imprescindibles de análisis o de referencia en el texto académico. Las explicaciones acerca del feminicidio se hallan vinculadas a la dimensión territorial” (68). The authors emphasize the importance of analyzing the connections between the geography of the city and feminicide. I think that this is equally important in a work of art

representing feminicide in Ciudad Juárez. As this analysis will reveal, artists who fail to make a connection with the city often end up relying on stereotypes to create their artwork.

Do works that fail to make a connection between representations of feminicide and the greater social and political context risk being sensationalist or becoming an empty shell devoid of a greater core meaning? I do not believe that art can only be judged by the direct action that it produces in the world. But in an exhibition socially and politically essential to the contemporary debate about feminicide, the relationship between art and action should be examined. Anne E. Kaplan, a professor of English and Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies at SUNY, discusses similar concerns when she states, “What I call ‘empty’ empathy is empathy elicited by images of suffering provided without any context or background knowledge” (93).

Curator Rosalinda González encouraged artists to spend time in Ciudad Juárez and make a connection with the city’s human and physical geography. She explained, “It seemed like there was more to be known, and we had to investigate the psychological space of the city and meet with some of the [NGO] groups” (Personal Interview). Some of the artists spent time in Ciudad Juárez collecting objects to incorporate into their artwork. They participated in a rebirth in which artistic vision converted ordinary objects – clothes, dirt, and sand – into symbolic works. In some cases, these acts of remembering influence or inform contemporary memory discourse and show the importance of witnessing artistically and creatively the horrors of the past. In *Frontera 450+* performance artist Elia Arce, forensic artist Teresa Margolles, photographer Maya Goded,

and video artist Carmen Montoya spent time in Ciudad Juárez or incorporated testimony or objects from the city in their creation of original works for the show.

PERFORMANCE AND THE CREATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Frontera 450+ opened and closed with an emotionally powerful performance by Costa Rican performance artist Elia Arce as she recited the names of victims of feminicide.¹⁰⁴ During the performance, she invited members of the audience and family members of victims to read the names of feminicide victims, creating a moment of collective memory and symbolic participation. In addition, the performance was taped and later displayed as a video in the exhibit space, an act by which Arce demonstrates the important connection between image and reality. Bolt argues that this central connection can only be understood when art moves beyond an analysis of representation. According to the author:

In returning to practice as a source for rethinking the work of art, I make the claim that the relationship between art and artist moves beyond the realm of representationalist representation. I argue that practice involves a radical material performativity. In a materialist ontology of the work of art, there may be a mutual reflection between imaging and reality. If this is so, then images – including mass media images – are even more powerful than currently imagined. (*Art Beyond Representation* 10)

The act of recitation makes a connection between memory and physical action, and by recording the performance, Arce's makes the experience available to museum visitors.

After the performance, the mothers participated in a panel on feminicide. González stated

¹⁰⁴ Rosalinda González estimates that 200 people attended the opening performance by Elia Arce. On average, 50 people per week attended the exhibition, although occasionally larger school groups toured the show raising museum attendance. This means that over the three months that the exhibition was open between 800-1,000 people saw the show (Personal Interview). All of the work remains online as a virtual exhibition.

that the mothers “approved of the spirit of solidarity, the fact that we included them in the process, and the fact that we gave money back to the community. It was bittersweet for them to be there” (Personal Interview). The participation of family members served as an emotional and physical reminder of the long-term effect of feminicide on families and citizens in Ciudad Juárez.

Although the recitation by Arce looks to the past to remember individual victims, it also serves as a call to action. Margo Handwerker, the curatorial assistant at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, attended the opening of the show and witnessed Arce’s performance. She described it as “a zealous performance” and “a poetic call to arms complete with protest sign in hand. Such an impassioned work, like the entire exhibition at its core, stirs emotions, potentially raising awareness and, most importantly, action” (“Frontera 450+ Station Museum of Contemporary Art”). This ritual focuses on the importance of the act of naming victims, of making a connection between bodies and identities.

NECROGEOGRAPHY AND THE LIFE OF THE CORPSE

While Arce incorporates the testimony and experiences of family members of victims into her performance, forensic artist Teresa Margolles in her installation uses clothing collected from families of victims in Ciudad Juárez. Margolles often makes artwork with pieces of dead bodies (a tongue, for instance) or bodily fluids such as blood. Her work captures the essence of what Bolt describes as art that is performative “rather than merely a representational practice” (*Art Beyond Representation* 8). Margolles’ work cannot be understood simply in terms of representation of symbolic meaning; for her, the

artistic process is essential to the creation of meaning. In “Espectralidad materialista” Cuauhtémoc Medina, an art historian and professor at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México who has written extensively about the art of Margolles, describes how she transformed the autopsy room into a space of artistic creation.¹⁰⁵ Before becoming an artist, Margolles worked as a forensic specialist in Mexico. According to Medina, “Por más de tres lustros, en sus distintos avatares, el trabajo de Teresa Margolles en torno al manejo institucional de los cadáveres y la materialidad de la muerte, ha operado como una suerte de historiografía inconsciente de la brutalidad de la experiencia social en México” (16).¹⁰⁶ In 2009 Medina curated a show of Margolles’ work for the 53rd Venice Biennale. This work represented Margolles’ artistic transition from the morgue to public space, as much of the exhibit involved blood or glass found at crime scenes. This work results from “recorridos *necro-geográficos*” in which Margolles searches for crime-scene evidence (Medina 22).¹⁰⁷

Margolles spent several weeks in the Ciudad Juárez getting to know families of victims of femicide and collecting their sweat and dirt-laden clothing to create her 2006 piece “Cimbra Framework.” Originally she wanted to gather the worn clothing of victims

¹⁰⁵Of course, taking art into the morgue raised ethical questions. Medina explains, “Doble trastocamiento: la artista ejercía un abuso de una institución del aparato legal, desviándola de sus fines aceptables. Y simultáneamente contaminaba de horror sagrado al aparato estético contemporáneo” (18).

¹⁰⁶For more information on the work of Margolles see *Teresa Margolles: 127 cuerpos* (2007) by Heriberto Yepes. Margolles worked with authors Heriberto Yepes, Nike Batzner, and Patrizia Dander to produce the book in which she explores the violent stories that accompany 127 different threads used by Margolles to sew up autopsied bodies.

¹⁰⁷Medina explains the process that Margolles goes through to collect evidence for her art. He clarifies, “En el peinado de escenas del crimen en las que Margolles y sus redes de colaboradores están involucrados, el *flâneur* resucita como tropa de fiscales amateurs que recogen del pavimento lodo, sangre y fragmentos de cristales, registran el horror vacío de territorios heridos de muerte con la cámara o la grabadora, y expurgan la prensa y el habla popular en busca de las sentencias y admoniciones que acompañan las ejecuciones. Estas derivas en pos de la materialidad y oralidad baja, ocurren después de que las policías y peritos han peinado el terreno, no sin dejar, al levantar los cuerpos, toneladas de remanentes y efluvios de la vida cercenada. Todo ese residuo (lodo, sangre, vidrio, manchas, fragmentos, sonidos) es lo que Margolles refiero bajo la fórmula de ‘lo que queda’” (23).

of femicide and of their families, and to enclose the sweaty garments in a plexiglass structure that would hang in the museum. While there, the clothes would eventually form bacteria and grow fungus, exhibiting “the life of the corpse” (Rosalinda González, Personal Interview). The life of the corpse is a prevalent theme in the work of Margolles, who founded a group of forensic artists in Mexico City called SEMEFO. Jesús Segura, an Art Professor at the University of Murcia in Spain, discusses the origins of SEMEFO in “Teresa Margolles: Necropolíticas de la visión.” According to Segura,

Sus inicios hay que buscarlos en su trabajo personal como técnico forense en la morgue de México y en el grupo SEMEFO (Servicio Médico Forense); un colectivo cuyo origen despliega una estética gótica y cuyos desarrollos se centran en las performances especialmente agresivas, y que posteriormente derivan a una serie de prácticas objetuales donde se utilizan cuerpos en descomposición para su transformación material. El grupo se ocupa primordialmente de una incidencia de la violencia en su carácter sistemático. La asimilación del objeto artístico como un simil de los mecanismos de terror y control marcara las producciones posteriores de Margolles. (2)

The artists in the group created polemic art installations involving human and animal cadavers, bodily fluids, and bloody clothes. These installations provoked legal and ethical questions about the use of dead bodies in artistic projects.¹⁰⁸

González invited Margolles to participate in the exhibition after seeing her work at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas. As González explains:

The work that she [Margolles] presented there was basically bricks. She had washed the bodies because she worked in the morgues for many years, so she would wash them and then save the remnants of the water and then go to these different sites and take the earth. Then she would make adobe bricks. At the MFA show she made a wall where she placed the bricks in a certain way so they looked like tombstones. (Personal interview)

In another installation, *Tumba portátil* (2001), Margolles encased a fetus in a block of cement. According to Segura the work demonstrates “la presencia concreta y brutal del

¹⁰⁸ Margolles and other SEMEFO artists negotiated the use of cadavers with family members of the deceased.

cuerpo muerto como fetiche necropolítico” (3). For *Frontera 450+* Margolles hoped to suspend a plexiglass box filled with hundreds of clothes in the museum. However, her vision proved structurally impossible in the museum space, and she was forced to adapt the installation.

Margolles’ work focuses on incorporating the geography of death into the museum space. For example, Seguro discusses how “En cierto modo hay una relación implícita entre los espacios de muerte, que quedan marcados en el imaginario urbano y el desplazamiento físico-alegórico que realiza Margolles. Este traslado simbólico activa una dimensión ambivalente, en la medida que fusiona territorios contrapuestos y los convoca hacía una deriva fantasmal que localiza el conflicto” (5). The space of death is sacred and usually confined to certain socially acceptable spaces like morgues and graveyards. However, Margolles brings remnants of death, in this case the clothes of victims, into the museum space.

In the article “The Victims of Ciudad Juárez Feminicide: Sexually Fetishized Commodities” Monárrez Fragoso analyzes collective memory in terms of the placement of bodies of feminicide victims, and finds that it exists on the margins of Ciudad Juárez in interstitial spaces like deserted lots. The idea of collective memory as a marginal geography is worth exploring. As Monárrez Fragoso explains,

The sexual and economic benefit of these inert bodies would seem to end with death, but it continues to be present in their fetishization in prohibited spaces, in the one-dimensional scene of the women/objects that are left in the desert for long periods and evoke an entire history of suffering that remains in the collective memory of women and men – of course, with different meanings for each man and woman, since memory cannot be equally interpreted from any given social situation. Reflections on life and human dignity therefore are not at the center of the city but on its margins – in the empty lots, the sand pits, the desert where bodies have been thrown. (68)

Margolles explored these marginal geographies and incorporated them into the exhibit, thus addressing a question posed by Arfuch: “La cuestión es ver, precisamente, *cómo entra la calle al arte*, es decir, de qué manera el arte permite realizar una elaboración conceptual perdurable, cómo operan sus políticas (simbólicas) de lo real” (*Pretérito imperfecto* 119). In her work Margolles collects materials both from the streets and from victims of violence, working with blood, fragments of glass, and clothes.

