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> Nowadays, we know too much, and yet we continue to know nothing. In the process of learning; reading; researching; raising consciousness; signing petitions; writing stories, poetry, and music; making art; organizing conferences; and collecting anthologies, there are only two things that have changed. The number of victims continues to grow. And now the Juárez femicides have become a legend.
>
> —Alicia Gaspar de Alba & Georgina Guzmán, *Making a Killing* (2010)

New Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Feminicide at the U.S.-Mexico Border

For more than two decades now, Gloria Anzaldúa's famed metaphor for the U.S.-Mexican border as an open wound *where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds* has been imposing itself in shockingly literal manifestations of increasing intensity. The case of Ciudad Juárez, plagued by a gruesome epidemic of extreme gender violence since at least 1993, stands out. When at his presidential inauguration in December 2006, Felipe Calderón declared open warfare against Mexico's transnationally operating drug cartels, the city's international infamy for its "femicides" was already firmly established. [1] His subsequent deployment of the army followed by the federal police force triggered an unprecedented escalation of violence that turned the border metropolis into the world's statistical murder capital for three consecutive years (2009-11). Altogether Juárez accounted for over 10,000 of the at least 60,000 casualties that "Calderon's War" claimed nationwide during his administration. Add thousands of never investigated disappearances and tens of thousands of local residents who abandoned their homes, fleeing bloodshed and economic downturn, plus a level of criminal impunity approaching a hundred percent (not least exonerating the numerous blatant human rights violations committed by the federal forces [Human Rights Watch]) to complete a dire panorama of a hemorrhaging community.

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Faced with the dramatic upsurge of violence in Juárez, scholars introduced the term *juvenicidio,* designating the killing of the young, and increasingly deploy postcolonial theories to conceptualize what many regard as a de facto war against the underclass merely masquerading as military operations against sophisticated crime organizations (Wright "Necropolitics"). [2] But whatever the rationale behind the metastasizing mayhem of late, it effectively obscured the insidious continuation of violence against women to the larger public. With the homicidal violence finally in decline since 2012 (Figuera), the dust now settles on a traumatized and fundamentally transmuted urban setting, one that urgently demands—once again—our clear-eyed critical attention.

Why then a continued focus on gender violence against female victims in a contemporary context where predominantly young men and boys are being "killed like flies," as one critic put it (González Rodríguez, qt. in Driver)? Indeed, both sincere and disingenuous voices who question the justification of the term, the study and even the very reality of feminicide have regained purchase, pitting *relative* percentages of female murder victims, which dropped below the ten percent mark during the escalation of violence, against the record-breaking rise of male-on-male murder (Hooks); in absolute terms, of course, the number of female murder victims skyrocketed as well. It is also true that formerly neglected hotbeds of feminicidal violence have emerged to challenge Juárez' presumed preeminence when it comes to the killing of women: the state of Mexico, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas within Mexico, and Guatemala and El Salvador in Central America, all exhibit alarming proliferations of systemic violence against vulnerable female populations (Bejarano & Fregoso *Terrorizing*). If only Ciudad Juárez were as exceptional as some of the earlier studies might have implied!

Let us be clear, however; the *myth* that reemerging revisionists and number crunchers purport them to be, the Juárez feminicides are certainly not. [3] That we know and talk about them at all is to the credit of a vibrant activist movement that successfully politicized *las muertas de Juárez* against an initial discourse of silence and evasion. Women and girls continue to be exposed in the public and the private sphere to high risks of assault, abduction, and sexual violence in a climate of impunity. *Juarense* sociologist and contributor to this issue, Julia Monárrez Fragoso, who has been chronicling the feminicides at the border since they were first registered, updated the aggregate death toll of murdered women in the past two decades in Juárez to nearly 1,500 victims, more than doubling any established pre-2008 estimates (Monárrez Fragoso "Analysis"; González Rodríguez *Machine* 71-75). Today, as the city's putative return to normalcy is hailed in international news outlets such as the New York Times (Cave), local journalists and intellectuals, along with the still ubiquitous missing-person posters adorning walls and lampposts around the historic center, attest to the fact that, whereas slain female corpses indeed no longer turn up in erstwhile frequency, women and girls do continue to simply vanish at an alarming rate.