Margolles, unable to explore “the life of the corpse” as originally planned for *Frontera 450+*, decided to coat the clothes of victims and their family members in cement and then deposit them in a 17-foot-long trough. The museum hired two contractors to help her work with the cement, and, the interactions with the male contractors ended up changing the nature of the work. The contractors became angry about working on an installation, because they thought Margolles should be making her own art (Rosalinda González, Personal Interview). They threw the clothes into the cement and then into the trough in a haphazard manner. The force of their actions ended up making the clothing more expressive, as if the violence suffered by the victims and families had been transferred to the clothing. González, who witnessed the whole process, described how Margolles’ installation “took on a life of its own” (Personal Interview). González also discussed how

These men were so hateful and so expressive that she [Margolles] started to learn something from them. She started to realize that the connection made the work expressive in a way that she did not necessarily intend, but that opened up a new door to understanding the representation of that kind of violence. (Personal Interview)

“Cimbra Framework” is an example of how an artist’s vision can be fundamentally altered by the confines of the museum space and interactions with contracted workers.

Margolles, like filmmaker Lourdes Portillo, emphasizes the continuity and connections between violence against women in daily life and in feminicide. She explores the irony of a society that defines the dead body as sacred while essentially ignoring those same bodies if they belong to marginalized populations. For Medina, “Si Margolles actúa ahora como *flâneur*, como la cronista y filósofa de las nuevas necrópolis de la periferia, es porque requeriríamos hacernos cargo del modo en que el triunfo universal del capitalismo y la democracia electoral, guarda una relación íntima con el *laissez faire* de la violencia” (23). In response to this invisibilization, Margolles scavenges used materials from liminal and forgotten geographies to bring objects and artifacts linked intimately to violence into the museum space.

Photographer Maya Goded, whose recent work focuses almost exclusively on the female body, has published three volumes of photography: *Tierra negra: Fotografías de la Costa Rica en Guerrero y Oaxaca México* (1994), a book focusing on largely ignored African American communities in Oaxaca; *Good Girls* (2006), which explores the nuances of the virgin/whore female dichotomy that Goded was taught during childhood; and *Plaza de la soledad* (2006) about the daily life of prostitutes in *La Merced* in Mexico City.¹⁰⁹ Elena Poniatowska wrote that, “Las mujeres de Maya Goded están expuestas a todos los avatares de la vida, nadie las protege, ni siquiera Maya que las evidencia una y otra vez” (1).

¹⁰⁹ Goded’s photos also appear in *Territorios singulares: fotografía contemporánea mexicana* (1997) by Rafael Doctor Roncero. She has recently begun to make short documentaries, and just finished *Una reina a su gusto*, which has not yet been released.

A self-taught photographer, Goded began her career at the age of 15, and spent decades exploring the question: “¿qué significa ser mujer?”¹¹⁰ While discussing the most important works of cultural production about feminicide, author Sergio González Rodríguez said, “Creo que es muy importante también el trabajo fotográfico de Maya Goded” (Personal Interview). While visiting Maya’s photography studio in Mexico City, I perused the photographs covering the walls: a prostitute in a fur coat with dark-coal eyes burning; a mother and with two daughters, all prostitutes; a defiant *padrote* naked from the waist up; a woman’s back inked with an image of *la Santa Muerte*; a prostitute posing in her underwear on a convenience store counter against a backdrop of chips and peanuts. “Take my picture,” she said to Maya, thus taking control of her own image. Those images, taken for a project that documented prostitutes in Reynosa, Mexico, reflect Goded’s interest in exploring cultural and societal expectations about what it means to be a woman in Mexico.¹¹¹

For *Frontera 450+* Goded took photographs that told the stories of victims of feminicide and their families. Rosalinda Gonzalez became interested in the work of Goded because she was “trying to find photographers who were doing work that wasn’t exploitative. Her [Goded’s] works were focused on the living. She would document the families” (Personal Interview). Goded, who took the photographs between 2004 and 2005 in Zacatecas, Chihuahua City, and Ciudad Juárez, wanted to get to know “their

¹¹⁰ One image from Goded’s book “Plaza de la Soledad” stands out for me in terms of its power to change perceptions of what it means to be a woman and to be a prostitute. In the photo a tiny, gray-haired woman, eyes peering out of thick glasses, lays fully dressed on a bed. Beside her, a man, her client of fifty years, cradles her thighs. The man’s head nestles atop the woman’s, his eyes closed.

¹¹¹ Goded showed me images she took of prostitutes in Reynosa. At dusk, rows of prostitutes stood in the doorways of crumbling buildings, their silhouettes like a beacon in the night. Their rooms were covered in posters of models, actresses, slick images of women in lingerie. One the walls of her room, one girl had scrawled “Brenda # 1” and in the room of another someone had left a message written in lipstick on a mirror. Nearby were abandoned building, sites where aborted babies were buried, walls, and a checkpoint. The prostitutes were guarded, trapped by walls and by the stigma of their work.

family, their rooms, the places where their bodies were found” (“Maya Goded: Justicia para nuestras hijas”). Both the work of Margolles and Goded demonstrate what, for Bolt, is an important link between process and product: “In a reversal of the causal chain of means and ends, the relationship between objects, artists, materials and processes, emerges as one of co-responsibility and indebtedness, rather than one of master” (9). The process of going to Ciudad Juárez and interacting with families of victims shaped the outcome of the artistic project for Goded. Her series of a dozen large-scale photographs, inkjet prints on cotton paper, includes an image of a mother standing in the desert holding a pink cross and another in which a young girl plays in the desert, her shadow stretched across the sand in the warmth of the late afternoon light.

PHOTOGRAPHING AN ABSENCE

Goded participated in the exhibit because “Siempre estoy en temas que me importan. Yo podría haber escogido muchas otras cosas. Me interesan la violencia y la mujer, me interesan los patrones, cómo tiene que ser la mujer” (Personal Interview). Her emphasis is on the families and the geographical sites where bodies of victims were found.¹¹² For example, in one photo, a grieving mother sits in a taxi, and a large framed photo of her daughter rests beside her. In many photos, Goded plays with shadow and light, hinting at absence but never showing bodies. Her work addresses a question posed by Arfuch: “¿es necesario ver para creer? Y ese hacer-ver, bajo las reglas del género de la información que difícilmente se alteran – el efectismo, la fragmentación, la

¹¹² Goded received the prestigious W. Eugene Smith Fund Award for “Sexo-servidoras,” a collection of photographs of prostitutes from La Merced neighborhood of Mexico City. She worked and lived in the area over a five-year period to capture the rich complexity of life, love, and inequality among a population of prostitutes.

simplificación, la endeblez argumentativa - ¿aporta en verdad a una toma de conciencia y, entonces, a una mayor responsabilidad ciudadana o sólo cumple una función catártica, que dispensa – a todos – de intervenciones más rotundas?” (*Crítica cultural* 101-02).

Goded's photos are not cathartic or sensational. Without knowing the context of the exhibit, an onlooker would find photos of the desert, of mothers, and of children. In one photo from the series that connotes absence, a shirt and a pair of shoes full of flowers lie on dry, cracked earth. When speaking of the photo, Goded explained that the mother had maintained her daughter's room exactly as it had been even though years had passed since her daughter's death (Personal interview). When Goded arrived, the mother, unprompted by the photographer, took her daughter's clothes and shoes outside, arranged them, and filled the shoes with plastic flowers (Personal Interview). Other photos from



Figure 4.1. Maya Goded © 2004. A mother of a femicide victim arranged her daughter's clothing in the desert sands. Courtesy of Maya Goded.



Figure 4.2 .Maya Goded © 2004. A body of a feminicide victim was found at this site in Lomas de Poleo. Photo courtesy of Maya Goded.

the series represent bleak geographies, places like Lomas de Poleo where multiple bodies have been discovered.

Goded has a series of photos – abandoned lots, desert, concrete – all sites where bodies of feminicide victims were found. In her review of *Frontera 450+*, Handwerker discusses the importance of geography in Goded’s work:

Place is a dominant theme in this exhibition and a significant component of Maya Goded’s *Justicia para Nuestras Hijas* (Justice For Our Daughters). Goded photographed the families of known victims in Ciudad Chihuahua, Juárez and the nearby state of Zacatecas, paying tribute to them in much the same way as the deceased and missing are memorialized by their families in portraits, which are occasionally included in the frame. Relatives are either photographed in their homes—often in the missing or deceased’s bedroom—or in remote parts of the desert where their children went missing or their remains were discovered. (1)

Goded does not show the bodies, leaving the geographies to speak for themselves.

Discussing her experience on the border, Goded said, “Así es Juárez y las fronteras, le ves una cara al ser humano que de repente te da escalofríos, de lo que podemos llegar a

ser” (Personal Interview).¹¹³ However, Goded’s images provide hope by focusing on the work of families and activists.¹¹⁴ “Busco entender las contradicciones de la vida,” said Goded of her body of work (Personal Interview).¹¹⁵

GEOGRAPHY AS A WITNESS

In the 2006 video “El aire me habla de ti” Carmen Montoya, a filmmaker from Ciudad Juárez, records the desert winds of Ciudad Juárez in real time and then plays the sounds and images into the installation space. For Montoya, the work is connected to her experiences growing up in Ciudad Juárez. In her artist statement she describes, “When I was a child I went to Ciudad Juárez to visit my grandmother. We walked in the desert and listened to the wind. She told me that the earth was telling us its stories” (“Carmen Montoya: El aire me habla de ti”). In an effort to connect the museum space with the deserts of Ciudad Juárez, the artist brought the sound of the desert winds to the museum. The video also introduces the concept of the physical geography of the city serving as a witness to femicide. Montoya learned from her grandmother that the earth “bears witness to all of human experiences. She remembers it in her soil and proclaims it on the wind” (“Carmen Montoya: El aire me habla de ti”). The artist records voices that tell the stories of femicide victims over the sounds of the wind recorded. Montoya thus creates

¹¹³ After her work in Ciudad Juárez, Goded began a project to document prostitutes in Reynosa, Mexico. Comparing the two cities, she described, “[Ciudad Juárez] no es Reynosa. [En Reynosa] tu ves coches y todos te dicen ‘Si ves un coche sin placas, no lo veas.’ Ves coches negros, luego Mercedes sin placas. Son los dueños de la ciudad. Todo el mundo te dice, los taxistas te dicen, ‘Bueno, si te toca una balacera, tú te tiras al piso y digo máximo dura dos horas’” (Personal Interview). Goded highlights the level of violence and insecurity existing outside of Ciudad Juárez.

¹¹⁴ A photo from this series is included in my introductory chapter in Figure 1.4. In the photo, two mothers stand in the Campo Algodonero beside memorial crosses they erected in memory of their daughters.

¹¹⁵ For more information on my interview with Goded, listen to me describe the experience in an essay titled “¿Qué significa ser mujer?” read on the National Public Radio program *Tales from the South*.

a memoryscape via technology that brings together disparate elements to create a geography that “tells” the stories of victims.

ARTWORK, MEMORY, AND SOCIAL AGENCY

Artists Lise Bjørne and Susan Plum moved beyond the trope of victimization by making a connection between their artwork and memory/social agency. They promote remembrance of victims of femicide by creating workshops with a diverse group of individuals. For example, Norwegian textile artist Lise Bjørne held educational workshops in 15 different countries in 2006 to produce *Desconocida Unknown Ukjent*. The women who participated embroidered the names of victims of femicide in silk thread onto 1,023 strips of white cotton cloth. The project, which was ongoing and continued after the exhibit and through June of 2010, took Bjørne to 27 countries where she worked with local women to produce more than 4,000 embroidered labels. Bjørne also invited visitors who attended *Frontera 450+* to embroider labels for the project. The art produced for the show represents a continuous cultivation of memory in which awareness was combined with the manual labor of embroidery. Bjørne makes an important connection between action and memory; we remember what we have made with our own hands.¹¹⁶ Our bodies retain physical memories and associations, and information is processed differently than if a person simply reads a newspaper article about femicide.