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There can be no doubt that the mass killing of young marginalized men at the border (and elsewhere [4]) merits keen attention and careful analysis, but in no way does this infer that *feminicide* as a concept had forfeited any of its pertinence. Utilizing one kind of violence in order to discredit and silence inquiry in another persistent phenomenon purports a rather false and dangerous dichotomy. The term *femicide* was theorized by Diana Russell and Gill Radford in 1992 and can be defined in the broadest of terms as the "killing of women for being women" (Monárrez Fragoso, "Serial" 9). The recent modification to *feminicide* constitutes, first of all, an adjusted re-translation from the Spanish *feminicidio*, for *femicidio* in Spanish simply denotes the homicide of a woman, irrespective of any gender dimensions. We favor the use of this new term—following Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, editors of the interdisciplinary anthology *Terrorizing Women*: *Feminicide in the Américas*—as it takes the constructed nature of gender as well as the dynamic relations of power between gender, sexuality, race, and class into account to thus "shift the analytic focus to how gender norms, inequities, and power relations increase women's vulnerabilities to violence" (Introduction 3-4). To reiterate the obvious, men are not killed for being men. They are, however, victimized under very much the same system of impunity that protects and enables the misogynist practice of feminicide. Anyone interested in probing into the conditions behind *juvenicidio* could do worse than consult the existing scholarship on feminicide and heed the lessons of the anti-feminicide movement in Ciudad Juárez. As Melissa Wright points out, the focus on feminicide has unlocked interconnections between violence, economy, and politics, and feminist perspectives remain indispensable to understand how gender is key for the distinct ways in which both feminicide victims and young male murder victims have been blamed for their own deaths by official discourses ("Necropolitics" 726). [5]

While the scholarship on feminicidal violence against subaltern women on the U.S.-Mexico border remains a shifting and contested terrain, what is beyond dispute is the remarkable wealth of cultural responses and knowledge production that has been accrued around the Juárez cases over the past twenty years. The myriad songs and poems, comics and graphic novels, articles and essays, book-length fiction and nonfiction accounts, feature films and documentaries, art exhibitions and installations, public gatherings and performances, well-intentioned to ill-conceived, dedicated to the victims and their families, creating awareness, empathy, outrage or merely voyeuristic titillation, have become too numerous to list with any claim to completeness. [6]

Meanwhile, scholars from both sides of the border have dedicated scores of studies on the causes of the violence, seeking to fill the epistemological vacuum left by a failing criminal justice system. Crossing disciplinary, discursive and geographical boundaries to enter into productive dialogues and political coalitions in their quest to diagnose and alleviate the intolerable situation, they gradually untangled an intricate web of interrelated socioeconomic, geopolitical, and cultural

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pathologies converging in Ciudad Juárez to facilitate the conditions behind the violence: a combination of a totalizing political and cultural disenfranchisement and hyper-exploitation of the subaltern border woman on the one hand and a pervasive system of criminal impunity for the perpetrators on the other. The result is a comprehensive, multi-layered, and steadily evolving corpus of scholarship that offers a host of overlapping, interconnected, and competing theories regarding the root causes of gendered violence, as well as proposed strategies addressing how best to counter them.

Early in the debate, a disproportionate focus on transnational economic forces popularized the so-called *maquiladora* narrative. Particularly U.S. critics emphasized the cataclysmic demographic, cultural, and socioeconomic shifts inflicted on the region by NAFTA. Some of these accounts displayed a lack of critical engagement with the local culture, communities, and institutions, and a problematic inclination towards sensationalism (Bowden, “While You,” *Laboratory*; Nathan). Cogent if at times constrictive correlations were drawn between feminicide and the feminization of unskilled labor in the export-processing plants along the border [7]; for instance, social geographer Melissa M. Wright exposed one of the more sophisticated links between the *maquila* industry and the murders in her deconstruction of the myth of the disposable third world woman. [8]

In November 2001, the discovery of eight raped, tortured, and murdered female bodies in an empty lot known as *Campo Algodonero*, uncharacteristically close to the city center, marked a new level of flagrancy for feminicidal violence in Ciudad Juárez. The disastrous handling of the so-called Cottonfield Murders became emblematic for the authorities' unacceptable incompetence and willful misconduct. Together with the production of the 2001 documentary *Señorita Extraviada/Missing Young Woman* by activist-filmmaker Lourdes Portillo, widely disseminated in human rights circles, and a damning report by Amnesty International titled "Intolerable Killings" (2003), the case became a powerful catalyst that galvanized international attention and helped a diverse transnational anti-feminicide movement gather momentum in the early-to-mid 2000s.