Bree Edwards, the curator for the Mitchell Center for the Arts at the University of Houston, discussed Bjørne’s work:

¹¹⁶ The act of connecting weaving with memory is as ancient. For example, Penelope in *The Odyssey* for years faithfully wove a burial shroud to keep suitors at bay and to keep the memory of her husband alive.

The garment labels seamlessly connect to the economic realities of labor in Juárez, while the often crude stitching bears the distinct trace of each participant in the project. The threads are multi-colored, except those that record “the unknown.” The language of these labels changes based on the location of where the workshop was held; unknown becomes “ukjent,” “desconocida,” “amas” and “onbekend.” The collection of labels, arranged in a morse-code musical score depicting the Mexican national anthem, is decidedly haunting. (“*Frontera 450+* at the Station”)

Bjørne organized the embroidered labels on a 26-foot long by 10-foot high wall, and then translated the Mexican National Hymn into morse code. The “unknown” labels represented the dots, and the dashes became the identified names. During the workshops Bjørne also disseminated information about femicide, creating a connection between the global and the local. Bjørne described how “Visually, each embroidered name, even the ‘unknown’, contains traces of the woman who embroidered. It is through her handwriting, her choice of colours and stitches that she leaves behind a trace of herself” (“Desconocida – Unknown – Ukjent”). Her work creates collective memory among an international group of women. Artists like Lise Bjørne organize projects that spread, like so many seeds carried by the wind, a profound understanding and memory of femicide in the international community.

Susan Plum, an American artist living in Mexico, organized a collective project between 2004 and 2006 in which women participated in the act of making the artwork. To make the video performance “Luz y solidaridad,” Susan Plum invited twenty-five women to join in a fifteen-minute wordless performance-ritual at the Museo de la Ciudad de Querétaro in Mexico. The women participated in a shamanistic sweeping ritual that, as Plum described, would “bring a sense of empowerment to the women who have lost their daughters as well as a feeling of solidarity” (“Susan Plum: Luz y solidaridad”). Plum brought together mothers of victims and other family members to create an event in

which memory was tied to action: the act of sweeping represented cleansing both physically and metaphorically. Both Plum and Bjørne use art to explore the connection between memory creation and physical action.

ISSUES RELATED TO FEMINICIDE

Several artists explore either horror in general (rather than femicide in particular) or issues tangential to femicide. These works provide information about important issues such as migration, the situation of women in *maquiladoras*, and the situation of women in other Latin American countries. However, not all of the works contribute to a discussion about femicide. These artists include Arturo Rivera, Sara Marinero, Luis Jiménez, Margarita Cabrera, Coco Fusco, Celia Álvarez Muñoz, Angela Dillon, and Kaneem Smith.



Figure 4.3 Alice Driver © 2011. Arturo Rivera poses in front of a self-portrait in his studio in the Condesa neighborhood of Mexico City.

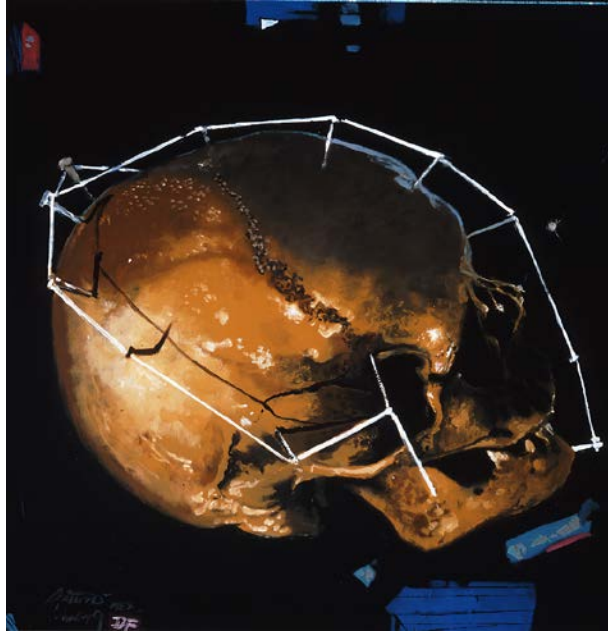


Figure 4.4 Jesus Sánchez Uribe © 2006 This mixed media painting titled “Y que si Juárez no hubiera muerto” is part of a series titled “Homenaje a Kubrick.” Courtesy of Arturo Rivera.

The work of painter Arturo Rivera, like that of writer Roberto Bolaño, exhibits a fascination with horror. Rivera is known for combining hyperrealism with elements of dark fantasy in his work. As Mexican poet José Ángel Leyva describes, “Arturo Rivera (ciudad de México, 1945) es, a todas luces, uno de los artistas plásticos vivos con mayor reconocimiento dentro y fuera de su país. Con una extensa obra de elevada factura, ha impuesto su marca en el panorama de la pintura internacional” (27).¹¹⁷ Rivera decided not to produce original work for *Frontera 450+*, because rather than depicting feminicide, he wanted to show “la muerte de *lo* humano y de *el* humano” (Personal Interview). He picked a painting of a skull produced for an earlier series produced in 2006 and titled it “Y si Juárez no hubiera muerto.” He decided to exhibit the painting in a room while music from the Mexican danzón song “¿Si Juárez no hubiera muerto?” played. This

¹¹⁷ A retrospective of Rivera’s work edited by Luis Bagallo Cortés titled *Arturo Rivera* was published in 2010. Rivera did not approve of the quality of the images in the book so he asked the editorial, Conaculta, to halt sales of the book (Personal Interview).

created an experience in which viewers confronted the painting of the skull while listening to the song “What if Juárez had not died?” While the song originally referred to the historical tragedy the death of Mexican President Benito Juárez (1806-72), Rivera places it in a context in which it refers to a different death, the death of Ciudad Juárez.

Rivera’s piece manages to be both realistic (in terms of a representation of an anatomically correct skull) and non-representational (in terms of not representing anything related to feminicide). For Bolt, it is important not to see representational and non-representational art as opposing categories. As she explains,

In the visual arts, for example, representation tends to be conflated with realism or figuration. Here representational art is opposed to abstract or so-called non-representational art. However, according to its critics, representation cannot be conceived so literally. It is not just concerned with realism or figuration, but rather, representation posits a particular relation to, or way of thinking about the world. (*Art Beyond Representation* 12)

Rivera’s “Y si Juárez no hubiera muerto” is more concerned with exhibiting a way of thinking about the world and about violence – “la muerte de *lo* humano y de *el* humano” – than with the representation of a specific issue related to feminicide. Rivera makes the important point that meaningful art about feminicide or other forms of horror does not have to be realistic or issue-specific in order to be meaningful.

During our interview at his studio in Mexico City, Rivera discussed *Frontera* 450+ and expressed skepticism about the role of art in creating social change. For example, he was critical of the work of Margolles, which involved collecting the clothing of victims and family members of victims. According to Rivera, “Eso no tiene ningún sentido. Eso no salva ni a las muertas ni salva a nada, además le hace daño al arte. Está jodiendo al arte.” Later in our interview he elaborated, “Vamos a suponer que sean reales

las camisas llena de sangre de las muertas de Juárez. ¿Y? ¿Qué le da o qué le quita?”

For him, the use of clothing of victims and their families did not create any special significance. He argued that art could not change reality, and as an example of his ideology, said that art may shout or protest against something, but that “Ni Rembrandt, ni Vermeer, ni Picasso juntos [pueden cambiar la realidad social].”¹¹⁸

When discussing art and social change Rivera expressed, “Una exposición no va a cambiar nada” (Personal Interview). He also asked me, “¿Qué acción puede tomar, puedes tomar ante una bola de narcos tremendos, ante una bola de asesinos que no sabes ni de dónde vienen?” The painter then talked about his understanding of the role of the artist as promoting social change. He asked, “¿En dónde cabe el artista? Sí, cabe, pero vamos a ubicarlo. ¿Dónde cabe un artista en un problema que es socio-político, económico? ¿Dónde lo vas a meter?” When I acknowledged that an artist did not have to have any explicit socio-political goals Rivera continued: “¿Por qué lo metes en un problema social si el artista quiere pintar flores? Puedo poner una tragedia en las flores, puedo poner cosas más gruesas en una flor que en las muertas de Juárez. ¿Por qué tú necesitas ilustrar las muertas de Juárez? ¿Por qué necesita el arte un tema determinado?” Rivera defines his art in terms of universal issues that face humanity, arguing that he can address issues more complicated than “las muertas de Juárez.” He makes the valid point that the representation of a particular thing – feminicide, for example – does not automatically create meaning.

¹¹⁸ Rivera also discussed the impossibility of resolving the situation in Ciudad Juárez: “Ciudad Juárez no tiene remedio. Este país no tiene remedio. Yo lo veo así. ¿Cuál es el remedio que podría tener? No sé, una especie de dictador pero no tipo Fidel Castro” (Personal Interview).

Venezuelan artist Sara Maniero created art from forensic evidence for a 1995 piece based on the use of dental records to identify murdered women in Venezuela. She did not create work specifically for *Frontera 450+*, and her piece had no connection to femicide or Ciudad Juárez. Maniero, who conducts research on violence in Venezuela, became interested in the role of dental records and teeth in the identification of cadavers. She sent sepia-toned C-prints of dental X-rays to *Frontera 450+*. The work was exhibited with no information about where the teeth came from, leaving visitors to guess at the rest of the narrative. The virtual exhibition online also lacks information to alert viewers that the images are not from victims in Ciudad Juárez.

In a 2001 lithograph reminiscent of the grotesque aesthetic Francisco Goya, Luis Jiménez represents grossly exaggerated figures attempting to cross the apocalyptic landscape of the U.S.-Mexico border. Against a stark desert backdrop, a man with a gun herds suffering figures with faces twisted in agony along the border. In the sky, helicopters and planes appear on the horizon, as if they will swoop in to pluck up the hapless bunch and take them back to Mexico. The most exaggerated figure is a skeletal woman, her mouth opened in a permanent scream. One of her breasts is exposed, and she appears to run towards a barbed wire fence. This piece displays no specific connection to femicide; rather, it points to the role of the border in the lives of families (both those who flee and those who are left behind or die during the journey). The work, due to its lack of specific connection to Ciudad Juárez or femicide, seems dissonant alongside the other exhibits in the show.

Like Jiménez, Margarita Cabrera did not create new work for the show. She exhibited work created between 2003 and 2005 that reflects on the role of *maquiladoras*

and mass-produced goods. According to Gonzalez, the museum wanted to work with Cabrera because her work is “about construction and objects that in some capacity symbolize the *maquiladoras* and that culture” (Personal Interview). Looking at the relationship between *maquiladoras* and justice, Deborah M. Weissman argues that “In the end, it may be that the term *impunity* ought to describe not simply the state but also the multinational corporate actors who act contrary to the interests of the majority of Mexicans” (*Terrorizing Women* 236). Cabrera’s work, which juxtaposes the manufactured and the handmade, includes handmade replicas of modern domestic machines (a blow dryer, slow cooker, espresso machine, food processor, and cleaning supplies). Kate Bonansinga, Director of the Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for the Visual Arts at the University of Texas at El Paso, analyzes Cabrera’s work, contrasting her hand-made machines to the earlier work of Andy Warhol:

Warhol immortalized brand name products and well-known people by reproducing and repeating their image. Cabrera’s icons are, instead, ubiquitous machines created by anonymous people. Warhol sanctioned stardom. Cabrera acknowledges unknown laborers. Warhol commented on how the temporary fame of a few products and people define our popular culture and public character. Cabrera observes that an underpaid and unacknowledged work force creates the objects that characterize our domestic space and, by extension our private lives. (“Margarita Cabrera: Maquila Factory”)¹¹⁹

Cabrera’s work, while not directly about feminicide, highlights the relationship between modernity and the anonymous female laborers that, in order to produce popular products in *maquiladoras*, submit themselves to a mechanized rhythm of life.

Women, the predominant labor force in *maquiladoras*, find their bodies worn and their time exploited. Many researchers have made the connection between the

¹¹⁹ To find the quote by Bonansinga visit <http://www.stationmuseum.com/frontera/450.htm> and click on Margarita Cabrera’s name. The subsequent link features photos of the work and quotes by Bonansinga about the work.

disposability of women in the *maquiladoras* and their disposability in society.¹²⁰

However, Steven S. Volk and Marian E. Schlotterbeck ask the pertinent question, “If Juárez’s political and sexual economies meet within the *maquiladoras*, to what extent are the murders about the border assembly plants?” (*Making a Killing* 128). They argue that “In that sense, the exploitation of gendered bodies cannot adequately explain the murder of gendered bodies. Nevertheless, the murders cannot be understood without recognizing the specific ways that *maquila* development has shaped both the political and the sexual economy of the border” (128). Cabrera’s work emphasizes the importance of recognizing the labor of individual women in the global market. Her domestic machines remain unfinished, the hanging threads reminding viewers of the labor involved in creation of any kind.

Cuban-American interdisciplinary artist and writer Coco Fusco exhibited a video she created in 2001 focusing on the role of *maquiladoras* on the border. However, her work was inspired by time spent in Tijuana rather than in Ciudad Juárez. In “Dalores from 10 to 10” Fusco created three surveillance videos showing footage of a female *maquiladora* worker being locked in a room by a male superior. The videos were inspired by a trip Fusco took to Tijuana, Mexico in 1998. While there, she met Delfina Rodríguez, a *maquiladora* worker and union organizer. Rodríguez told Fusco that when her boss found out she was trying to organize a union, he locked her in a room for twelve hours without food, water, or a bathroom. She was later forced to sign a letter of resignation before being freed, and afterwards she had no evidence to prove that her boss had infringed upon her civil rights. “Dalores from 10 to 10” is Fusco’s attempt to

¹²⁰ For further reading refer to Melissa Wright’s *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Globalization* (2005).

recreate the story of Rodríguez as if she had been able to obtain the footage from the *maquiladora* surveillance cameras. The video consists of a twelve-hour collaborative performance with Ricardo Domínguez. The video footage, which features captions rather than sound, shows the degrading treatment suffered by the female worker at the hands of her boss. He bullies her verbally and emotionally while depriving her of basic needs until she signs a letter of resignation.

The use of surveillance video footage can be seen as a metaphor for the way women are treated on the border. As Rosa-Linda Fregoso points out, “In effect women are transformed into subjects of surveillance; their decency and morality become the object of social control. What’s more, shifting the blame toward the victims’ moral character in effect naturalizes violence against women” (*MeXicana Encounters* 4-5). Many women are trapped by cultural expectations and judgments that define victims of abuse or femicide as prostitutes or morally corrupt individuals. Fusco’s video shows how the *maquiladora* power structure, lacking in checks and balances, produces an environment rife with the abuse of women’s rights. Fregoso, who urges readers to look beyond the simplistic connection between femicide and global capitalism, argues that “A more nuanced understanding of sexual violence in Juárez identifies the multiple sites where women experience violence, within domestic and public spaces that are local and national as well as global and transnational. And this leads us to another way in which globalism is complicitious with the state” (“Toward a Planetary Civil Society” 52). Fusco’s work contributes to the ongoing conversation about violence against women and the abuse of power, but at the same time it emphasizes the connection between *maquiladoras* and femicide. Although *maquiladoras* often violate the rights of female

employees and some victims of femicide have been *maquiladora* workers, it is a fallacy to assume a consistent cause-and-effect relationship between *maquiladoras* and femicide.

Like Fusco, El Paso native Celia Álvarez Muñoz focused on issues involving women and inequality. Álvarez Muñoz explained that her 2006 work, “Las mordidas” “is one of several projects I have done dealing with the feminization of poverty. It is an extension of an earlier installation titled, ‘Fibra y Furia: Exploitation is in Vogue,’ that was exhibited in 1999 – 2003 about the same topic, the women of Juárez” (“Celia Álvarez Muñoz, Las Mordidas: The Power of Privilege”). In “Las mordidas” Álvarez Muñoz uses acrylic paint to print the text of reports of human rights abuses in Mexico onto a large cloth screen. The density of the paint and the formation of the words are organized to form what from a distance is clearly recognizable as the coat of arms of Mexico. The artist explains that while she was putting up the installation for *Frontera 450+*, “[...] the story broke, of a child *maquiladora* worker who survived the brutal sexual assault and was able to identify her attacker, a bus driver who was supposed to deliver her home. The *maquiladora* then attempted to sue her because she was underage when she went to work for them” (“Celiz Álvarez Muñoz, Las Mordidas: The Power of Privilege”). Through her work, Álvarez Muñoz transforms a symbol of Mexico, the coat of arms, into a symbol of the shortcomings of the country and its institutions in terms of protecting human rights.

In “El árbol de la vida” (2006) American Angela Dillon works with the familiar symbol of the cross to produce a tree of red crosses made out of wood and acrylic paint. In her artist statement, she explains that the cross, a symbol of her upbringing, represents

peace and safety. However, she recognizes that “We know this is not always the case; in war history it has been the symbol of aggression and of threat as well. Throughout the history of mankind, the cross is almost always related to death, it symbolizes the passing to another world, to the memory of the departed, the quick mark or gesture suggesting a place of resting for the souls” (“Angela Dillon: El árbol de la vida”). The artist is optimistic about the power of the cross, and stated, “I really believe in my heart for the families the cross to be a symbol of Jesus the Son of God, God the protector, the merciful, and who will bring justice soon enough, if not in this life, in the next one.”

THE FEMALE CORPSE

In the article “Dead Bodies Animate the Study of Politics” author Katherine Verdery discusses how the dead body has become a political symbol and a rallying cry for action, one that can be manipulated for various means. For her, the use of dead bodies as a symbol is important because of

their connection with affect, a significant problem for social analysis. Anthropologists have long asked, Wherein lies the efficacy of symbols? How do they engage emotions? The same question troubles other social sciences as well: Why do some things and not others work emotionally in the political realm? It is asked particularly about symbols used to evoke national identifications; Benedict Anderson, for instance, inquires why national meanings command such deep emotional responses and why people are “ready to die for these inventions.” The link of dead bodies to the sacred and the cosmic – to feelings of awe aroused by contact with death – seems clearly part of their symbolic efficacy. (307)

Three artists in *Frontera 450+*, Sharon Kopriva, Teresa Serrano, and David Kreuger, represent the figure of the dead or tortured female corpse. Their choice to represent feminicide victims as dead bodies is a risky one because, although such representations

often create an immediate emotional connection with viewers, the works themselves often lack depth to move beyond what I will call the sad-dead-body discourse.

In a work titled “Who Are You?” (2006) Houston-based visual artist Sharon Kopriva exhibited the mummified body of a woman draped in a produce sack, that she painted with the colors of the Mexican flag. Kopriva designed the graphic work because she felt that the U.S. audience had not had to confront the realities of feminicide. The piece, made of animal bones, found materials from Ciudad Juárez, and papier-mâché, features the bones of a young girl lying on her side on a patch of rock and sand. A pendant of the Virgin lies in the sand near the girl’s body, both a representation of the faith of the victim and an indictment against the Church for doing so little to work for women’s equality. As Kopriva explains, “She clings to her faith, but the Church does little” (Email). While researching the anti-feminicide movement in Ciudad Juárez, Kathleen Staudt also discovered that religious leaders had missed an opportunity to speak out against violence against women. She asserted that “At the border, religious leaders have been latecomers or absent from the anti-femicide and anti-violence movements, despite activists’ use of quasi-religious icons such as crosses and crucifixes to dramatize and legitimize their cause” (*Violence and Activism* 104-5).

Although the figure of the girl appears realistic from a distance, closer inspection shows that it is not anatomically correct. It is an abstraction, an every-woman that represents victims of injustice, both economic and physical. Kopriva designed the piece for a U.S. audience, and, as she explains, “This piece is graphic in nature with reason. Most of the audience probably did not want to view the piece. Unlike most of the world, the American public seldom sees death imagery depicted in the press due to sponsor

issues. Murders are discussed in low tones, but the visuals and scents of death are totally absent” (Email).

In Kopriva’s work, the female body has become a victim of the state. Kopriva describes how “The girl wears only a produce sack. She is a Product of Mexico, but her blood is on the hands of Mexico, the USA and the world” (“Sharon Kopriva: Who Are You?”). The artist asks viewers to question not only the death of so many women but the global flows that leave women in such a precarious position. However, the work lacks the nuance needed to more fully explore the relationship between death and the U.S.-Mexico relationship. Moreover, the piece does not relate directly to feminicide, except to repeat a simplistic argument that blames feminicide on Mexico and the United States. The blame is general, and the work itself does not suggest in what ways each of the two nations are complicit in feminicide.

The video installation produced in 2003 by Mexican artist Teresa Serrano depicts a scene in which a Mexican actor perpetrates acts of misogyny on a *piñata* created in the female form. The *piñata* wears a wig of long black hair, and although the performance is theatrical, the violence is eerily real. In addition to the glossy hair, the *piñata* wears a tight white midriff-baring shirt and a short blue skirt. The *piñata* is cartoonish and busty like a video game character. The vicious beating of the *piñata* is punctuated by the grunts of the actor as he strikes the *piñata*. The curator, Rosalinda González felt that the violence of the work required a space of contemplation separate from the other pieces in the show.

In *Gender, Sexuality and Museums* Amy K. Levin, professor of Women’s Studies and English at Northern Illinois University, discusses the power of the curator to control

gender not only through the choice of artists but also through a manipulation of the art space and how works of art are viewed. According to Levin,

Whether it is through the peepshow-like experience of viewing a geological specimen alight in a dark case in the entry to the earth galleries at London's Museum of Natural History of Nazi-era female undergarments mounted on a mannequin in the City Museum of Osnabrück, Germany, curators and exhibition designers have the ability to render objects curiously sexual or, alternately, to strip them of any sexual power by constructing the visitor's gaze in various ways. (5)

González, well aware of this power, took an active role in framing the exhibited works within the art space. González explained that she worked with Serrano to create a "small viewing section where only four people at a time could view it [the film], and they were very displaced from it. The end result was that the work became more successful because you really thought about the space and the relationship to what was going on" (Personal Interview).