The result was a new proliferation of feminicide scholarship produced on both sides of the border that provided critical correctives and expansions of preceding accounts. Feminist scholars with close biographical and/or professional ties to the borderlands and local grassroots initiatives or NGOs led the way with an applied type of scholarship that operated with a passion and urgency openly driven by an activist impetus to achieve social justice (Julia Monárrez Fragoso, Alicia Schmidt Camacho, Cynthia Bejarano, Rosa-Linda Fregoso, Melissa M. Wright). Sociologists probed into subaltern subjectivities of those women most at risk (Schmidt Camacho “Body Counts”, “Ciudadana”) and rectified prevalent misconceptions about the victims, clarifying, for instance, tha the vast majority of targets were poor young migrants from the rural Mexican South, culturally

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uprooted and politically, socially and geographically marginalized in their new home while *maquiladora* workers per se only constituted up to a fourth of total feminicide victims: victims also typically included students, housewives, domestic servants, service industry employees, sex workers and drug traffickers (Monárrez Fragoso "Serial"). Political scientist Kathleen Staudt questioned the exclusive fixation on the dramatic serial kidnap-rape-and-torture murders by introducing pervasive domestic violence to the equation. [9] Feminist scholars also pondered the cultural forces of male backlash against women entering the workforce, and denounced media discourses that sensationalized the violence, objectified the bodies and colluded with the state in blaming the victims, thereby re-victimizing their families and discrediting grassroots justice movements (Staudt 49; Fregoso). Mexican voices, meanwhile, kept railing against the institutionalized system of absolute impunity, nurtured by rampant corruption throughout all levels of government (González Rodríguez *Huesos*; Monárrez Fragoso "Serial").

After the mid-2000 peak of activist momentum, the critical discourse kept diversifying, as it grappled with increasing frustrations and impasses experienced among anti-feminicide activists, who proved unable to make strides against institutional inertia and impervious criminal forces. [10] Scholarship reflected the rising sense of fatigue in the border communities and pushed, on the one hand, for new and more effective human rights frameworks [11], and on the other, shifted the focus from the epistemological impulse to identify and inhibit the forces primarily responsible for the perpetuation of the killings to critical interrogations of how the feminicides were being represented in public discourse. Differentiated (self-)evaluations of movement activism and acute discourse analyses of official, documentarian, academic, and artistic treatments of feminicide in multiple genres and media also led to a deeper reflexivity with regards to the ethics, politics, and inherent practical and discursive limitations of academia (Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán; Corona & Domínguez-Ruvalbaca; Driver). This new phase also coincided with European scholars taking notice and actively partaking in the debate for the first time (Messmer).

The more recent feminicide scholarship (including substantial contributions by several of the present collection's authors), thus readily acknowledges its own political shortcomings with regard to subaltern subjectivities, vulnerabilities and violence experienced in marginalized communities on the border, while nonetheless strengthening the resolve to find new ways to overcome their contradictions (Corona & Domínguez-Ruvalcaba 6-9). In addition to impassioned preambles that re-assert strong commitments to social justice, recent interdisciplinary anthologies—namely *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and la Frontera*, edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzman, *Terrorizing Women: Feminicides in the Américas*, edited by Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, and *Gender Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Media*

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Representations and Public Responses, edited by Ignacio Corona and Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba (all published in 2010), also prominently incorporate testimony. As the coeditors of the latter compilation emphasize the urgently needed "strategy for 'building bridges'" across the gaps that divide the academy from the community and the humanities from social sciences (7), so we, the co-editors of this special issue, hope to build a bridge of understanding by reaching across continents for a transatlantic connection around justice, activism and scholarship.

The contributors of this special issue draw on the aforementioned scholar-activist tradition of feminist and transborder scholarship. Our collection is unique in that it brings together scholars from different geocultural sites—Europe, the United States and Mexico—to raise awareness regarding the feminicides, thereby widening the sphere of coalition building. Several of the collected articles also venture to subtly shift the location of knowledge southward, unsettling the totalizing hegemony of Western European and Anglo-American epistemologies by turning to local witnesses, artists, and intellectuals from Mexico and other representatives of the Global South as jumping off points for critical reflection.

Acknowledging thusly the geopolitics of knowledge, we, the contributors, ask questions, such as: What are the experiences of those who have been most intimately touched by the violence and what knowledge have they acquired on the ground? What strategic interventions and coalitions have scholars and activists on the Northern side of the North-South divide as well as from transcontinental sites made to engage perspectives of the global South and what strategic interventions can they make to help shift the location of knowledge about the feminicides from the global epicenters of Europe and the Americas to the global South? How can scholars and activists and cultural workers situated in such geopolitical sites form linkages of knowledge production within contemporary cultural work as well as within social and cultural theory capable of disrupting not just the physical violence but also the configuration of knowledge hierarchies that underpin and exacerbate the violence?

While we are conceptually indebted to the already important body of cross-border scholarship on the feminicides, in particular, the aforementioned recent volumes, this issue nonetheless offers several other unique features that distinguish it from previously published works. The origin of the current issue provides an important context in which to consider the analytic of feminicide. This idea for this project grew out of two panels on feminicide, organized by the co-editors of the current issue and presented at the 2014 European Association for American Studies (EAAS) conference “America, Justice, Conflict, War” in The Hague, Netherlands. The panelists, the bulk of whom are also contributors to this issue, agreed that there was a need to make visible the continuous abuses and violation of rights, and to begin to make sense of such violence not only within a cross-border,

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hemispheric context, but also within a broader transatlantic context. The articles thus reflect a collective effort to evolve current understandings of the structures sustaining and reproducing the violence through an interrogation of representational schemas as well as state and academic discourses.

The cultural background, scholarly training, and political interests of the contributors span a wide range of fields encompassing the arts and social sciences, including visual cultural studies, human rights studies, American Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, Justice Studies, Latin American Studies, and Latin American History, approaches that in many cases intersect with or emerge out of the contributor's activism. They also originate from and/or teach in institutions representing Europe, Mexico and the United States.

One important area of critical inquiry in this issue is the critique of social ideologies and discourses. In his article, "The Historiography of Feminicide in Ciudad Juárez: What Numbers Don't Tell Us," Steven Volk retraces the historiography of the feminicides to determine the types of analytical intervention most appropriate for understanding and eliminating the crimes. In his comparison of feminist and empirical approaches as competing frames used within scholarly and journalistic discourses, he shows how two generations of scholarship on the violence in Juárez offer very different, even incompatible views on the violence. The first focuses attention on the creation of theories on feminicidal violence that allow for the comprehension of deeply contextualized social processes that in many ways overdetermine women's conversion into targets of violence. The second approach uses quantitative analysis, in particular, the use of statistics, to argue that women are not the exclusive or primary targets of violence. Volk concludes that while empirical approaches are helpful, they cannot take the place of feminist analysis, which provides us with motives, context and causes that reveal the explicit and more subtle and covert social processes linking feminicide to women's marginality.

The correlating concerns over how to advance new or more nuanced theoretical approaches that can help explain the formation and operations of state power that freely violate human rights as well as how to aid in the elaboration of new resistance practices capable of contesting evolving forms of state hegemony constitute another thematic emphasis in our collection.

In her essay, "El destino de la humanidad en tiempos inhumanos," Julia Monárrez Fragoso also offers an evolved theoretical understanding of the gendered state. She examines the ways in which governments have the power (biopolitics) to determine who lives or dies, which they exercise through regulatory techniques (necropolitics) that convert the population into killable subjects without juridical implications. Drawing on the theoretical work of Achille Mbembe, she explores a three-tiered operation that results in the expulsion of certain women (f*eminicidios*) and

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young people (*juvenicidios*) from humanity: the loss of bodies; the loss of place of origin or residence, resulting in the creation of spaces of death; and the loss of citizenship, resulting from the patriarchal state and its repressive regimen. She draws on the feminist scholarship of Rocío Silva Santisteban, Melissa Wright and Alice Driver in order to show how gender politics intersect with and inform necropolitics. This line of inquiry—a gendered necropolitics—is useful in producing a new critical vocabulary for understanding the impunity of the crimes and for foregrounding *feminicidio* and *juvenicidio* as the violation of the human right to life and citizenship.