Despite the space that created displacement between the viewer and Serrano's work, the artist's representation of the victim relies on a sexualized image of a woman: young, with long hair, showing lots of skin, and wearing tight clothes. In her explanation of the piece, Serrano writes, "I ordered a *piñata* done in the shape of a young girl" and had it dressed "in a manner in which the girls at the factories do in Ciudad Juárez" ("Teresa Serrano: La piñata"). Serrano describes, "I attached a long real wig to her head, and I hung her from the ceiling as all the *piñatas* are hung at parties. I hired a theatre actor and explained to him the motive of this video: to represent a horrible art of misogyny. ("Teresa Serrano: La piñata"). Serrano's words seem to make the stereotype a reality: all young factory girls dress and look like the *piñata*.

Another work that reproduces the concept of woman as a victim is the life-sized bloody body in an altar created by David Kreuger in 2006 for the exhibition.

Handwerker, who reviewed the exhibition for *Art Lies*, a contemporary art journal, criticized the ethics of Kreuger's work and other pieces, asserting that

The undertone of women as victims is a poignant component of the exhibition, albeit a problematic one. In *María de la Arena Seca* (*María of the Dry Sand*), for example, David Krueger recreates an oversized roadside memorial in the form of a dismembered mannequin soaked with blood, surrounded by a desert landscape with clothes and shoes embedded in the sand. Likewise, Teresa Serrano's *La piñata* records an actor aggressively beating a piñata shaped like a young woman. Although the violent, disturbing footage is a powerful glimpse at the sadistic impulse, such works—like many in the exhibition—emphasize victimization, as though all the women of Juárez are already dead.¹²¹

Kreuger's work relies on stereotypical imagery – the bloody female body – to create a memorial to victims of feminicide. In his memorial Kreuger created a woman dressed in white and covered in bloodstains. Although the artist created it as a roadside memorial, Kreuger does not move beyond stereotypical imagery.

ART AND MEMORY CREATION

As a whole, the pieces in *Frontera 450+* present a varied look at feminicide and the importance of the artistic process in creating meaning. Bolt argues that “[...] it is through process or practice that the outside world enters the work and the work casts its effects back into the world. In the dynamic productivity of the performative act, the work

¹²¹ Patricia Ravelo Blancas also addresses the problem of victimization in “We Never Thought It Would Happen to Us: Approaches to the Study of the Subjectivities of the Mothers of the Murdered Women of Ciudad Juárez.” She asserts that “One of the most telling instances of state co-optation is evident in the label given to the murder victims on Mexico’s northern border: ‘Las muertas de Juárez’ (The dead women of Juárez). This designation has been converted into one of the elements in the chain of victimization (suffering mothers, society, state) that currently serves to sustain the mass media’s dominant discourse rather than the interests of those affected by border violence” (40).

of art produces ontological effects” (*Art Beyond Representation* 10). Works like that of Elia Arce demonstrate the importance of the performative act in memory creation.

However, memory creation is also influenced by the politics of curatorial work: how to balance male versus female participants, and national versus international presence. Some artists who were recruited to create diversity either did not produce work for the show or did not produce work about feminicide. In contrast, artists like Goded and Margolles made the decision to spend time in Ciudad Juárez, thus forging a connection with the community and creating artwork with significance beyond the museum space. However, as Goded admitted, “Cada día necesitas más energía para fotografiar este país. Está muy fuerte” (Personal Interview).

To make art about feminicide requires an emotional commitment, a willingness on the part of the artist to confront horror, to analyze it, and to synthesize that experience into a work of art. In the case of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez, it also often requires a willingness to visit or work in one of the most violent cities in the world. The pieces in *Frontera 450+* that most successfully promote memory creation about feminicide are those that rely on the artistic process to unite the signifier (objects, testimony, and ideas about feminicide) with the signified (the work itself). These works move beyond representation, making a case for the importance of process in creating meaning.

When asked about the power of art and cultural production to influence the feminicide debate, author Sergio González Rodríguez replied, “Creo que para lo que sirven los productos culturales es para mantener la memoria de algo tremendamente dramático y injusto” (Personal Interview). I know of no measurement for the existence or quality of memory, but memories of the victims live on in the women around the

world who sewed victims' names for Bjorn's project, in the family members who donated clothes to Margolles "Cimbra Framework," and in those who viewed the desolate landscapes photographed by Goded.¹²² Where there was once an absence – no name, no body – there is now a presence, a transplanted historical memory that will live on.

¹²² As Estelle Barrett notes in the introduction to *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Inquiry* (2007) "Within the field of science, there is a growing recognition that restricting enquiry to those things that can be exactly measured would mean denying many of the benefits of alternative modes of enquiry (Eisner 1997). Since creative arts research is often motivated by emotional, personal and subjective concerns, it operates not only on the basis of explicit and exact knowledge, but also on that of tacit knowledge" (4).

CHAPTER FIVE

MONUMENTS, MEMORIALS, GRAFFITI, AND STREET ART: MEMORY CREATION IN AN APOCALYPTIC LANDSCAPE

“Cuando yo pinté esa cruz, la policía me dijo que estaba loca para andar haciendo yo eso.”
—Paula Flores, *La carta*

In December of 2010 President Felipe Calderón promised to construct a monument to the victims of femicide in the *Campo Algodonero* in Ciudad Juárez. As reported in *Proceso* by Gloria Leticia Díaz:

El presidente Felipe Calderón se “comprometió” a ir a Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, a develar un monumento en memoria de cientos de mujeres asesinadas en esa ciudad fronteriza, y ofrecerá una “disculpa pública” a los familiares de las víctimas que demandaron a México ante la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos (CoIDH), reveló David Peña, representante de las víctimas.

The local government approved the proposal for the monument, and a plan was prepared to construct it near the *Campo Algodonero*. However, when I visited the city in May of 2011, there were no signs of the monument at the proposed site, and citizens expressed doubt that the project would ever be completed or even constructed. At the time, photographer and journalist Julián Cardona, who writes for *El Diario* and *Reuters*, observed, “No han cumplido [los políticos]. Al final no sé como está ahorita el proceso porque creo que el gobierno mexicano había mandado algunos funcionarios de segundo nivel a que vinieran a disculparse. Y las madres [de las víctimas] dijeron, ‘No, tiene que venir Calderón a pedir perdón’” (Personal Interview May 24, 2011). Calderón visited the city in May of 2011 to rename it “Héroe Ciudad Juárez,” an act which was performed, he said, to get rid of the negative connotations that are associated with the

name “Ciudad Juárez.”¹²³ In November of 2011, the monument to the femicide victims of the *Camop Algodonero* was inaugurated. However, victims’ families attended the ceremony in protest as authorities built the monument but never fully investigated the crimes. Although political leaders could have a key role in cultural production, as of yet, they have been featured mainly as villains in fiction and non-fiction works due to a long series of sexist statements made by members of successive political administrations in Ciudad Juárez.

GEOGRAPHIES OF EXCLUSION

In 1995, multiple bodies of victims of femicide were found in Lote Bravo, an informal dump on the southern edge of the city near Abraham González International airport. In 1996 bodies began to appear in Lomas de Poleo, an informal housing settlement and dump on the northwest edge of the city near the U.S. border.¹²⁴ Lomas de Poleo is also home to the *colonias* of Anapra, areas of informal housing that appeared in

¹²³ The business sector has also recently tried to improve the image of Ciudad Juárez by organizing “Foro Juárez Competitiva,” an event celebrated on October 14, 2011. As Nancy González reported in the article “Anticipation High for Juárez Competitiva” in the *El Paso Times*, “The event aims to promote national and international investment and tourism and will gather dozens of businessmen, companies and thinkers to discuss topics such as technology development and investment opportunities, as well as social and cultural issues.” Guests included the Mexican pop group Maná, Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev, and former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

¹²⁴ Cardona discussed covering the first appearances of bodies as a photographer for *El Diario*: “Cuando fue Lote Bravo y Lomas de Poleo ni siquiera era una cosa de cobertura nacional. Y a mí me tocó vivirlo. Porque yo me fui al caso donde encontraron a la primer víctima de Lote Bravo que fue en agosto de 2000. A mí me tocó estar en la calle en el Lote Bravo cuando estaban contando las primeras víctimas, cuando eran los primeros rastreos” (Personal Interview May 24, 2011).

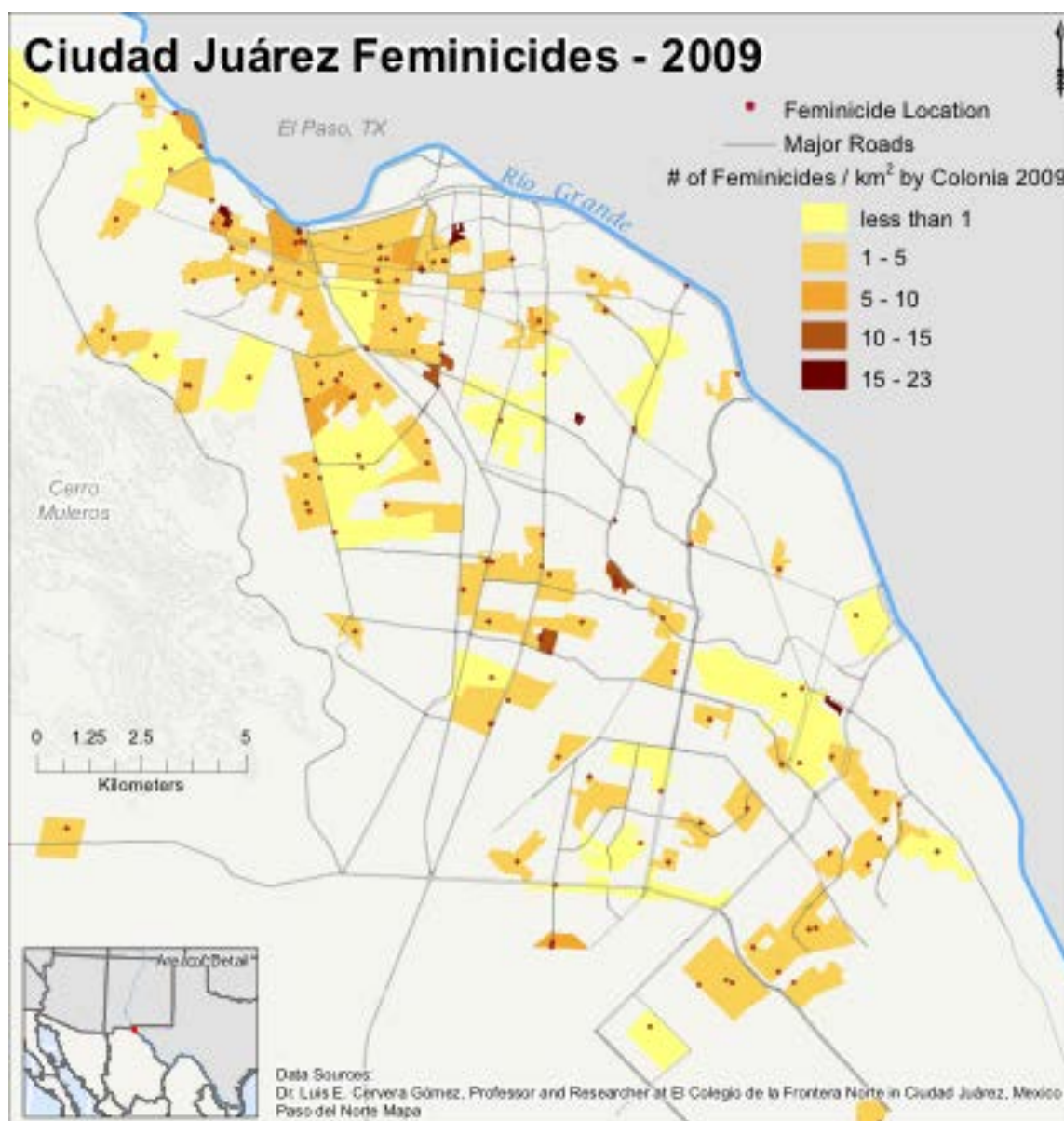


Figure 5.1. Jeff Levy © 2011. This map shows the spatial distribution of femicide for the year of 2009. Source: Cartographer Luis Cervera at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.

documentaries such as *Señorita extraviada* (Paula Flores, who was interviewed in the film, lives there).¹²⁵

In 2001, as I have mentioned previously, the bodies of eight women were found in the *Campo Algodonero*, a large abandoned cotton field on the eastern edge of the city

¹²⁵ *Tierra prometida* (2003), a short documentary by Ángel Estrada Soto, follows the lives of one family living in Lomas de Poleo, portraying them in their full humanity and fragility.

surrounded by bars, clubs, and hotels.¹²⁶ In the documentary films discussed in chapter one, these deserted lots and abandoned spaces often become sites of informal memory. In May of 2011 I traveled to the city to see what expressions of art and memory still existed or were being created to honor victims of femicide. Although my analysis of cultural production spans 1998-2008, femicide continued, and, as the map below highlights, was concentrated in poor areas of the city like Lomas de Poleo.

Julian Cardona served as my guide, narrating the landscape as we drove to each of the sites. Today, the Pan-American Highway runs through Lote Bravo, and the roadsides are lined with junkyards and the corpses of thousands upon thousands of rusted cars. In 1995, on the other hand, Lote Bravo was a huge desert tract, and land speculators were grabbing up bits and pieces.



Figure 5.2. Alice Driver © 2011. An informal dump at Lote Bravo near where bodies were discovered in 1996.

Today those land grabs have resulted in a hodge-podge of new *maquiladoras* that gleam in the late desert sun. Such land speculation is also responsible for the geography of

Ciudad Juárez, a decentralized city that is littered with abandoned lots and tracts of desert. *Maquiladora* workers and citizens are often forced to travel long distances to reach work, libraries, hospitals, and other services, and these trips are undertaken on public buses. Abandoned lots littered with trash surround the *maquiladoras* in Lote Bravo. As we drove by one of the deserted lots, Cardona mentioned that even at that very moment a body could be hidden there among the dust and scrub and trash (Personal Interview May 26, 2011). No crosses were visible from the road, but in the intervening years since the discovery of bodies, large tracts of desert had been converted into housing.

Lomas de Poleo has changed significantly since it appeared in *Señorita extraviada*. The entrance to Lomas de Poleo requires passing through a heavily armed checkpoint manned by soldiers. In 2008 President Calderón sent 2,500 Mexican army and federal police officers to Ciudad Juárez to occupy the city and control violence. Since that time, the federal army continues to occupy the city even though violence rose significantly after their arrival, and thousands of ethics violations, ranging from theft to rape and murder, have been attributed to members of the force. Cardona discussed the allegations of violence made against soldiers occupying the city:

Yo pienso que las organizaciones no entendieron lo que pasó, y ahora que lo entienden más, es muy tarde porque una de las cosas importantes era para mí documentar violaciones del ejército, pero documentar con nombres, direcciones, que estén físicamente localizables. Porque en alguna determinada tiempo eran físicamente localizables. Documentar es muy difícil, pero si tú no tuviste la idea de hacerlo, pues menos ahora, hay miles de casos. Así es muy difícil llevar, por ejemplo, a Calderón ante una corte internacional. (Personal Interview May 24, 2011)

After many bodies were discovered in Lomas de Poleo, politicians started investing money in paving some of the roads and providing electricity and water to citizens.

However, although the main road through the *colonia* is paved, the many tiny roads that

wind among the informal houses are made of sand, and are difficult to traverse without a four-wheel-drive vehicle. At a turn in the sandy road, near a water tower, we saw eight pink crosses, baking under the sun. Nearby stood a tiny cross made of blue ribbons representing a homicide victim.



Figure 5.3. Maya Goded © 2004. Goded took this photo in at Lomas de Poleo in 2004, and when I visited in May of 2011 the crosses were still up. Courtesy of Maya Goded.

The roads are also littered with garbage, clothes, flip-flops, remains of things. Cardona described, “[Lomas de Poleo] es surrealista. Los cuerpos de las chicas estaban por todo este camino dentro. Aquí te encontrabas familias enteras buscando cosas en la basura” (Personal Interview May 25, 2011). The desert path is scattered with things left behind, forgotten, and thrown away, reminders of the lives of others, markers of an absence.

At the site in the *Campo Algodonero* where there was once a memorial to eight victims of feminicide, there is now the Hotel Conquistador Inn. However, the hotel only takes up part of the *Campo Algodonero*, and is surrounded by a deserted lot filled with

dried grass and plastic bags. Far into the field and not visible from the highway are three pale pink crosses, their paint peeling in the heat. Only by hiking into the field can one catch a glimpse of the crosses.



Figure 5.4. Alice Driver © 2011. This photo shows one of the remaining crosses in the *Campo Algodonero*. It is not visible from the road.

When the bodies of eight women were found in the *Campo Algodonero* in 2001, victims of femicide finally gained international attention. While walking through the *Campo Algodonero* in 2011 Cardona discussed how “Nadie estaba haciendo caso de los homicidios de mujeres en 1993, ni en 1994, ni en 1995, ni en 1996, ni en 1997, ni en 1998 sino ya hasta que fue este campo. Hizo que detonara [la situación]” (Peronal Interview May 24, 2011). In a nearby lot where the government is supposed to be constructing a monument to victims of femicide, there is nothing, no signs of plans or construction.



Figure 5.5. Alice Driver © 2011. These two flyers show the faces of missing women. They were many similar flyers posted in different locations around the Plaza de Armas in the historic city center.



Figure 5.6. Alice Driver © 2011. This flyer with the photo of a missing girl was posted in El Mariscal on the door of a gentlemen's club.

Thousands of young women and girls pass through the city center on their way to *maquiladoras*, to school, and to shop. The heart of the city at the Plaza de Armas is covered in flyers depicting the faces of young girls and women. Their black-and-white faces decorate telephone poles, light posts, and the doors of abandoned buildings. The flyers are sometimes ripped, sometimes covered in tape, sometimes plastered in such profusion that the same female face covers the length of an entire telephone pole.

El Mariscal, the red-light district near the city center, was recently razed in an effort to remove prostitutes and drug users from the city center. The area is now filled with demolished and abandoned buildings, closed bars, and graffiti. It is rumored that Carlos Slim, the richest man in the world, has bought the land and plans to develop it. In El Mariscal one can find street art and graffiti representing the presence of feminist collectives in the anti-femicide movement. *Kolectiva Fronteriza*, a group of female artists, has created a visual presence in the city with graffiti demanding justice for victims of femicide. In their anonymous “Manifiesto de la Kolectiva Fronteriza”, the group describes, “La KF somos un grupo de mujeres jóvenes (la mayoría), estudiantes, trabajadoras, profesionistas, artistas, amas de casa, mamás y activistas que aprovechando nuestras ideas, propuestas y habilidades colectivas nos organizamos para desarrollar en conjunto una propuesta creativa y novedosa de resistencia al sistema patriarcal y capitalista de nuestra frontera.” Their design in El Mariscal employs the pink and black of crosses seen around the city.



Figure 5.7. Alice Driver © 2011. This graffiti created by the *Kolektiva Fronteriza* on a wall in El Mariscal demands justice for femicide victims.

In its manifesto, the *Kolektiva Fronteriza* defines its goals in revolutionary terms. They protest against the military occupation of the city, the treatment of women by the *maquiladora* industry, the treatment of domestic workers, capitalism, and femicide.

The manifesto states:

Ante una realidad que no se puede negar, porque quienes vivimos aquí la vemos, la olemos, la sentimos diariamente en las calles, creemos que las mujeres jóvenes somos una fuerza revolucionaria y que con nuestras distintas experiencias, miradas, nuestras formas de organización y expresiones políticas, artísticas y culturales vamos por ahí transformando y reivindicando lo que somos y lo que queremos ser y lograr desde, con y para las mujeres. (“Manifesto de la Kolektiva Fronteriza”)

These geographies represent physical and economic displacement, bodies pushed to the peripheries and excluded from the machinery of citizenship. To reach a school, hospital, park, or library, citizens in the communities near Lomas de Poleo, Lote Bravo, and the *Campo Algodonero* often have to travel significant distances.¹²⁷ According to Cardona, exclusion “se materializa en la geografía. Los pobres o los excluidos de la sociedad

¹²⁷ Luis Cervera is currently mapping this phenomenon, showing how the residents of communities with the most femicides and homicides are also the most under-served in terms of government services (schools, parks, hospitals).

terminan en un sitio como esto [Lomas de Poleo] o tienen que cruzarlo” (Personal Interview May 25, 2011). For Cardona, this represents economic discrimination:

Es la discriminación que hay ahora a partir no de tu raza pero a partir de qué tienes. ¿Tú qué tienes para hacer en la vida? Yo puedo cruzar legalmente a Estados Unidos con una visa o alguien que tiene un medio de andarse en la vida. Pero si no tienes eres excluido por el sistema ya sea que eres inmigrante o campesino, tú tienes que caminar y tus huellas van a ser similares a estas huellas. Tu cuerpo sigue siendo desechable y es un cuerpo que está expuesto a morir en estas circunstancias. Hay un eco en los tiraderos de los inmigrantes. Su exclusión se materializa en estos tipos de terrenos geográficos, que son en abandono, son los basureros. Tienes un montón de huellas, tienes un montón de presencias. Ves que es un lugar concurrido, pero sólo con restos. (Personal Interview May 25, 2011)

Cardona points to a larger set of economic issues related to globalization and capitalism, issues which reflect the true nature of citizenship. Citizenship is not universal: it is for those who can afford a certain standard of life and measure of protection.

FEMINICIDE AND POVERTY: A CARTOGRAPHY

Monárrez Fragoso and cartographer Luis Cervera work together to map patterns of economic exclusion based on femicide data. Their research highlights the importance of addressing economic inequalities and the correlations between socio-economic status and femicide. National economic indicators often tell a misleading story about Ciudad Juárez, given the high employment numbers in the region and the easy access to cheap used goods from the United States. Cervera points out that “la pobreza en Juárez no es igual que la pobreza en Chihuahua o en Chiapas. Porque el indicador de pobreza, si lo haces en Ciudad Juárez, todo el mundo es rico. Pues si tienes un empleo [eres rico] , todo el mundo trabaja en la maquila o por allá” (Personal Interview). In addition to higher employment rates, citizens of the city also have access to cheap goods on the black market. Cervera observed, “¿Tienes un refrigerador en la

casa? Aquí en la frontera cualquiera puede tener refrigerador. Puedes comprar un refrigerador usado americano del mercado informal en 20 dólares, 30 dólares, una lavadora, una secadora. Entonces la gente que tiene todos esos bienes y los indicadores nacionales vienen así. No te explican la pobreza.” While mapping patterns related to femicide, Cervera noticed a lack of certain basic services in the areas where victims lived: “Es la falta de equipamiento urbana: hospitales, escuelas secundarias, escuelas preparatorias, la falta de pavimentación.” Cervera thus situates the femicide debate within a larger economic context, linking the demand for justice to a need for investment in infrastructure in under-served areas.