Cynthia Bejarano's essay, "(Re)Living Feminicide through Social Control: the Regulation of Life and Bodies through Fear and (In)Formal Social Control," examines the hegemony of the Mexican state from the perspective of the temporal vantage point of the second decade of the 21st century. She argues that the hegemonic state has used the feminicides to implement a regime of gendered social control in Ciudad Juárez. The state has succeeded in regulating womens' bodies through the deployment of a rhetoric of fear that operates in tandem with formal and informal systems. Bejarano asserts that the rhetoric of fear naturalizes the gendered spatial divide of public and private so as to deprive women and girls of full citizenship, thereby exacerbating the already normalized sexualized and gendered violence. She further traces how regulating bodies falls into Richard Lawrence Millers' framework of the 'Chain of Destruction' (1996) which describes mass violence through five phases: identification, isolation, ostracism, confiscation, and annihilation.

A third area of critical inquiry entails the examination of linkages between feminicide, human rights and art. Several of the contributors interrogate the role that cultural producers play in producing narratives, rhetorical strategies and representational schemas that unwittingly contribute to the objectification and reification of women. Others analyze alternative strategies that cultural producers have developed for invoking feminicidal violence in their work in a manner that encourages the spectator's moral and epistemic agency as well as oppositional political action.

Tobias Jochum's "The Weight of Words, the Shock of Photos": Poetic Testimony and Elliptical Photography in Sergio González Rodriguez' *The Femicide Machine* (2012)," sets the stage for the critical discussion of the limitations and potential of representation for artists who seek to put their art to use as a resource for human rights activism. Jochum uses *The Femicide Machine* as a case study to argue that the ethical demands posed by extreme gender violence on the US-Mexico border as well as the analytical complexity required to pin down the causes challenge artists to transcend genre boundaries and seek out new means of representation. A vital question that he asks is: can representation respond adequately to human suffering, invoking in the spectator a greater capacity for empathy and political agency? Drawing from Susan Sontag and Jacques Rancière, Jochum argues in his analysis of the book's "Epilogue" that Gonzalez manages, through

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inventive use of testimony and illustration, to humanize a complex critical analysis of the Juárez feminicides while effectively circumventing sensationalism and titillation. Using text to visually replace photographs, González anticipates and plays off of the reader's (voyeuristic) interest in the image, but then, in denying visual access, encourages her to be self-reflexive about her own voyeuristic investments.

In her essay "'A New Landscape of the Possible': *400 Women*, Politics of Representation and Human Rights," Aishih Wehbe Herrera examines and assesses the role of art as mediator in the dissemination of human rights values and discourses, its power to raise awareness about violations of women's human rights and its function as a cultural and political mechanism that functions to convert spectators into duty-bearers. To address with specificity the complex nature of the intersections of art and activism, she analyzes *400 Women*, an art installation by London artist Tamsyn Challenger, in collaboration with families of the victims, artists and NGOs. Challenger's inspiration for the project emerged from the shame and discomfort she felt when Consuelo Valenzuela showed her a photo of her disappeared daughter, Julieta Marleng González Valenzuela. Drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière and Wendy Hesford, Wehbe Herrera examines the relationship between rights discourses and the politics of representation within art. She ultimately argues that against normative visual rhetorics encountered in artistic works that uncritically implement cosmopolitan and neoliberal power relations, the visual rhetorics and economy of Challenger's installation expose the unequal power relations that permeate economic and political globalization processes and instantiate an alternative visual economy that resists totality, homogenization and the (re)construction of hegemonic binaries.

In her essay, "Haptic Visuality in Lourdes Portillo's La *Señorita Extraviada*: Towards an Affective Activism," Laura Gillman analyzes the affective registers that Portillo uses to replace visual regimes of violence in her documentary La *Señorita Extraviada, Missing Young Woman*. Arguing that cinematic affect, in particular, haptic visuality, which she defines, following Laura Marks, as a tactile form of expression commonly used in the works of diasporic film makers of the global South for the purpose of developing an affective, inter-embodied contact between the filmic subject, the filmmaker and the spectator, disrupts the necropolitical discourses of feminicide. She further argues, through an in-depth analysis of several examples of haptic visuality in the documentary, that Portillo uses the affective register as an escape route from a colonial way of seeing, by involving the viewer's body as a site for knowledge and political action.

Alice Driver's essay, "Risks, Challenges and Ethics of Representing Feminicide: A Comparative Analysis of Sergio González Rodríguez' *Huesos en el desierto* and Roberto Bolaño 's *2666*," also concerns the problematic nature of available systems of representation of violence that compound

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exponentially the feminicidal violence visited upon the victims. Driver analyzes visual depictions of feminicide in *Huesos en el desierto* (2002) by Sergio González Rodríguez, and the posthumously published novel *2666* (2004) by Roberto Bolaño, arguing that while violence against women is made real in graphic and/or explicit descriptions of rape, strangulation, suffocation, and other forms of torture in these works, the authors have created a context in which such portrayals humanize the victims rather than sensationalize the stories of their deaths. González Rodríguez undermines sensationalism by connecting the bodies of victims with memories of their lives and deaths, converting his account into a vehicle of memory, including the hegemonic social forces that have contributed to the violence. In contrast, Bolaño analyzes the processes of anonymity surrounding the feminicides, which allows him to explore the depth and meaning of horror, without fetishizing a particular victim, or reproducing in Juárez what Driver calls, following Butler, "corporeal vulnerability." Driver critically explores whether and to what extent the author achieves such avoidance strategies.

In his essay, "The Maquila Complex: Reification, Disposability, and Resistance in *Maquilapolis: City of Factories,*" Edward Avila examines *Maquilapolis*, a film by Vicki Funari and Sergio de la Torre, showing how it is possible to adopt representational strategies capable of exposing the reification of female employees' labor in the *maquila* industry. The complex challenges of representing the intersecting social forces reproducing gendered violence in the Mexico and U.S. borderlands, Avila argues, result from the difficulty of avoiding the pitfalls of unwittingly subscribing to the default mode of reification, fetishism, and sensationalism within representation, which Avila views as the cultural worker's encounter with the "specter of reification." Yet Avila suggests that by engaging with processes of exploited labor, commodity fetishism, and social reification, as conceptualized in the work of Marx, *Maquilapolis* pushes beyond the limits of reification to offer the spectator a more complex representational approach. Indeed, the documentary interrogates the historically contingent character of reified identities, subjectivities, and social relations within the maquila complex. To demonstrate this more subtle approach, Avila analyzes the film's narrative strategies, including interpersonal video diary, the performative mode of narration, and symbolic appropriation. Each of these represents centrally the voices of women working in the assembly plants, ones that challenge hierarchical gendered and classed relations under maquiladora-led industrialization, and implementing what he calls, following Alicia Schmidt Camacho, a "contestation-in-struggle."

Looking forward to the future and beyond the confines of the borderlands, what the example of Ciudad Juárez offers us, then, is an exceptional model of how art, activism, and academia can coalesce over atrocities that have come to be theorized by feminicide scholars not as an epidemic of violence but as a human rights violation—the human right to state protection and to life itself.

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The aggregate activist response, the cultural texts dedicated to the dead women of Juárez, and the innovative, politically engaged scholarship that reaches across disciplinary as well as national boundaries is what truly renders this case unique. The lessons of the anti-feminicide movement and the insights gleaned by research and scholarship make valid claims far surpassing the confines of *las muertas de Juárez*, ones applicable to other loci of intense gender violence in the region, in the hemisphere and around the globe, and instrumental for an understanding of the closely related and no-less intricate phenomenon of *juvenicidio* against young, poor women and men in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

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Endnotes

[1] A definition of the terms, including a critical distinction between the earlier established femicide vs. the more recent feminicide which we endorse, follows below. As a still-contested concept, the term will also be explicitly addressed in several of the compiled articles that make up this special issue.

[2] Giorgio Agamben's theory of 'bare life' has gained legitimacy in designating the high-risk *colonias* around Juárez as "absolute biopolitical spaces" (González Rodríguez *Machine*, 31), as has Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics.

[3] In fact, conversations indicate that feminicide is now such a loaded term in the current climate in Juárez that its affirmation or rejection has become a *Gretchenfrage* of sorts for local activists and academics. See Steven Volk's contributing article below for a thorough discussion of the issue.