Using statistics gathered by Monárrez Fragoso, Cervera created maps showing where the bodies of victims were found (predominantly in abandoned lots) and where the victims lived (predominantly from the peripheries and in sectors of informal housing). Cervera remarked that, “Lo hicimos por residencia y por lugar del escenario donde se encontró el cuerpo. Es importante separarlo porque por residencia puedes asociar los datos con el perfil de la víctima, con datos económicos, con equipamiento urbano” (Personal Interview). In a conversation at her office at El Colegio de la Frontera del Norte, Monárrez Fragoso discussed femicide and justice. She too emphasized the role of economic equality in the situation:

Una justicia correctiva tiene que ver con otro elementos, la desigual inequitativa distribución de la riqueza social en la ciudad, y además la justicia igualitaria que no es lo mismo ser hombre que ser mujer y como todos estos elementos se conectan más allá de este ranchito o esta villa que es Ciudad Juárez con los elementos internacionales que están aquí presentes en la ciudad. (Personal Interview)

There is resistance on a local and national level to addressing issues of economic injustice. For example, why pay thousands of soldiers to occupy a city rather than fund new

schools, parks, housing, and educational programs in areas that obviously lack those services? Given the lack of action on a political level, local citizens and organizations continue to develop strategies to reduce violence and promote justice.

ART AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Committee of Visual Resistance, a student-based art group of the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez organized by Kerry Doyle, works with independent art collectives to organize visual resistance at local marches for justice and women's rights. Doyle, the Assistant Director of the Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for Visual Arts at the University of Texas at El Paso, has worked for more than a decade as an activist in Ciudad Juárez and in El Paso, and lived in Lomas de Poleo for a decade while working with the Annunciation House, a non-profit organization dedicated to working on border issues. During my visit, the group met on May 25th, 2011 to plan a march for peace and justice in June and to discuss the importance of art in activism. This march was planned to coincide with Mexican poet Javier Sicilia's arrival in Ciudad Juárez for the National March of Peace. Sicilia mobilized a national movement for peace after his son was assassinated in March of 2011.¹²⁸ The march would pass through Ciudad Juárez on June 10, 2011, and many local organizations, including the Committee of Visual Resistance, participated.

Doyle began the meeting for the Committee of Visual Resistance by discussing how "Tenemos que empezar a tomar muy en serio cual es la tarea del artista en la cultura

¹²⁸ For more information on the march organized by Sicilia, refer to "El poeta Sicilia lidera una marcha nacional por la paz, inédita en México" (2011) by Óscar Guadarrama.

ahora.” Doyle described how art plays a central role in society and provides a space to promote reflection and change. She explained to the gathered artists,

Es la única vez que voy a mencionar el marxismo, pero Marx tiene una idea de una brecha en la sociedad, de un lugar, un espacio entre todas las estructuras que tenemos en la vida. Tenemos las estructuras del trabajo, de la escuela, de las familias, es que es muy difícil encontrar espacios que no van dentro de estas estructuras. Hay un filósofo francés que escribe mucho sobre el arte que dice que el rol que tiene en la sociedad es dar esta brecha. En este momento el arte empieza a abrir otro espacio.

Doyle then invited each of the artists to speak about the role of art in promoting social justice. Many of the collectives who participated in the meeting had prior experience creating art for past marches.

The artists discussed the need for art to move beyond beauty, beyond being visually stimulating. Groups discussed finding a symbol for the movement, creating graffiti and stickers, and the potential for performance and music to become part of the march. In response to a discussion about creating a symbol for the movement, musician Jorge Barimala brought up the importance of memory: “Yo estoy de acuerdo con esa idea simbólica de crear una memoria colectiva sobre las víctimas desde los homicidios hasta el feminicidio actual. Es muy importante mantener vigente la memoria de las víctimas.” Doyle, providing an example of artistic symbols, discussed Argentinean artist Fernando Traverso and his use of the bicycle to represent the disappeared and missing from Argentina’s Dirty War. Traverso began his project by spray-painting 350 images of bicycles throughout his hometown of Rosario, Argentina. He continued to travel internationally and discuss his project, and today the symbol is recognizable and present in cities around the world, including El Paso and Ciudad Juárez.



Figure 5.8. Stanley and Gerald Center for the Visual Arts © 2009. Participants in the Traverso workshops were encouraged to take a photo of the banner in a place on the border that evoked loss, disappearance, or injustice.

In May of 2009 when Traverso held a workshop in Ciudad Juárez, Manuel Arroyo Galván, a professor at the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, was shot in the head six times while driving to the bridge to cross into El Paso. Students, lacking a symbol to express their anger, marched in the streets carrying posters with the symbol of the bicycle to protest Arroyo Galván's death. Although the symbol of the bicycle was not directly related to violence in Ciudad Juárez, its use signaled the real need to develop a symbol representative of local issues.

Filmmaker Ángel Estrada Soto attended the May 2011 meeting, and discussed the difference between art and political expression and the relationship between the two: “El arte tiene una fuerza contundente que no tienen otras formas de expresión como la misma expresión política por sí sola.” Estrada also brought up another important point about the difficulty of organizing marches: how can one keep citizens involved in a city that has experienced so many tragedies in recent years? He explained, “En Juárez tenemos una historia de calamidades bastante larga, y la gente se cansa. Es muy importante que la

gente se mantenga. ¿Nosotros mismos dentro de dos años tendremos los ánimos [para] marchar?” Estrada Soto planted the idea that art could serve as a motivation to continue working for peace and justice and to remain committed despite the many difficulties. In recent years many femicide activists have been killed, pointing to the danger of protesting and the lack of security in the city. For example, activist Norma Andrade was shot five times on December 2, 2011. Although Andrade survived the attack, six other prominent activists have been killed in the past several years. Cardona, discussing the difficulty of protesting, made a connection between threats received by activists and the public officials associated with crime: “Es más difícil protestar en general para toda la gente. Es muy probable que el gobierno sea un gobierno represor. Pero es muy probable también que partes del gobierno que están asociadas con el crimen pueden estar atrás de las amenazas” (Personal Interview May 24, 2011). In recent years many prominent anti-femicide activists have been either killed or threatened. Cardona noted, “Lo que me parece nuevo es que las madres de víctimas ahora son víctimas. Marisela Ortiz se fue a El Paso, a Marisela [Escobedo] la mataron” (Personal Interview May 24, 2011). In addition, the insecurity in the city means that city streets are generally deserted after sunset. For example, *El grito*, a public celebration that traditionally signals the end of Mexican Independence Day, is an event celebrated in the central square in Ciudad Juárez. Normally thousands of citizens fill the square to watch the mayor ring a bell marking the start of *El grito*. However, in 2010, due to security concerns, the military surrounded the square to prevent citizens from entering, and the mayor rang the bell alone in front of television cameras. Cardona captured the moment in a photo titled “Empty ‘Grito’ in

Juárez.” The security situation makes any kind of public gathering, march, or protest difficult.

In order to combat “esta idea de que aquí no hemos hecho nada” Estrada Soto proposed to film the June 2011 march, make a short documentary, and upload it to YouTube: “A mí me gusta documentar para dar un seguimiento a eso, para que en otros lugares se pueda ver qué es lo que está sucediendo para que quienes no fueron a las marchas lo vean para que sí fueron tengan como elementos para la reflexión de lo que sucedió, de lo que se pudo hacer, de lo que no se hizo.” Addressing the central issue of memory, Doyle proposed a collective project in which artists would invite community members and marchers to decorate two sides of a block with visual reminders of victims of homicide and feminicide. The artists planned to decorate the remaining sides of the block and then work together to construct a wall of memory from the blocks.

THE TESTIMONY OF MOTHERS

When I wrote a letter to Paula Flores, the mother of María Sagrario who was a feminicide victim in 1998, I also sent a donation to the non-profit *Fundación María Sagrario*. I was inspired by the work Flores was doing on a local level, and hoped to contribute to her work educating children in Lomas de Poleo. However, shortly after I sent the donation, I received an email from Flores stating that, due to threats against herself and her family, she was fleeing Ciudad Juárez and suspending the activities of the foundation.

When I went to Ciudad Juárez in 2011, I heard that Flores had returned to the city. I tried to contact her in hopes of conducting an interview. However, in my research I was

always hypersensitive about contacting the mothers of victims since I had heard over and over about the media making them cry or retell their stories. I also did not want Flores to feel that I thought my donation to her foundation gave me access to her testimony. It was a delicate situation, and when Flores did not respond to my attempts to meet, I did not pursue the situation further.¹²⁹ I tell this story to explain the lack of testimony by mothers. It was easier for me to access academic and intellectual circles, and to pester artists and writers for interviews, than to contact mothers of victims. I felt as if I had already accessed their testimony through cultural production given that many of the mothers told the same stories, almost word for word, in different works of cultural production.

WINGS TO FLY: INTERIOR GEOGRAPHIES

Graffiti is an ephemeral art, and walls are easily painted over or torn down. The red-light district of Ciudad Juárez, El Mariscal, has been mostly demolished. However, on the walls that remain, anti-femicide and anti-government graffiti bloom like so many colorful desert flowers. On a large white wall across the street from demolished buildings are two graffiti installations, side by side. One proclaims the need for justice for femicide victims, and the other depicts a series of women with wings and asks: “Feet, what do I need them for if I have wings to fly?” This quote is taken from the journals of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. The graffiti expresses the relationship between female empowerment, art, and creativity. Mothers, father, sisters, activists, artists,

¹²⁹ On November 16, 2011 I met Flores at a screening of the documentary *La carta*, which recounts the story of her life and her experiences in Ciudad Juárez. I told her, “I’ve never met you, but I dedicated my dissertation to you.”

filmmakers, writers, fathers, and children in Ciudad Juárez have dreamed and worked for a more fair and just society in which respect for women is an essential narrative.



Figure 5.9. Alice Driver © 2011. This graffiti in El Mariscal features a quote by Frida Kahlo.

Even if the wall is torn down (and I imagine that it will be), I will carry this geography with me just as many of the residents of Ciudad Juárez carry with them an interior geography of memory. The crosses may disappear or be torn down, and the red-light district may be remade by Carlos Slim, but a generation of remembers exists to keep alive memories of femicide victims. Half a million citizens have already fled Ciudad Juárez to escape the ever-present violence, but memory has taken flight with them, to be carried forth and implanted in new geographies.

CULTURAL PRODUCTION, EPHEMERAL ART, AND THE FUTURE OF FEMINICIDE MEMORY

How victims of femicide are remembered is influenced by the quality and diffusion of cultural production. *Performing the Border* (1999), the first documentary

about feminicide, brought attention to a diverse group of women working for equality for workers in maquiladoras and in the sex industry. Biemann explored the connection between the space of the city – informal housing settlements, deserted spaces, *maquiladoras* built on the edge of the city – and violence against women. She laid the foundations for later work, like that of Lourdes Portillo in *Señorita extraviada*. Documentaries like *Señorita extraviada* (2001), and *La batalla de las cruces* (2005) demonstrate that ephemeral art like the memorials and graffiti produced by families of victims can have an impact outside of the local community. Although such projects are informal and not supported by the government, the tenacity of the families in their efforts to overcome resistance to memorialize their daughters has galvanized action on the part of organizations such as Amnesty International to investigate feminicide.

Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future (1998) was written for a United States audience as a way to introduce them to their own complicity in the problems of Ciudad Juárez. The photo essay, with its focus on the economic and physical violence caused by NAFTA, foretold much of the extreme violence that would occur in the next decade. However, the essay's reliance on overused stereotypes of whores and prostitutes detracted from the important work of introducing a U.S. audience to the problem of feminicide. During my interview with Bowden he concluded, in his distinctly deep gravelly voice, that he inadvertently introduced an international audience to feminicide ("Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence" 375). And he did. Even though he doesn't use the term *feminicide*, he did bring the murder and rape of women in Ciudad Juárez to the attention of an international audience. On a personal level, Charles Bowden influenced my work by introducing me to photographer Julián Cardona and librarian

Molly Molloy. Cardona's experience living and working in Ciudad Juárez as a photographer and Molloy's obsessive work keeping track of statistics on death in Ciudad Juárez contributed to my understanding of femicide and to the formation of my own work of cultural production.

Huesos en el desierto (2002), like many of the works of cultural production included in my analysis, demonstrates the level of personal involvement required on the part of many cultural producers to investigate femicide. González Rodríguez, as he documents in *Huesos en el desierto*, was abducted and severely beaten during the process of investigating femicide. He was warned not to continue his investigations. However, in his quest to ensure that the memory of victims and an understanding of the crimes be understood, he continued to work on *Huesos en el desierto*. His work on femicide is so well regarded in Mexico that he eventually came to the attention of Roberto Bolaño and influenced the writing of *2666* (2004), especially "La parte de los crímenes." Bolaño uses femicide as a metaphor for evil and explores the way in which history, in different countries and during different time periods, seems to repeat itself. Santa Teresa, the Ciudad Juárez of Bolaño's imagination, is a hellish landscape littered with dead, raped female bodies and corrupt policemen. He tracks a historic cycle of genocide, war, and femicide. Bolaño reminds readers of the human capacity to forget, over and over again. *Huesos en el desierto* takes up the difficult task of creating memories in a society that wants to forget and move on.

Frontera 450+ is an exhibition that demonstrates the difficulty of representing femicide and of creating art to increase awareness and activism. While the dead female body may seem the most meaningful and emotional way to bring attention to victims of

femicide, a more nuanced representation is needed to move beyond the discussion of the sexualized female body. In *Precarious Life* Judith Butler examines what can be learned from the “geopolitical distribution of corporeal vulnerability” (29). The dead bodies of women in Ciudad Juárez have been used for political and geographical discussions that have, to a great extent, tried to limit the participation of women in public space. Future cultural production must continue to move beyond trauma discourse, beyond crying mothers, beyond sexualized bodies in order to address the matrix of gender inequalities that continue to contribute to femicide.

My hope is to continue to open up a discussion about representations of femicide, because cultural production on the topic has significance not only for Ciudad Juárez, but also for other cities and countries experiencing a rise in femicide. For example, as Hilda Morales Trujillo discusses in the article “Femicide and Sexual Violence in Guatemala,” the crime of femicide in Latin America is widespread:

In the course of seven years, about three thousand women have been murdered in Guatemala, and no one has been identified as responsible in the majority of the cases. Thus, these crimes against women remain in total impunity. The problem is similar to that in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, which is better known internationally, and increases in violent deaths of women are also coming to light in other Latin American countries, including Costa Rica, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, and Peru. (127)

Although much of mainstream cultural production continues to be complicit in a cultural and institutional norms that limit the way women inhabit public space, the cultural production I have analyzed provides an example of the ways in which activists, artists, writers, filmmakers, academics, cartographers, and other citizens create memory in public space. Representations of femicide must move beyond the sensational nature of the violence, beyond the naked corpses of women, beyond a discourse that blames victims

for being in public space at the wrong time or in the wrong place. In the interstices of official discourse on femicide, individuals continue to work, to create memorials, and to mark the geography of the city with ephemeral art that pays tribute to the lives of victims of femicide. These minor glories – the wooden crosses made by family members of victims, the graffiti produced by art collectives, the marches organized by activists – reveal the true nature of the geography of memory in Ciudad Juárez.

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Espejo retrovisor. Dir. Héctor Molinar. Perf. Manuel Ojeda, Azela Robinson, and Géraldine Bazán. Cine Producciones Molinar, 2002.

Femicidio, hecho en México. Dir. Vanessa Bauche. Perf. Norma Andrade and Sergio González Rodríguez. Justicia con Equidad, 2003.

Hecho en Juárez. Dir. Arturo Chacon. S.C.B. Productions, 2003

Juárez: desierto de esperanza. Dir. Cristina Michaus. Tenzin, 2002.

Juárez, Mexico. Dir. James Cahill. Perf. James Cahill, Roberto Sánchez, and Carmen Perez. Dodging Bullets, 2005.

Juárez Mothers Fight Femicide. Dir. Zulma Aguilar. Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa, 2005.

Juárez: Stages of Fear. Dir. César Alejandro. Perf. Chris Penn, César Alejandro, and María Rebeca. Stages of Fear Joint Venture, 2005.

Juárez: The City Where Women Are Disposable. Dir. Alex Flores. Las Perlas del Mar, 2007.

Las Madres: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Dir. Lourdes Portillo and Susana Blaustein Muñoz. First Run Features, 1985.

Las muertas de Juárez. Dir. Enrique Murillo. Perf. Claudia Bernal, Carlos Cardán, and Eleazar García Jr. Laguna Productions, 2002.

Ni una más. Dir. Alejandra Sánchez. FOPROCINE/ IMCINE. 2001.

On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez. Dir. Steev Hise. Detrital Films, 2006.

Performing the Border. Dir. Ursula Biemann. Women Make Movies, 1999.

Preguntas sin respuestas: los asesinatos y desapariciones de Ciudad Juárez. Dir. Rafael Montero. IMCINE, 2005.

Señorita extraviada. Dir. Lourdes Portillo. Women Make Movies, 2001.

Silencio en Juárez. Dir. Michela Giorelli. Discovery Channel, 2009.

Tierra prometida. Dir. Ángel Estrada Soto. Malavida Films, 2003.

El traspatio. Dir. Carlos Carrera. Perf. Ana de la Reguera, Jimmy Smits, and Amorita Rasgado. Tardan/Berman, 2009.

The Virgin of Juárez. Dir. Kevin James Dobson. Perf. Minnie Driver, Esai Morales, and Ana Mercedes. Las Mujeres LLC, 2006.

VITA

Alice Laurel Driver

Born July 23, 1981 in Oark, Arkansas

EDUCATION

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 2011 | Ph.D. in Hispanic Studies |
| 2008 | M.A. in Hispanic Studies, University of Kentucky |
| 2008 | Middlebury College Summer Spanish School in Guadalajara, Mexico |
| 2005-06 | University of Kentucky/University of Valladolid Exchange Program |
| 2003 | B.A. in Spanish and B.A. in English, Berea College |

PUBLICATIONS

Book Chapters

- “Ciudad Juárez as a Palimpsest: Searching for Ecotestimonios.” *Pushing the Boundaries of Latin American Testimony: Meta-morphoses and Migrations*. Eds. Louise Detweiler and Janis Breckenridge. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 181-200.
- “Of the Flesh: Graphic Images of Femicide in Ciudad Juárez.” *Restructuring Violence in the Spanish-Speaking World*. Eds. Jess Boersma and Christopher Dennis. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP. (Forthcoming).

Journal Articles

- “The Construction of National Identity in Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo’s *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*.” *Divergencias: Revista de Estudios Lingüísticos y Literarios* 7.2 (2009): 3-12.
- “*Locura y muerte de Nadie*: El héroe en busca de un panóptico.” *Especulo* 43 (2009): <http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero43/heroepan.html>
- “La función del erotismo en *El acoso* de Alejo Carpentier y *Paradiso* de José Lezama Lima.” *El Cid* 21 (2009): 27-39.
- “La lealtad: In the Absence of.” *Romance Quarterly* 54.1 (2007): 67-71.

Interviews

“Representations of Femicide in Ciudad Juárez in *Performing the Border*: An Interview with Ursula Biemann.” Forthcoming in *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* in 2012.

“Femicide and the Disintegration of the Family Fabric in Ciudad Juárez: An Interview with Lourdes Portillo.” Forthcoming in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 30 (2012).

“Femicide and the Aesthetics of Violence in Juárez: *The Laboratory of Our Future*: An Interview with Charles Bowden.” *Hispanic Research Journal* 12.4 (2011): 369-81.

Driver, Alice and Joshua Jennings Tweddell. “Cinematic Realism and the Restoration of Everyday Life: An Interview with Víctor Gaviria.” *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 12 (2008): 233-50.

Book and Film Reviews

Film review of *13 Pueblos en defensa del agua, el aire y la tierra*. *Chasqui: Revista de Literatura Latinoamericana* 38.1 (2009): 241-44.

Textbook Review of *Puentes: Spanish for Intensive and High-Beginner Courses*. *Latin American Journal of Content and Language Integrated Learning* 2.1 (2009): 55-57.

Book Review of *Cruelty and Utopia: Cities and Landscapes of Latin America*. *Hispania* (2008) 91.4: 833-35.

Radio

“¿Qué significa ser mujer?” *Tales from the South*. National Public Radio. KUAR, Little Rock, 29 Sept. 2011.

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

2011	Latin American Studies Research Grant
2010	Woman’s Club Endowed Fellowship, University of Kentucky
2010	Bluegrass Indo-American Civic Society Memorial Scholarship
2010	Sigma Delta Pi Research Grant

2008 Full Scholarship to Middlebury Spanish Language School in Guadalajara, Mexico

2008 Robert Flaherty Film Seminar Student Fellowship

ACADEMIC HONORS

2011 Keller Award for Outstanding Research, Department of Hispanic Studies, University of Kentucky

2003 Outstanding Student in the Humanities, Berea College

2003 Paul Vernon Kreider, Jr. Award for Best Essay, Berea College

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2010 “Ciudad Juárez as a Palimpsest: Searching for Traces of Memorable Lives.” Latin American Studies Association, Toronto, Canada

2010 “Geographies of Power: Representations of Marginalization in Mexico, Chile, and Colombia.” Fifth International Conference on Film and Theory Analysis, Morelia, Mexico

2009 “Girando fuera de control: La ciudad globalizada en *Señorita extraviada*.” Latin American Studies Association, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

2008 “La estética de la dignidad en *13 pueblos en defensa del agua, el aire y la tierra*.” Midwest Association for Latin American Studies, San Juan, Puerto Rico

ACADEMIC SERVICE

2010-11 Co-Founder and Managing Editor of the online academic journal *Nomenclatura: aproximaciones a los estudios hispánicos*.
<http://uknowledge.uky.edu/naeh/>

2009-11 Vice President, Sigma Delta Pi National Honor Society

2008-09 Treasurer, Hispanic Studies Graduate Student Organization

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2005-2010 Instructor of Spanish, University of Kentucky
SPA 101: Beginning Spanish. Spring 2005
SPA 101: Beginning Spanish. Summer 2005
SPA 103: Spanish for High Beginners. Fall 2007

SPA 101: Beginning Spanish. Spring 2008
SPA 201: Intermediate Spanish I. Fall 2008
SPA 201: Intermediate Spanish I. Fall 2009
SPA 202: Intermediate Spanish II. Spring 2010
SPA 211: Spanish Conversation. Fall 2010

LANGUAGES

Near native – Spanish

Reading knowledge – Portuguese, French, Latin