[4] The case of 43 disappeared student teachers (plus six who were murdered on the spot) in Iguala, Guerrero on September 26, 2014, followed by the (apparently unrelated) discovery of several mass graves in the vicinity, serve as a stark reminder that Mexico is still immersed in a severe crisis of governance, regardless of the new political rhetoric. The insolent collusion between municipal police and cartel *sicarios* in the planning and execution of the crime attests to the inextricable entanglement between state and organized crime that has become normalized in parts of the country (Archibold). Speaking of impunity or "state-sanctioned terror" (as Rosa-Linda Fregoso did in the context of feminicide) seems like an understatement in the face this level of criminal collaboration (17).

[5] In "Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence at the Mexico-US Border," Melissa Wright cautions that with regard to *juvenicidio*, the odds are stacked against justice movements seeking to counter the prevailing narrative of drug violence as 'criminals killing each other off'—a discourse that would frame any and every murder victim, ipso facto, as a delinquent, thus spinning the escalating murder rate into a positive indicator proving that the war on drugs is, indeed, progressing as intended. She offers that,

> Feminist scholars can help in this endeavor by exposing how discourses of a rational masculinity contribute to violence, to the silencing of citizens, and to state-sanctioned impunity. Just as feminist scholars provided the term femicide, which has proven so valuable to activists in northern Mexico, feminists could help subvert the logic that depicts drug violence as a productive development ("Necropolitics" 726).

[6] For an incomplete (and by now, slightly outdated) list of books, films, and music, see "Appendix B" in Gaspar de Alba and Guzmán, *Making a Killing* 298-300. The most recent mainstream take on Ciudad Juárez may be the current crime-drama series *The Bridge*, a US-American (though in part transnationally produced) adaptation of an originally Swedish-Danish crime series, which is currently airing its second season on FX.

[7] See for instance Leslie Salzinger's landmark study of the *maquila* industry in Mexico and the gendering of its production processes, *Gender in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories* (2003). For further historical insights into the heavily gendered industrialization of the borderlands since the 1960s (with a particular emphasis on Ciudad Juárez), see: María Patricia Fernández-Kelly *For We Are Sold, and I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier* (1983).

[8] Combining post-structural feminist and neo-Marxist approaches, Wright revealed a narrative that rationalizes the deliberately high turnover rates of female workers in the low-skill/high-intensity production sectors of the export-processing plants. Unlike the traditional (male) worker whose company value increases over the course of his employment through the accumulation of experience and skills, the value of this "disposable woman" is gradually used up through the tremendous grind of her work.

> Within a relatively short period of time and at a young age [she] loses the physical and mental faculties for which she was initially employed, until she is worth no more than the cost of her dismissal and substitute [and] turns into a form of industrial waste, at which point she is discarded and replaced." (*Disposable* 2).

The parallels between such a systematic extraction of value followed by a disposal of the female body with the rationale behind sexual murder (by bodies then literally being discarded like waste in the desert) seems obvious, but Wright is mindful to warn against summarily utilizing the former to explain the latter.

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[9] The media's fascination with spectacular violence is not surprising, but anti-feminicide activists, too, had rallied around the extreme cases while strategically including fatal domestic violence into their statistics.

[10] For illustrative insights on government repression against as well as debates and inner tensions within the activist movement, see the four essays that encompass the section “¡Ni una más!“ in *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*, co-edited by Alicia Gaspar de Alba and Georgina Guzmán: Staudt & Coronado; Monárrez Fragoso; Rojas; Wright, 155-241.

[11] For example, in 2009 Kathleen Staudt conceded that “national and state human rights commissions lack authority to compel changes in Mexico,” just as academic criticism does (Staudt et al. Rights 2).

In 2010, Corona and Domínguez-Ruvalcaba described a generalized "scenario of pessimism", a catch-22 where "on the one hand, the authorities are defined as de facto offenders because of the prevailing impunity along the border; on the other hand, mutual disqualification and distrust among the government, NGOs, and civil and international organizations impede any sense of real progress" (8).

In reaction to the apparent impotence or unwillingness of the Mexican state and its judicial system to administer justice, Héctor Domínguez-Ruvalcaba and Patricia Ravelo Blancas even called for a direct engagement with the cartels as de facto sovereigns of powers in the region—a proposal perhaps less practicable than illustrate of the sense of frustration (“Obedience” 194).

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